



***INFLUENCES OF THE WATCHDOG ROLE OF BROADCAST MEDIA IN
NIGERIA***

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NIGERIA**

By

ABDU MARYAM GAINAKA

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

March 2020

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Elizabeth Abdu Gainaka.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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March 2020

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The watchdog role of the media is a fundamental responsibility of the media especially in a democracy. In Nigeria, the constitution and some enabling laws like the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) have given the media the duty and responsibility to “uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people” and some legal backing to have more access to information of public importance from government and public institutions. However, media watchdogging is often identified with the press (print media) in Nigeria from colonial era to the present democratic dispensation. Guided by the social responsibility theory of the media, this study was therefore, an investigation of how broadcast media in Nigeria interpret the watchdog role as well as an exploration of the factors that influence how they perform the role and ways that can improve their performance of the role. The study was conducted using the qualitative case study research method. Data was collected using semi structured in depth interview and it was analyzed using the thematic analysis. The informants for the study comprised of senior editors and field reporters which were sampled purposively from FRCN, a government owned radio station and AIT, a privately owned television station. Findings of the study revealed that broadcast media in Nigeria understand the watchdog role as a social responsibility like it is conceptualized in literature and they perform the role through investigative reporting and through broadcast programmes. The study also found that owners influence, broadcast news commercialization, self-censorship and the general laxity of broadcast media practitioners to explore the FOIA influence the watchdog role performance of broadcast media. The study concludes that broadcast media in Nigeria need to engage more in investigative journalism like there print counterpart and more regulation is required to curb owners influence. Broadcast media practitioners should also explore the FOIA to enhance their watchdog role.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

PENGARUH KE ATAS PERANAN JAGAWAN MEDIA PENYIARAN DI NIGERIA

Oleh

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Peranan jagawan media merupakan tanggungjawab asas bagi media terutama dalam sesebuah demokrasi. Di Nigeria, konstitusi dan beberapa undang-undang pembooleh seperti Kebebasan Akta Maklumat (FOIA) telah memberikan media, tugas dan tanggungjawab untuk “menegakkan tanggungjawab dan akuntabiliti kerajaan kepada rakyat” dan sokongan undang-undang bagi mendapatkan lebih akses kepada maklumat bagi kepentingan awam daripada kerajaan dan institusi awam. Walau bagaimanapun, kejagawanan media selalunya dikenal pasti bersama-sama dengan percetakan (media cetak) di Nigeria daripada era kolonial hingga pendispensan demokratik kini. Berpandukan teori tanggungjawab sosial media, kajian ini oleh itu, merupakan penelitian bagaimana media penyiaran di Nigeria melaksanakan peranan jagawan di samping sebagai eksplorasi faktor yang mempengaruhi bagaimana mereka melaksanakan peranan dan strategi yang dapat meningkatkan prestasi peranan mereka. Kajian ini telah dijalankan menggunakan kaedah penyelidikan kajian kes kualitatif. Data telah dikumpul menggunakan temu bual mendalam separaberstruktur di samping pemerhatian langsung dan ia telah dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Responden kajian diperolehi daripada FRCN, sebuah stesen radio milik kerajaan dan AIT, sebuah stesen televisyen milik swasta. Dapatan kajian memperlihatkan bahawa media penyiaran di Nigeria memahami peranan jagawan sebagai tanggungjawab sosial seperti yang dikonseptualisasikan dalam literatur dan mereka melaksanakan peranan tersebut melalui pelaporan investigatif dan melalui program. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa pemilik mempengaruhi, pengkomersialan penyiaran ekonomik, tapisan sendiri dan kelonggaran pengamal media penyiaran am bagi menerokai FOIA yang mempengaruhi prestasi peranan jagawan bagi media penyiaran. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa media penyiaran di Nigeria perlu lebih terlibat dalam penyiaran investigatif seperti rakan sejawat percetakan mereka dan lebih peraturan diperlukan bagi membanteras pengaruh pemilik. Pengamal media penyiaran juga perlu menerokai FOIA bagi meningkatkan peranan jagawan mereka.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FRCN	Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria
AIT	Africa Independent Television
NBC	National Broadcasting Commission
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter contains the background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, and purpose of the study. It also presents the limitation of the study and definition of key words.

