

SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF THE MEDIA AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

It is pertinent to note that in the 21st century where corruption and bad leadership have accentuated heinous concern, bigotry and acrimony for social, political and Economic developments are incidental with high influx of crises, ineffective planning and lack of vision for sustainable national development. Thus, the restructuring of the mass media and necessary application of strategic communication are required, mainly as most nations desire democratic stability and economic growth that cut-across all aspects of transformational developments all over the world. The concern of this paper is to identify areas of information needs of the government and stakeholders in order to enhance social freedom, economic growth, political stability and physical developments in Nigeria. Thus, the adoption and application of strategically effective channels and appropriate methods of communication messages shaped by the mass media in line with development communication principles will be immeasurable in order to promote investment opportunities in a socially and politically democratic country such as Nigeria.

Keywords: Mass Media, Socio-Cultural, Strategic Communication, National Development, Economic & Political Stability.

Background to the Study

The myriads of development problems makes it pertinent that the efficacy of the mass media system and press have to be re-evaluated and improved upon from time to time in order to fit into the role of mobilizing the citizenry for effective participation in social, political, cultural, economic and other development programmed in Nigeria. The reason according to MacBride (1980:35), is to foster the organization of the socio-

cultural communication systems both at the level of groups or local communities in order to achieve cohesion and mobilize local resources, and to solve problems affecting smaller or larger groups towards in order to achieve greater heights for national development. In recognition of the socio-cultural dynamics of the people and importance attached to the mass media, MacBride (1980:14) expressed concern that in contemporary society, especially in the areas regarding information dissemination of cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the heritage of the people, the development of culture by widening the individual's horizons, awakening his imagination and stimulating his aesthetic needs and creativity becomes a vehement concern for progressive minds all over the world. It is on this backdrop, this paper is concerned to explicate and determine the various communication strategies of the media towards national development that is tilted towards specific appraisal of socio- cultural nature of the media environment and communication strategies adopted by the Nigerian Mass Media in order to provide the enabling environment and create attraction for investment opportunities that would bring about political stability and economic growth in the country.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual theoretical framework of this paper is predicated on the "Developmental Press Theory". This theory of the press is regarded as a natural offshoot of the revolutionary media theories. Its relevance and applicability is anchored on the development of the third world countries. Konkwo (2003: 210-211) stressed that the developmental press theory reflects modern nationalists and political independence movements drawn upon socialist thought based on the principles of development. It explicates the implicit use of the mass media to foster the promotion of social and economic development with the objective of achieving national integration. In justifying the relevance of the developmental press theory as priority to the socio-cultural and economic developments of a nation striving for sustainable national development, Okon (2001:113) opine that it evolved as a result of the needs in third world countries and the inapplicability of most of other theories to certain aspects of the societies in less developed economies of the world, especially in the areas of information accessibility in a country such as Nigeria. In articulating this view, McQuail (1983:79), observed that some prevailing conditions of the developing countries limited the application of other theories and so, another theory (Development Press Theory) was developed for the developing countries of Asia and Africa.

The development media theory emanated as significant machinery for initiating the socio-cultural and socio-economical advancements which are founded on the needs of the less developed countries, especially the circumstances that institutionalized developments in third world countries. This notion has also been reinforced by Okon (2001:113) who observed that many developing states are too fragile to be deficient in

literacy and established institutions and their people more loyal to racial, religious, or tribal communities than to the new concept of statehood to risk the controversy and confrontations produced by the full exercise of personal freedom. It is on this backdrop the media are basically used to highlight efforts being made by the communities in building health centers, feeder roads, civic centers and so forth. They are also used to focus attention on government efforts in the area of provision of basic amenities.

