AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND PERCEPTION OF MEDIA PROGRAMMES: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country with a great potential in terms of human and natural resources but the ability to convert the potentials into meaningful socio-economic development is perceived to be grossly deficient. The shift in paradigms from the top-down approaches that emerged in the 1950s and 60s, to the participatory/bottom-up approaches of the 1980s and 1990s, has created more curiosity among scholars concerning the ability of the media to influence development. This challenge motivated the study to evaluate audience perception of media programmes by examining audience perception and participation as well as the impact in the attainment of national development. The development media theory provided a theoretical background for this study while the survey research method was adopted in the collection of quantitative data. Abuja and Lagos were purposively selected because of the concentration of mass media and composition of rural and urban population. A sample size of 1500 respondents was chosen using the random sampling technique. Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Data were analysed using a combination of frequency count and simple percentage. Results revealed that 71.4% had access to development programmes through radio and television, while 36% preferred radio as the medium for access. Radio remained a popular medium for disseminating development messages in Nigeria. In addition, majority of the respondents indicated that media programmes encourage participation in national development. It concluded that the media have been effective in supporting the national objectives. It is recommended that radio be more effectively used in disseminating messages that will impact positively on national development.

Key Words: National development, channels, media audience, media programs, access and participation.

Introduction

The word development has been given many different meanings. For some, development means more material prosperity; owning, land and a house. Regardless of any particular normative framework, many would view development as a multi-sectional process, involving social, economic and political change aimed at improving people’s lives. In other words, development means each member of a given community has an equal opportunity to use available resources to increase their potentials. Development process uses and manages natural resources to satisfy human needs and improve people’s quality of life.

Todaro and Smith (2003) identified three objectives of development as increasing the availability of basic life sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection; raising levels of living in addition to higher incomes through the provision of more jobs as well as better education and greater attention to cultural and human values. Development is
perceived from not only from the perspective of enhancing material well-being but also to generate greater individual and national self-esteem as well as expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence. National development on the other hand is described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country’s collection of strategies mapped out by the government (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011).

The media in any society are known to perform three basic functions – enlighten, educate and entertain. However, in recent times, these roles have been expanded to include national development and mass mobilization of citizens for developmental efforts. Professor Lai Oso in the book *Health and Behavioral Change Communication for Development* (Akinfeleye, ed., 2008) noted that communication has become a major component of the development process. Asante (1997) emphasized that in any developing country, the mass media has a crucial role to play in engendering development among the populace. The media, he opines, is expected to function as part of the national efforts in the arduous task of nation building and modernization.

Altschull (1995:229) observed that in the “developed Western world, the role of the media is to inform objectively and entertain in the context of the market, to stand as a watchdog for the people against the abuse of power, and as the ‘centerpiece of the democratic assumption. In other words, the media checks the activities of the government that negates the principles of democracy advocating for freedom of expression, preventing the abuse of power by cautioning the defaulting party as well as contributing and supporting the society to become a truly democratic environment. The media in the developing country on the other hand is vested with the role of nation-builder and development agent.

**The problem**

As a developing country, Nigeria has continuously witnessed a downward slide from a country with about the most promising prospects in the sub-Saharan Africa with over 163 million people (World Bank, 2013), to one that has 112.519 million people (69%) living in relative poverty (National Bureau of Statistics, HNLLS 2010). Since 1980, Nigeria has been within the category of countries with low human development ranking 153 out of 186 according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2013). There seems to be an agreement among the academic society and media practitioners that at the center of all Nigeria’s problems is the fact that the mass media have not been fully deployed as an effective tool in achieving the desired accelerated growth and transformation that the country desperately needs (Moemeka, 2012). In 1974, the World Bank pointed out that efforts targeted at using the mass media in development did not positively affect the lives of the people in the developing countries to any appreciable degree. Benefits derived from the mass media efforts were very insignificant. Moemeka blames this problem on two factors – one, is the one-way nature of the mass media, and two, the way the media were used and continued to be used, a fact that aligns with McQuail’s (2005) argument in the Development Media Theory.

**Theoretical Background**

The development media theory suggests that the media have a role to play in facilitating the process of development in developing countries based on the assumption that the mass media and communication can positively influence the development process (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010). Moemeka (2012:135) noted that this “theoretical perspective requires that the mass media become companions in development with the government”. Anaeto and Anaeto (2010), opines that the media must promote their country’s social, economic, political,
cultural development, national stability as well as direct a sense of national purpose. The development media theory argues that the media can only be considered as relevant and helpful if it strives at all times to ensure the progress and development of the country and society where it exists. Communication experts and development agencies are convinced that for communication to be effective, it must be systematically planned, implemented and coordinated effectively.

The role of the media in National Development and Communication
Aptly captured in the words of Soola (2009), “a virile media is the bastion of democracy and good governance”. He observed that the interplay of the media and government can be traced to the early political history of the Roman Empire noting that the media assumed a vantage status in the political process due to its unrivalled mass reach and mass influence. Equally important is the potential power of the media to initiate, enrich and sustain robust national debate and rational discourse, provide alternative viewpoints, sensitise, conscientise and mobilise the citizenry for a given cause and beam its searchlight on critical national socio-political and economic issues.

The power of the media cannot be underestimated as Barker (2005:4) observed, it is through the media the citizens learn how government policies will affect them, and governments gain feedback on their policies and programmes. Media systems act as the primary conduit between those who might want to influence policy and the policymakers – controlling the scope of political discourse and regulating the flow of information.

Commenting on the complementary relationship between communication and national development, Kuo (1986:1) observed that:

- on one hand, communication is a fundamental social process underlying social change and development, while
- on the other, a communication system is an integrated part of the fabric of society and is highly dependent on socio-economic development for its sustenance and growth.

