

**STEERING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TV PROGRAMMING ON
“NIGERIA TODAY” (NTA 24): LESSONS IN STYLE AND PRESENTATION**

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Abstract

Television remains one of the potent media for public mobilization in our world. It is, to borrow a leaf from the cut line of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), “Then, Now and Forever.” This perceived ageless elasticity in relevance gives off a Midas touch and a presumed septicity whenever any program runs on it, at the risk of nostalgia of the Hypodermic Needle or Bullet Theory. However, society may have been cured of believing that everything that is put on TV is fiat accompli for whatever persuasion it is customized to achieve. That proof was tested otherwise in this study: Steering Socio-Economic Development Through TV Programming On “Nigeria Today” (NTA 24): Lessons In Style And Presentation. The program “Nigeria today” promises to mobilize public members on socio-economic and political issues of burning currency in Nigeria.. Using Focus Group and interview instruments outcome of the study reveals that the social complexity of persuasion demands a lot more than the status of a medium making up for a message; obviously a cheat on the absolutism of assumption of “the Medium is the Message.” It shows that the landscape of anything-on-TV-sells mantra may have changed at the cost of some variables like: other competitors on the same horizon and technology. Both of these make TV programming a tall order for liaises faire programmers that will not spice up their contents. Thus the study recommends that program may profit better by making agenda of issues that are exhaustively discussed before engaging newer issues.

Key words: Socio-economic, Development, Television, Programming, Agenda-setting

Background

The quest for development is a universal phenomenon that resides in every quarter and is widely subscribe to by all. An important indices for development is the degree of public consciousness and involvement that is harnessed in the campaign to realize that. A driver in that context is the media, especially

the broadcast media.

Tavakolli, Najafi and Ramezani (2013, p.49) note that, the media are strategic in actualizing aspiration for development in the present scheme as, according to them, "Mass media have an axial and undeniable role in meeting the need for development awareness through transferring information to the audience and exchanging thoughts. This point makes it possible for humans to know their surrounding world and make their important personal and social decisions based on clearer and more updated information so that they could get familiar with their social responsibilities, especially for development."

However, getting acquainted with information is a fractional duty of the media in their obligation to society. They set the agenda for society to think about the development that is needed in an environment and go on to play the gad fly around the development that may have been engineered by their repetitive demand for development. The later flank of duty is variously referred as surveillance (Watson and Hill, 1993; Watson, 2003, Hoffman, 2007). Let's face it communication has a major role in transferring knowledge, skills, attitudes and information.

Importantly, the media are mobilizers of society particularly the broadcast strings like Television. However, focusing on the possibility to use the media to achieve development goals is particularly interesting for a number of reasons.

First, from a policy perspective there is a large debate on the effectiveness of foreign aid and a corresponding quest for policy interventions that promise a vast outreach at low cost. Edutainment is potentially one of these, given the minimal requirements it poses in terms of administrative capacity and supply infrastructure compared, for example, to social welfare programs (La Ferrara, 2015, p.2).

Second, the incremental contribution of media such as television and radio is predicted to be highest in contexts where other sources of information (e.g., newspaper readership, formal education) are relatively less in use. Poor countries with low literacy rates clearly constitute an environment where the easily accessible 'language' of television and radio gives them a comparative advantage over other means of communication.

Third, the transforming role of media programs depends on how 'innovative' their content is. In the past, introduction of television in poor communities has resulted in exposure to lifestyles and values that were very different from the prevailing local customs, more so than in wealthier localities. The potential for exploiting educational content to progressively change social norms and behavior is therefore particularly high in environments that have been less exposed to economic and social transformation.

For Television stations in Nigeria, by the prescription of the National Broadcasting Commission, more than 70% of their programme content is enjoined to be local. The whole idea is to encourage creativity, patronage, acculturation and innovativeness.

The fact is in the 1960s, communication scholars and media experts were quite sure that television and the other media of mass communication would help national development. The media were considered the prime motivators of development. Following the trail of developed economies of the world, it is almost incontrovertible to assume that economic and technological development achieved by the Western nations were the result of increased media use (Vilaniyam, 2005).