A more pragmatic view of the theory was given by Vilanilam (1979:33) when he opined that developmental theory centered on “journalism relating to the projects and programmed anchored in an economical backward country to provide certain minimum living standards to its people. Still dovetailing on the development media theory, Aina (2003:172-173) opine that the theory arose from concern for events in developing nations. The need for a separate mass media theory for them became compelling because they lacked communication facilities and because of poor resources which hindered the success of previous theories suitable only for advanced nations. This new theory discourages the negative use of the mass media. It favours democratic grassroots involvement rather than repression and exclusion but endorses the subordination of certain freedoms to the collective needs of a society struggling to develop.

Some proposals for developmental journalism given by Gating and Vincent (1992) and cited in Aina (2003:188-189) are:

- 1 The media must relate development to people by discussing human needs for survival, economic well-being, identity and freedom.
- 2 It must broaden its focus to include the military, political and cultural aspects of life, and not just economics of development.
- 3 It must allow the people to run the media through contributions to newspapers content or broadcast programmed 'production and not just through letters to the editor" and "op-end page" due to "space constraints.
- 4 People should be allowed to talk through the media to generate enormous range of visions
- 5 Development should possibly be reported not critically in terms of problems but constructively in terms of positive programmed. Success stories will contribute to the feeling of individual freedom and media obligation to the society.

The Socio-Cultural Dynamics of the Media in a Contemporary Society

In an evolving contemporary society, the nature of mass communication explicates the ability of the media to facilitate the transmission of messages from a source to a destination of the recipient through available channels of communication to largely dispatched or heterogeneous audiences. It is as a result of these processes of

information transmission that made some astute proponents of the media to classify the media as a dynamic tool for socio-cultural, economic political and technological advancement in the globalized society. The mass media operates in a socially dynamic environment imbued with complexities brought about by consistent changes and demands more than direct face-to-face communication in order to function properly in the society.

It is on this backdrop, one time Director General of UNESCO, Amadou-mahtar M'Bow re-affirmed the importance of the mass media and stated that, communication is at the heart of all social intercourse (MacBride, 1980: Xiii). More so, the role of the mass media in its broad sense, does not only deal with the exchange of news and messages, but as an individual and collective activity embracing all forms of transmission of information towards the transformation and advancement of the social system, sharing of ideas, facts and data which defines its main functions in any social system.

It is succinct to note that MacBride (1980:14-15) identified the functions of the media in a contemporary social system as follows:

Information: The collection, storage, processing and dissemination of news, data, pictures, facts and messages, opinions and comments required in order to understand and react knowledgeably to personal, environmental, national and international conditions, as well as to be in a position to take appropriate decisions.

Socialization: the provision of a common fund of knowledge which enables people to operate as effective members of the society in which they live and which fosters social cohesion and awareness thereby permitting active involvement in public life.

Motivation: the promotion of the immediate and ultimate aims of each society, and the stimulation of personal choices, and aspirations; the fostering of individual or community activities, geared to the pursuit of agreed aims.

Debate and discussion: The provision and exchange of facts needed to facilitate agreement or to clarify differing viewpoints on public issues; the supply of relevant evidence needed to foster greater popular interest and involvement in all local, national and international matters of common concern.

Education: The transmission of knowledge so as to foster intellectual development, the formation of character and the acquisition of skills and capacities at all stages of life. This function of the mass media equally creates the awareness to the public regarding the availability and access to information.

Cultural promotion: The dissemination of cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the heritage of the past; the development of culture by widening the individual's horizons, awakening his imagination and stimulating his aesthetic needs and creativity.

Entertainment: The diffusion, through signs, symbols, sounds and images, of drama, dance, art, literature, music, comedy, sports, games, etc. for personal and collective recreation and enjoyment.

Integration: The provision to all persons, groups and nations of access to the variety of messages which they need in order to know and understand each other and to appreciate others' living conditions, viewpoints and aspirations. Prescriptively, the socio-cultural dynamics of the mass media increases as the society transverse, the individuals also develop and integrate their economic, political and religious activities from one level to another. This according to Wilson and Wilson (1994:14) is evident as earliest information processes by the media made people to source for second handed information from text books, television and other sources for the purposes of understanding and education, mainly because people depend largely on these medium of the mass media as it determines a major aspects of the content of their culture.