It is believed that the communication media are critical in creating awareness, generating public interest, placing critical issues on the public agenda and building social support and popular participation in development projects, thus, reducing poverty by ensuring that equal opportunities are available to all citizens. In spite of the great potentials of the mass media for promoting national growth, evidences abound to show that the influence of the Nigerian media in this regard is of little significance. In light of this, the study examined audience perception and participation in media programmes on national development. The study is aimed at identifying the channels audience own and use to receive media programmes on national development, the medium Nigerians consider most appropriate for receiving programmes that promote national development as well as the benefits audience derive from participating in such programmes.

Methodology
The survey method was adopted in this study and the questionnaire was used as instrument for data gathering. Quantitative data were needed because according to Creswell (2009), such data “provides a … numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population…” The population of the study comprises Nigerians above 18 years living in Lagos and Abuja.
which have the desired mix of both the rural and urban settlements. Purposive sampling technique was used to draw 1500 respondents from two randomly selected Local Government Areas in Lagos (Badagry and Ikorodu) and two administrative units in Abuja (Kwali and Bwari). Their responses were analysed and form the basis of the conclusions drawn from this study.

**Discussion of Findings**

**RQ 1: What are the channels audience own and use in receiving media programmes on national development?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channels</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Field survey 2014*

To answer this question, it was first imperative to establish the percentage of those who own broadcast equipment through which they can easily access development programmes. While usage is equally important, this question strengthens the argument on the importance of access to participation. Without access people are not aware and as such many never be able to lend their voices and participate in any meaningful discussions on development. The data gathered in this section revealed the percentage of Nigerians who have access to basic media equipment. The data gathered from the 1500 respondents sampled through the field survey revealed that more than half of the respondents (1071 -71%) indicated that they own both radio and television. In other words, many of the respondents have a medium through which they can access development programmes. This is very much in line with the argument of McQuail (2005) just as some other scholars have observed that radio has flourished since the coming of television hence these two media devices play complimentary roles as each medium has its unique features when it comes to their deployment for communication objectives. In other words, both radio and television should be given prominent attention in terms of use for development purposes. Also, to further strengthen the fact gathered on receiving sets ownership, a follow-up question was asked to identify other media used by those do not own radio or television sets in receiving development programmes. This category of respondents indicated that the handset, online, friends, car radio, etc are some of the channels through which they receive such messages. Prasad (2009) noted scholars are showing renewed interest on how media convergence is reshaping the ways in which communication can be used in development. Also, as the result of the study showed, Kaul (2011) had observed that the rise of more sophisticated communication and information technologies, such as the Internet or mobile telephones, has opened new horizons and opportunities by enhancing communication at the local level. Thus, having established that a greater percentage of Nigerians have one equipment or one means or the other through which they receive development programmes, it can be said that Nigerians to some extent have access to development programmes that encourage their participation through the radio, television, handset, online and car radio. However, the media that ranks higher than others in the study is the television and radio.
RQ 2: Media Nigerians consider appropriate for receiving and participating in programmes on national development

<table>
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<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>MEDIA</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This question is considered important in light of the comments of Myers (2008) who revealed that radio is uniquely suited to the African context, being an aural and portable medium in a continent that is predominantly non-literate and has communal living patterns. This question was necessary in order to establish whether the channels respondents earlier indicated they have access to, are actually considered appropriate for the transmission of development programmes in terms of convenience, ease of usage and cost effectiveness. This question also helped to determine the types of information best suited to this medium. It equally revealed the kind of information accessed through these media and the extent to which they encourage participation in national development. Thus, respondents were asked to rate the media they consider appropriate for receiving development messages. The result revealed that out of the 1,500 respondents sampled through the field survey, 545 indicated that the radio is the most preferred media for receiving development messages. This is followed by 416 who prefer television, 283 prefer the online media, 88 prefer magazine while 84 prefer newspaper. In the first instance, this result revealed that many Nigerians who own radio also consider it the most effective medium through which they can receive development messages. Several reasons have been identified for the uniqueness of radio for development communication. One of such is that when compared to other mass-media, one of the great advantages of radio is that it is portable and it can be listened to while doing other things. Respondents confirmed this fact as one of the major reasons why they can participate.

RQ 3: What benefits does the audience derive from media programmes on national development?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Make useful suggestions to the local authorities on development activities</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live a better life</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make informed decisions</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This question is considered important in light of the submission of Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) that participation is crucial in boosting the sense of belonging and commitment of the people as these imbues with two important elements - self-confidence and self-importance considered elements of success of any development programmes. This is especially important in view of the 2013 UNDP Report which identifies “four specific areas of focus for sustaining development momentum: enhancing equity, including on the gender dimension; enabling greater voice and participation of citizens, including youth; ...”(pg. 8). Majority responded in the affirmative to the question asked on what development programmes encouraged them to do, 582 (39%) responded that these programmes encourage them to live
a better life, 429(29%) indicated that these programmes helped them to make informed decisions while 293(20%) indicated that such programmes helped them make useful suggestions to the local authorities on development activities

**Conclusion**

Majority of the world’s population engage with the media every day through the radio sets, television sets, newspapers, or online. In this sense, the media is considered a formidable tool which a lot of people can relate to whether through a favourite programme or article that connects them to their immediate environment. The study established that a greater percentage of Nigerians have one receiving set or another through which they receive media programmes on national development. The power the media possess as an effective channel for achieving rapid transmission is further underscored in the findings of this study which revealed that the Nigeria media are positively deploying their strength to the advantage of the Nigerian populace by bringing to them regularly, relevant and impactful development programmes.

**References**


World Bank Report, 2013