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, the media is a fundamental democratic institution. They are regarded as a voice for the people, a beacon of freedom, the social police who serve as a check on authorities and drive home the agenda for development and progress of the society. In various ways, they set agenda and provide the citizens with the frames for understanding issues that they report on (Oso, 2013; Odunlami & Adaja, 2015). There is a consensus among media scholars and practitioners about some of the important roles of the media in the society, especially a democracy. These include providing a platform for participation and diversity of ideas, shaping of public opinion, agenda setting, mobilization and serving as watchdog of the society. In this regard, Graber (2009) emphasized that, of the many roles the media performs in the society, one of the very important function they carryout exclusively, for the public is the role of a watchdog. This implies that, the watchdog function of the media is very crucial for good governance, accountability and transparency. Eriksson & Ostman (2013) added that the media's function as watchdog is a basic primary democratic duty to elicit accountability. In doing this, the media is expected to propagate, support and promote the views and opinions of individuals in respect of governance, leadership and stewardship of leaders in public governance (Sambe, 2004).

Therefore, the watchdog function of the media connotes a sensitive and active dog that barks loudly when it encounters failure, misbehavior, abuse of power and other wrongdoings by government and all public authorities whose actions and inactions directly or indirectly affect the public interest (Oso, 2013). Waisbord (2000) asserted that through the watchdog role, the media contributes to good governance in democracy by monitoring and holding government accountable to the people through the coverage of important public issues that needs the public's attention, and creating a platform for the people to air their concerns and opinions about governance. Indeed, the function is essentially to hold government accountable to the people. Senam and Udo (2015) in their study of critical journalism and democratic governance in Nigeria further described the watchdog role of media as "the watchful and critical role journalism plays against bad government and individual practices that can hinder democratic governance". Referring to watchdog as critical journalism, they further explained, "it is ideally an eye on the government through the digging up of information about political process, interpreting and analyzing the process and alerting the public of the probable implication" (p. 47). This position further reiterates the aim of watchdogging which is for accountability and development. All over the world, it

is a crucial role that equips the media to keep an eye on the activities of public authorities, including government and any other powers. The objective is mainly for the purpose of demanding accountability and promoting good governance. Consequently, the media is a public trust and for public service. Hong (2014) and Deuze (2005) reasoned that the media institution is characterized by “ideal typical values” among which are public service, autonomy and ethics. This therefore, means that the purpose of media in the society is to serve the interest of the public and part of this obligation includes standing as the society’s watchdog, which can only be done rightly, when the media is largely independent.

In many developed countries of the world, the media has taken its place fully as the fourth estate. Their watchdog role, which is embedded in that, has seen many wrongdoings and activities of state being unraveled. Some of these even led to resignations of public officials and in some cases restitution in countries like the USA, Germany, Russia (Waisbord, 2000). In most African countries, the media arguably, played important roles in the struggle for independence and democratization. Kasoma (2001) as cited in Shardow (2015, p.1) noted that “the rebirth of Africa’s democracy could not have been possible without the pressure that the media, particularly the independent media exerted on the political power brokers”. This is particularly true for the media in Nigeria as they played immense role in attaining independence from the British colonialists and democracy from military dictatorship (Jibo & Okosi-Simbine, 2003). Notwithstanding, many African leaders struggled with the idea of allowing a free and independent media. They argued that young and developing democracies could not afford it. As a result, governments owned and had absolute control of the media. The complete ownership and control of the media was seen and believed to be good for rapid development of African countries. This however failed, as the media became tools for the protection and propagation of politicians and their agenda at the expense of citizens (Ali, 2015). The need for a plural and independent media therefore, became apparent. Consequently, African countries with nascent democracies like Nigeria came to the realization that the growth and effective functioning of a democracy is largely dependent on a media that is free and independent to carry out its obligations to the society. This is advocated for by the social responsibility theory of the media which upholds media freedom to serve the interest of the public while imposing on them the responsibility of maintaining stability in the society by adhering to professional standards and self-regulation (Uzuegbunam, 2013). As a result, the constitutions of most African countries gave provisions for plurality and independence to the media in order to promote diversity and ensure checks and balances in the activities of government (Shardow, 2015). Hence, in Nigeria, the media have strived to perform some of its roles in the society, but, they continue to come under criticism for failing to perform their watchdog role in criticizing and scrutinizing the activities of government, its officials and other important institutions in the society (Amodu, Yartey, Ekanem, Oresanya & Afolabi; 2016, Amodu & Usaini, 2014).