A major milestone on the aspect of the mass media is the ability to control the thinking processes of individuals in an evolving society through the access to news, information and entertainment. This the media does by information gate keeping by regulating society's socio-cultural and socio-economic activities. A media pundit, Kint Lewin in 1947 ascribed the term "Information Gate Keeping" to the fact that news travels through a series of checkpoints (gates) before it reaches the public which is the final destination. As observed by O' Sullivan and Rayner (1993:20-21) the nature of the information gate-keeping is characterized by the mediation and social concern which are anchored on the powerful effects of the media.

The process in which the mass media is regarded as a dynamic tool for socio-cultural, political and economic development is the Agenda setting. The term "Agenda setting" entails a list of plan activities outlined by the media for the consumption of the heterogeneous publics. The professional communicators working for the mass media set the news and information agenda for the society. According to Wilson and Wilson (1994:15), the media sometimes gives more extensive coverage to certain events and play down on others. This selective attitude of the mass media in information gathering, packaging and dissemination does not protect the wishes of their audiences. However, it is quite necessary to assert that these socio-culturally dynamic functions performed by the mass media can be seen essentially from the individual's standpoint, but emphasis should also be laid on a new phenomenon, or

at least one whose importance is rapidly increasing: communication has become a vital need for collective entities and communities. It is incontrovertible to say that society as a whole cannot survive today if they are not properly informed about political affairs, international and local weather conditions and so forth. Governments need varied information from all aspects of the society, concerning trends in population growth, harvest results, water supplies, etc., if they are to be able to plan dynamically for the future. Without sufficient data on world commodity and money markets, public authorities are handicapped in their local and international activities and negotiations. Industrial enterprises also need rapid information from many sources in order to increase their productivity and to modernize their production processes; banks depend more and more on world networks for data on currency fluctuations, etc. The armed services, political parties, airline companies, universities, research institutes and all kinds of other bodies could not function today without efficient information exchanges.

Albeit in many cases the collective information and data systems which do not correspond to the needs of the public authorities or private bodies. Apart from main government services and the biggest enterprises are banks, which are usually well-informed, many local bodies, factories, firms public cooperation's are still rattling with problems on information accessibility and systems to satisfy individual communication needs. It is vitally important to correct this situation which is liable to affect adversely the development prospects of millions of people, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. This is particularly so as communication functions are linked to all people's needs, material and non-material. Man does not live by bread alone; the need for communication is evidence of an inner urge toward a life enriched by cooperation with others. People want to add aspirations toward human growth to the satisfaction of material needs. Self-reliance, cultural identity, freedom, independence, respect for human dignity, mutual aid, participation in the reshaping of the environment – these are some of the non-material aspirations which all seek through communication. But higher productivity, better crops, enhanced efficiency and competition, improved health, appropriate marketing conditions, proper use of irrigation facilities are also objectives – among many others- which cannot be achieved without adequate communication and the provision of needed data.

It must also be recognized that each of these functions may, depending on environmental conditions, display different and even contradictory characteristics. Information is easily corrupted into the dissemination of half-truths and even falsehoods; persuasion into manipulation and propaganda. Similarly, institutionalized communication may serve to inform, to control, or to manipulate citizens. While the content often serves to sustain personal identity, it may lead to the standardizing of attitudes and aspirations. Information systems which use a variety

of sources and messages help to foster open-mindedness (albeit with the attendant risk of alienation in extreme cases), while systems ignoring this need may lead to a taming of the mind, or indoctrination. The simple truth that the functions of communication are essentially relative and related to varied needs of different communities and countries is often overlooked or underestimated, yet without recognition of it there can be no realistic approach to communication problems in a divergent, divided but interdependent world. Hence, communication effects vary according to the nature of each society.

Why Strategic Communication for National Development?