The history of media in Nigeria judged the media well in terms of its resoluteness in holding government accountable. However, even that is not attributed to all media, most of the watchdog feat attained by the Nigerian media, was attributed to the print

media. For example, it was the print media that exposed the former speaker of the house of representatives for dishonesty in declaring his age, which, led to his resignation in 1999 (Apata & Ogunwuyi, 2019). Also, the print media exposed the ploy by former president Olusegun Obasanjo to influence the national assembly to amend the constitution to give him a third term in office. Many of such examples of financial misappropriations, corruption in the civil service and among the people saddled with public trust abound, many of which were brought to the attention of the public by print media. Perhaps, this informed Ojomo (2009, p. 11) assertion on broadcast media's monitorial duty that "this is the core responsibility of the electronic media in any society, yet it is the area where the Nigerian broadcast media have failed the most". Meanwhile, the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, like many constitutions around the world has expressly equipped all media to carry out its duty as the fourth estate by serving as watchdog for the society (Agbo and Chukwuma, 2017; Aginam, 2010).

Broadcast media particularly has the potential to impact more audience through its news and other programs because of the inherent advantages it possesses over the print media. Some of these advantages include that it has the ability to reach a many audience simultaneously; its limited mental demand also makes it appealing to all categories of the audience (Ojomo, 2009). These inherent features, therefore, bestows on them a greater responsibility to monitor and guard the public against the excesses and abuse of government and public authorities. Yet, Nigeria broadcast media remain docile in that regard (Jibo & Okoosie-Simbine, 2003; Ojomo, 2009). Over the years, some scholars attributed the inability of broadcast media to live up to its role as watchdog to "the long monopoly of government ownership of the broadcast media" (Ojomo, 2009, p. 11). Others attributed it to some laws and broadcast regulations that stifle freedom of the media and also the absence of freedom of information law that would grant free access to information of importance to the public (Akinfeleye, 2003; Akinwale, 2010; Kur & Nyekwere, 2015). As valid as those reasons have proven to be, the public expected better performance when government deregulated broadcast media in 1992 and assented to the freedom of information act. This new law was greeted with so much enthusiasm and hope that journalists would have more easy access to information (Oberiri, 2016), and the provisions of the law did provide more access to information that would otherwise be hidden from public eyes and ears. Yet, broadcast media continues to lag in its watchdog role performance (Amodu & Usaini, 2014).

Consequently, Scholars have argued that the effectiveness of the monitorial and guardian role of the media in respect of government, institutions and powers is shaped by various elements. For example, Oso (2013) argued that the efficacy of the media as watchdog could be eroded by political and economic benefits. He argued that, these interests can be seen in the commodification of media services and have come to determine and define the operational activities of the media. Hence, he concluded that these interests have successfully overtaken the media and weakened its ability and vigor to be effective watchdogs. In his words, "they may still occasionally bark, but their ability to bite has been seriously curtailed". In the same way, Waisbord (2015) argued strongly about the impact of economic factors. He argued that news media

established for commercial interests are often simply not interested in using their often limited resources in pursuance of stories that consume those resources. Furthermore, private media organizations will naturally enjoy more freedom to exercise its watchdog duties, however, they are often times more likely to be slaves to the market than government media who by virtue of being owned by the government alone are tied to do the biddings and propaganda of the government (Coronel, 2010). Also, studies have revealed that the ability of the media to perform its watchdog role is largely dependent on the freedom of the media, whereby a more libertarian media stands a higher chance of performing its role to the public than an authoritarian media (Whitten-Woodring & James, 2012). However, as it is with most part of the world, media freedom is not absolute; it is not without regulation of some sort to cater for the concerns and peculiarities of individual countries (Dashti, 2008; Beli & Inuwa, 2014).