A key aspect of development communication that facilitates the enhancement of national development has been ascribed to strategic communication. The term “strategic communication” entails a spectrum of communicative activities tilted towards the creation and accessibility to the utilization of information regarding individual behavior and environmental change which in turn translates to sustainable social, political and economic development (Ugulah, 2013:67). In order to justify the importance of strategic communication to national development, Schechter (2005:1) observe that strategic communication helps to establish a common understanding among stakeholders on development initiatives by creating a base for knowledge acquisition and information that can be applied to effective decision making to enhance transformational development in African countries such as Nigeria.

A strategic communication framework serves several roles in national development programmed and processes, more so, when development issues that affects the countries in Africa. It has been severally observed by the Mass media and development communication scholars that, strategic communication takes into account the psychological, sociopolitical, cultural and economic dynamics within and across stakeholder groups directly or indirectly involved in the development processes. Highlighting the roles of strategic communication in national development projects anchored on community driven development projects by the World Bank in Nigeria, Masud and Galia (2005:3) upheld the view that strategic communication addresses institutional, socio-psychological and projects specific factors identified in Community Driven Development (CDD) operations. In that regards, it combines information, education, mobilization, behavior change and capacity building activities that facilitates horizontal and vertical relationship building, top-down and bottom-up political actions, accountability, project management, social and behavior change through knowledge and learning experience sharing.

Succinctly, the orthodox significance of strategic communication to national development in transforming the foundations of the economy is the most complex, but biggest contribution individuals and governments must make to bring about sustainable development (Anam 2014:18). Strategic communication provides a bridge through the mass media to lubricate the processes of transformational developments in order to ensure sustainability of policies and programmed initiated in economically disadvantaged countries in Africa. It is on this backdrop, the public and indeed, development communication practitioners attached most importance to the mass media as a socially responsible fragment of the society. In principle, they- the mass media should be free from government's unnecessary intervention, but at the same time, be responsible to the development agenda of the government and the citizenry for purposes of transformational national development. In order to foster social, political cultural and economic growth so as to better serve the public, the media should be guided by certain principles underlying strategic communication roles in national development.

These principles as summarized by McQuail (1987) and cited in Clement and Ntiense (2011:44-45) are:

- 1 The media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally initiated policies.
- 2 The media should be open to restrictions that will make them comply with economic priorities and development needs of the society.
- 3 The media should give priority in their messages/contents to national culture and language.
- 4 It must have links with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically that should be prioritized by the media.
- 5 The freedom of media workers in gathering and disseminating information goes with responsibility.

In order to further explicate the roles strategic communication perform in the development processes of nation building, Ate (2008), have enshrined the conditions in which the mass media should uphold in contributing to national development and these include:

- 1 The media should accept and abide by certain obligations to the society.
- 2 Based on the above principle, the society has the right to expect the media to maintain high standards of performance. Whatever intervention the media should carry out should be for the good of the public.
- 3 Accountability of media workers should be to members of the public, the employer and the market.

- 4 That the media should pursue and hold onto information based on truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance.
- 5 The media should operate within the framework of law and rules set by appropriate institutions for them to effectively carry out their responsibilities.
- 6 The media should avoid and discourage crime, violence, civil disorder and infringement on minority groups.
- 7 The media should recognize plurality and give access to various views and grant all, the right to express their views.

Strategic communication became vehemently pertinent to national development in the sense that more than two-third of the (Third) world's population lives in countries that can be best described as underdeveloped or developing (Moinmah, 2012:102), and this according to Ugulah (2013:67) has aroused great concern and agitation for leaders in Africa over the years. It is quiet appalling to say that the condition in which some of the citizens live is occasioned by high influx of belligerence and insurgencies that are bedeviled with corruption is so stunning that so many conferences have been organized to address the issues of information needs and accessibility. One of such conference was the united Nations Conference on development held in September 2000 in New York, United States of America. The conference which was tagged the millennium summit was aimed at improving the quality of life of the poor in less developed countries such as Nigeria (Abdulwahab & Tafida, 2009). At this conference the critical areas of development needs were addressed which include:-

- 1 Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
- 2 The achievement of Universal Basic (Primary) Education
- 3 Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
- 4 Redirection of child mortality
- 5 Improve maternal health standards.
- 6 Combating Hiv/ Aids, malaria and other diseases
- 7 Ensure environmental sustainability
- 8 Development a global partnership for development (of National interest).