Hence, broadcast media has the same duty as the other media to perform the function of watchdog for the society. This is in order to push for greater development of the Nigerian society and take its place as the voice of the voiceless.

1.2 Problem Statement

The society has always relied on the media for information to help them understand democratic processes and to make informed decisions about societal issues. The reason seems to be the fact that providing informational compass for society is a traditionally ascribed and sacred duty assumed by the media. Hence, the media holds a sacred position in the society. They assume the role of managing and distributing information, which is consistent with their call to stand in place of the people as a voice just like the social watchdogs (Yusha'u, 2009).

As part of the roles and functions of media in the society, serving as watchdog over government and any other public institution, is regarded by the public and the media itself as one of the most important duties it ought to perform for the public. This is because it is believed that, those in authority who wield power need to be checkmated against abusing public trust. This believe may have perhaps, contributed to the nick naming of media as the fourth estate of the realm centuries ago by Edmund Burke to be the watchful eyes and ears of the public by serving as a watchdog over government and public officials.

Increasingly, Nigerian society on its own, continues to clamour to see effective watchdog activities in the media, they want to see media organizations that will monitor authorities for transparency, accountability and responsible service delivery. As such, they have willed the right and power of attorney of their conscience to the media to exercise that on their behalf and demand that authorities live up to their expectation. For instance, in Nigeria, the Freedom of Information Act of 2011 has given every citizen the right to exclusive disclosure of information in government custody, however, most citizens rather trust the media to investigate and disclose whatever information to them. Thus, the media are expected to keep surveillance by

setting agenda, pursuing agenda and provide the public with the structures for understanding issues in the various forms of news coverage (Oso, 2013). The expectation of the public is to see a responsible media judged by how they propagate, support and promote the views and opinions of individuals in respect of governance, leadership and stewardship of leaders in public governance.

Consequently, it is in acknowledgement of the importance of the media as watchdog of the society, that the Nigerian constitution of 1999 expressly articulated the constitutional role of the media. Chapter 2, Sub-section 22 of the constitution (as amended) states in part that, "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people". As reiterated by Agbo and Chukwuma (2016) this constitutional provision further affirms the importance of the watchdog role and therefore, empowers the media to monitor, investigate, inform and alert the public of wrongdoings of government and its agencies. However, it is one thing to assume the traditional function and quite another to press authorities to carry out their directive duties spelt out by a nation's constitution. That concern may have led scholars like Nwosu (1993) to question the genuineness of watchdogging in the Nigerian media.

Scholars have variously accorded the Nigerian media as one of the fiercest and most vibrant in Africa (Dare 2010, Onabanjo, 2004). It is in record that, the post-colonial, military and early democratic Nigerian media's role as watchdog in demanding accountability, transparency and responsibility from governments led to the exposure of wrong doings, corporate malfeasance and insincerity of public officials in high places with some leading to resignations and prosecutions. In other words, most activities of the media in Nigeria show that they are familiar with pre-colonial activism, many of which have positively contributed to the independence of the nation, and beyond that, they have been at various times credited with campaigning against military dictatorship resulting in democratic emancipation. It is however, not without some challenges. As such, on the other hand, the general media has come under criticisms for lagging in the performance of its role as watchdog. Scholars have put forth arguments such as continuous corruption in government, under development and outright abuse of office by politicians as evidence for media's laxity in the performance of its watchdog role to hold government accountable to the people (Omojola, 2010; Dunu, 2013).