The main thing that gives unity to a development communication of the mass media is the acceptance of economic development itself (i.e. social change) and often the correlated nation building as an overriding objective. To this, collective end rather than individual freedom are emphasized. Emphasis is placed on the “right to communicate” and the need to use communication to achieve social change and better life, which is the pivot of development.

Development communication aims at achieving the following:

- 1 The need for media to accomplish positive development efforts in conformity with nationally established polished policy.
- 2 Freedom of the media geared towards the development needs of the society.

- 3 The need for media to give priority to national culture and language(s) in their content.
- 4 The need for media to give priority in their news and information to link with other developing nations in terms of geographical culture or political proximity.
- 5 In an effort to gather information and carry out their tasks, media workers should have responsibility and freedom.
- 6 Direct control and intervention of the state justified in the interest of development of state (Ugulah, 2013:69-70).

In line with the nexus of development communication objectives, which some communication scholars have proposed for development journalism in order to ensure good development policy, most leaders in developing and underdeveloped countries, especially in Africa have swiftly made a paradigm shift to address issues of technology, policy and planning. Though questions of effective implementation remain largely unexplored, development communication policy, strategy and planning as applied to Third World countries have emerged as a significant area of study. For instance, a number of approaches to measure the impact of modern communication technology include the followings:

- 1 Long-range planning with policy goals towards equitable distribution of communication power in society's future.
- 2 Comprehensive planning for development, examining all aspects of information needs and communication systems within the borders of socio-political framework of society.
- 3 Areas of technology transfer and assessment, especially innovation in such areas as satellite communication, cable Tele-computer link-ups.
- 4 Control and regulations and their legal and institutional consequences.
- 5 Information economics, determining the information sector of the economy contribution to overall economic growth.

The Mass Media and Strategic Communication in National Development in Nigeria: A Participatory Approach

One can argue that communication qua information will enhance individuals and governments participation in the development processes of most African countries such as Nigeria. This is because when people are better informed through effective communication, they become sensitive to interventions in issues and have opportunities to join in debates. They will make better inputs in decision making and in the design of programmed. Okon (2001:115) has argued that information and communication are important infrastructure elements in the process of economic growth and social development. Since national development depends on empowering people and communities to take control of their own lives, having access

to information becomes an essential component of progress (Ate, 2008). A corollary to this statement is that people's involvement in all aspects of social development will be enhanced when they can access information, become better educated and so enhance their capacity to communicate ideas and views with intimidation or fear.

However, mass media scholars and development observers are of the view that in as much as global communication and information networks and services have peaked; this has not translated into equal access for all citizens. Individuals, groups or social categories do not yet share from the global information resources and stock of knowledge. For example, rural dwellers, the urban poor and the female gender are humans-social categories that face a new form of exclusion from society because they do not have adequate access to modern communication networks and information services. These categories are the majority in society. This, therefore, means that the benefits of participatory development are lost on those on whom development is built. The major factor responsible for this state of affairs is that developing countries lack the wherewithal to install and provide the requisite facilities and services.

This creates a paradox in that the informational poverty of development countries has become a hindrance to effective participation in development processes. In the first place, modern communication technologies are expensive to acquire, and the developing countries are suffering from debilitating poverty due to high rate of communication technologies in their scale of development preferences. In illustrating the dilemma of rational allocation of resources to prioritizing of basic needs, observers of the mass media regarding peoples participation in issues of national development in Nigeria have observed that money needed to enter the Internet service (as an example) will feed an average family in a year. The citizenry in a developing country like Nigeria are wont to allocate money to absolute necessities such as food, roads, hospitals, water and so on. But by sacrificing communicational and informational needs, the citizenry and government benefits of consensus building, dialogue, awareness raising and partnership that are requisite for the design of sustainable development programmed in country are seriously affected.