Specifically, broadcast media is known for its exceptionality and ability to simultaneously reach a wider or larger audience especially in a developing country like Nigeria where radio is widely listened to by both rural and urban citizens. Arguably, this advantage should propel it to do more in holding the government accountable. However, most of those struggles and activism which coronate democracy in Nigeria are often identified with the press (print media), perhaps for obvious and apparent reasons such as they being the pioneer media before broadcasting. Apart from that, it is the press (print media) that continues to make demands on government with broadcast media criticized for failing in this regard (Ojomo, 2009). Besides, up until 1992, broadcast media in Nigeria was completely a

monopoly of government. But, in 1992, it was deregulated to include private ownership and since then, there has been proliferation and plurality.

The main issue of concern here is that the watchdog role function of the media is not limited to the print media alone, in fact, if anything, as earlier stated, the Nigerian constitution specifically mentioned “radio and television” alongside print media to hold public authorities accountable to the people. In addition, in spite of this plurality, and also the constitutional provision and other laws enabling broadcast media to carry out their professional duty as watchdog, print media seems to lead the vanguard in doing so, broadcast media performance of the role continue to come under question (Ojomo, 2009, p.11). They are seen not to live up to that, instead they act as lapdogs, promoting government agenda and failing to provide well-investigated and needed information for the public (Ojomo, 2009, Amodu, Usaini, & Ige, 2014; Ngwu, 2015). In that regard, many questions are still being asked regarding what broadcast media activity constitutes watchdog function. Hence, the question begs, why broadcast media seems to be lagging in the performance of its role as watchdog compared with their print media counterpart.

Moreover, in the Nigerian context, not many studies have covered the subject matter of media watchdog role to the best of the researcher’s knowledge. Where they did, the focus has mainly been on content analysis of print media, the use of secondary data and survey. For instance, Amodu, Usaini and Ige (2014) and Agbo & Chukwuma (2017) employed the use of secondary data to assess and analyze the performance of the watchdog role by the media and the impact of new media on media watchdog function respectively. A study by Amodu, Yartey, Ekanem, Oresanya & Afolabi, (2016) used the survey quantitative approach to assess the Nigeria media watchdog role in ensuring government accountability with focus on the perspectives of the audience.

The propensity to see more watchdog journalism in Nigeria broadcast media seems bleak. Many reasons such as press freedom in Nigeria, corruption in the media and poor remuneration for journalists have been suggested and assumed as to why broadcast media in Nigeria rarely attempt watchdog feat, (Akinwale, 2010; Ali, 2015 & Apuke, 2016). Most of the reasons, however, tend to proceed from outside the ambit of broadcast media organizations. Many researchers seem to have paid little or no attention on enquiring from the perspective of broadcast media organizations and practitioners. To the best of the researchers knowledge, there is no study seeking to find out reasons for the seeming laxity of broadcast media to engage in or be on the same pedestal as the print media in performing their role as watchdog.

It is therefore, important to explore from the angle of broadcast media because, understanding how they interpret the watchdog role will provide an understanding of whether they understand what the role entails and what is required of them. Also, outside of the mostly external and audience perspectives of the issues with broadcast media role performance, there is a need to explore from internal views of broadcast media organizations, with the view to proffering solutions. This will provide empirical

evidence and add to the mostly normatively and theoretically studied role of the media as watchdog (Spiess, 2011). To this end therefore, this qualitative study attempted to fill in the gaps identified, by focusing on broadcast media organizations in Nigeria to understand and explore their interpretation of their duty as watchdogs of the society and the factors that influence how they perform that role. To achieve this, the following questions were raised.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does Nigeria broadcast media perform the watchdog role?
2. What are the factors that influence broadcast media watchdog role performance in Nigeria?
3. How can broadcast media watchdog role performance improve in Nigeria?

1.4 Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to understand and explore how broadcast media in Nigeria perform the watchdog function and what influences how they perform the role. The study has the following specific objectives:

1. To understand how broadcast media interpret the watchdog role in Nigeria.
2. To explore factors that influence broadcast media watchdog performance in Nigeria.
3. To explore the ways broadcast media watchdog performance can improve in Nigeria.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how broadcast media perform the watchdog role in Nigeria and explore the factors that influence how they perform the role in Nigeria. This qualitative study will contribute to the discovery of issues that affect broadcast media performance in Nigeria. With focus on broadcast media, empirical findings of the study will contribute to the understanding of what constitutes the watchdog role of the media and reveal the factors that influence how broadcast media perform the watchdog role. Additionally, considering that media watchdog role have been mostly studied theoretically. The study will provide empirical understandings of media watchdog role.