Succinctly, one can argue that communication qua information will enhance individual and government participation in the development processes of African countries especially in a country such as Nigeria better informed through effective communication are important infrastructure elements in the process of economic growth and social development. Since national development depends on empowering people and communities to take control of their own lives, having access to information becomes an essential component of progress (Ate, 2008). This, therefore, means that the press as a formidable factor and a potent instrument in determining the fate of any country, social change and social development contribute to the full manifestations of that fate. Thus as pointed out by Ugulah (2013:74) in order

to articulate the policies for accomplishing developmental needs, the beneficiaries must be well informed, better educated and given unhindered opportunities to put across their own ideas and views. Ideally, in all societies, the press should act on the side of the people, irrespective of formidable obstacles, including state harassment.

In developing countries such as Nigeria, the most contending problems and basic needs plaguing the citizenry include ignorance, disease, poverty, overpopulation and environmental pollution. These problems are exacerbated by the prevalence of illiteracy and ignorance. It is succinct to say that socio-economic and communication analysts have agreed that the press in the developing countries must first enhance the capacity of their people to understand their problems in order to redress their living conditions (DeFleur and Dennis, 1998). The essential role of the mass media and the press is to inform and to educate the citizenry who will bring about a change of attitude and modify their behavior in the direction of positive and supportive action in harnessing their efforts and resources to satisfy their basic needs which in turn translates to national development. In the African continent, Nigeria is littered with a litany of failed programmes for social development due to ineffective participation and inclusion of the citizenry in her development programmes carried out in the past, which cover all aspects and sectors such as agriculture and rural development, health and social welfare, moral and ethical orientation, education and literacy, etc all failed to achieve their desired objectives. Just for the records, these operations covers: poverty alleviation, population control, family planning and so forth. Many scholars and analysts agree that the people were not allowed to participate in the design of the projects, a situation that evokes negative attitudes of complacency, and in some cases, neglect and vandalization of the projects (Okowa, 1991). These are pointers to the fact that the mass media and the press must address in order to play a formidable role in communicating social development messages (Okon, 2001) in such a manner and context that such messages can generate general and popular support for programmes of economic and social development in developing economies at all levels. Nwuneli, (1985) has argued that while social change is desirable, social development programmes can easily run into problems if they are not effectively communicated to the people in a participatory manner.

The point being emphasized here in is that the mass media and the press should carry and disseminate messages or information which helps to address the needs and concerns, as well as create awareness and encourage the intended beneficiaries. These are the components of communication and information services in participatory development and the emphasis is that well-planned information education and communication (IEC), interventions are particularly important in attaining the goals of social development programmes in developing economies on the continent of Africa. The reality in Nigeria today, as it is for most African nations, is that

globalization has made it immensely difficult for governments to provide social security. Trends like these have been largely dictated by the asymmetry of powers that accompany globalization, which according to Usman (2005) is inequality in the status of the members of the “velarized world” and their inability to resist imposed policy options. Thus, these phenomenal imbalances hinder national development and civic participation in the country.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The mass media has been ascribed to be an inexplicable medium of cultural instrument which serves to promote or influence attitudes or motivate and even foster the spread of behavior patterns in order to bring about social integration (McBride et al, 1980:30). It on this backdrop strategic communication tends to articulate the roles performed by the mass media towards national development. In Nigeria, the applications of strategic communication to the implementation of policies and programmed of government have been identified as an essential element in the process of national development. In that regards, it ensure that project design is realistic and appropriately effective by building awareness and understanding between and amongst stakeholders and beneficiaries under the prevailing socio-cultural setting, political conditions, perceptions of economic standards and incentive structures. These have directly or indirectly influenced investment opportunities and promote social order in the country.

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