The outcome of the study will be useful for media in Nigeria to find ways to improve on their role as watchdog in the interest of the society. The study is also significant, as the results will provide Nigeria broadcast media policy makers like the regulatory body, NBC a broader understanding of the issues in broadcasting as well as provide a reference point for discovering broadcast media issues and improve on media policies,

laws and regulations. Lastly, It will also provide more understanding of the watchdog role of the media and thereby, adding to the body of knowledge and literature.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study covers broadcast media organizations. The two broadcast media organizations involved or covered in the study are Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), owned by the Federal government of Nigeria and Africa Independent Television (AIT) owned by Daar Communications, a private media company. It is important to state here that, these media organizations have a branch in each state in Nigeria, as such, they have a national impact. The study will focus mainly on how broadcast media interpret/perform the watchdog role, what factors influences how they perform the role and how to improve their performance of the role in Nigeria. The study focuses on broadcast media because watchdogging has historically, been attributed to the press in Nigeria and the subtle suggestion that broadcast media rarely do watchdogging. The study was conducted in Abuja, Nigeria at the headquarters of the broadcast media organizations involved in the study. The Scope is also limited to experienced broadcast field reporters and senior editors who formed the informants for the study purposively selected from the broadcast media organizations (FRCN and AIT) covered in the study. However, the study will not involve print media organizations or informants.

The study is limited first, by the organizations involved in the study. It covers only Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and Africa Independent Television (AIT). Secondly, being a qualitative study, it is limited by the population and informants of the study. The informants interviewed include only field reporters and senior editors.

1.7 Definition of key words

1.7.1 Watchdog Role

Watchdog role of media sometimes referred to as surveillance role in some climes is one of the most important and crucial role of the media (Karikari, 2018). According to Tetey (2006.p.232), watchdog role is an accountability role of the media. He argued that, it is clear the public cannot monitor the daily activities of government, its officials and institutions. As such, the media among other actors has the responsibility to demand accountability and responsibility of government and institutions to the public. Waisbord (2015) defined watchdog role as a duty of the media to monitor and provide information that assists the public to comprehend the activities of government and other institutions of the society. Also, Coronel (2010) defined watchdog role as the monitorial and guardian function of the media where the media monitors and examine the activities of government and institutions of the society to assist the public to make sense of their performance as well as unraveling and bringing to light the abuses, wrong doings and corruption of authorities. This may involve investigative journalism

1.7.2 Broadcast Media

Broadcast media also referred to as electronic media is a platform for disseminating audio-visual communication signals to diverse and heterogeneous audience. Iredia (2015) noted that, “Although, Fax, Film, Internet and Satellite are fast gaining popularity as new forms of the electronic media, they are usually not taken to be part of what is known as broadcasting which consists essentially of Radio and Television.”. Hence, broadcast media here will be regarded as formal channel of transmitting electromagnetic signals through the airwaves over a wide area, that could be received on television and radio.

1.7.3 Investigative journalism

Investigative journalism is specialized type of journalism, which conventionally reiterates the employment of specific methods and initiative of the media to dig deep and produce information that is relevant to the public. It emphasizes the use of innovative method that gives room for journalists to research and produce multi-faceted news or information.

1.8 Summary of Chapter

This chapter presented a general introduction of the study. It clearly articulated the background of the study, the statement of the problem and three research questions that piloted the study as well as the objectives the study aimed to achieve. Furthermore, the chapter outlined the significance of the study, the scope and limitation of the study and it was followed by the definition of terms and this summary. According to the objectives of the study, the study aims to explore on the performance of the watchdog role of the media with focus on the broadcast media. In the process, the next chapter discussed and reviewed past scholarly literature related to the study.

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