Hence, Television was entrusted with the brave goal of promoting national integration, humanitarian goals and becoming a medium for the urban middle class. It is this class that owns and operates most of the television industry in most cosmopolitan centers around the country. Incidentally, the same class seems to be transmitting its own values, principles, and opinions to the rest of the nation (Johnson, 2000). Consequently, the cause of the poor, underprivileged people for whose development the medium was primarily brought to the country seems to have suffered a setback.

Invariably, the same medium that is thought to galvanize development is in some cases found to reinforce a sense of alienation in many parts of the country particularly in the northeastern states (Joshi, 1985; Ninan, 1995; Page and Crawley, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Television is a privilege to development of an age bracket over a course etc., and as a result given a handle to theories of development that may not have gone pass intellectual rhetoric. However, it must be stated at once that with every privilege comes maximization, abuse or underutilization. In the case of Nigeria there are evidences of all those shades of dividends as research shows (Huesmann and Taylor, 2006; Onobe and Onivehu, 2016a; Onobe and Onivehu, 2016b).

In terms of preponderance and significant value, it is not clear whether the advent of Television brought about quantifiable positive development or it was a tool that undermined our collective aspiration and fortunes. Specifically, this study is concerned with identifying how to make television programming like Nigeria Today more amendable to positive development in the State (Nigeria).

Research Question

1. What does the public see as Television Programming?
2. How does Television programming influence National Development in Nigeria?
3. What is the ratio of Television development programmes to other programmes on NTA 5?
4. How do people respond to Nigeria Today on NTA News 24?
5. What are the indices of measuring effective Television Programming in Nigeria?

Literature Review

(a) Conceptual Clarification

Television is a mediated system of visual radio communication that is used in passing information, receiving information and all general signals that can satisfy uses of enlightenment, education, entertainment, mobilization etc. A television program or television show is a segment of content intended for broadcast on television other than a commercial, channel identity, trailer, or any other segment of content not serving as attraction for viewership. It may be a single production, or more commonly, a series of related productions i.e. also called as a television series.

Broadcast programming or scheduling is the practice of organizing television or radio programs in a daily, weekly, biweekly or season-long schedule. Television scheduling strategies are employed to give programs the best possible chance of attracting and retaining an audience. They are used to deliver programs to audiences when they are most likely to want to watch them and deliver audiences to advertisers in the composition that makes their advertising most likely to be effective. (Ellis, 2000).

The television programming for general entertainment channel is divided into two types: Fiction and Non-fiction. Other categorizations are: nature programs, talk show, Series, News, Documentary, Sports Programs, Soap Opera, Cartoon, and Comedy. Thus, programming is scheduled content intended to guide communication delivery mediated or otherwise.

National Development

National development as a concept is an amalgam of two words. 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. According to Akoja (2016) Development should be viewed not only from the perspective of enhancing material well-being, but also what makes for a generation of greater individual and national self-esteem as well as that which expands the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence.

Thus, National development should be rightly 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, described as the country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011; Sanni and Ojewale, 2013).

Media and National Development

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. Mass media are capable of creating various kinds of impact on mankind. They play a crucial role in the function and change of any society. A study of social change cannot be done without studying mass media. Therefore in the present times when technology has brought about changes in the society, mass media studies have become important. The mass media constitute a powerful and pervading force in our lives.

Mass media expose people to a flood of information almost narcotizing reader, listener or viewer. Due to mass media the range and amount of information available to the people has vastly increased. Effective use of the mass media has the potential for increasing the public understanding of the goals of development programs and activities of development workers. It can increase public support for development programs and it can have a significant impact on the decision of development planners, policy makers, and legislators that affect these programs. It can help people function better in the community, by providing information that can support the coping capacities of persons under stress and consequently, it can significantly expand the impact of the development programmes in any community.

Asante (1997) reasons that, the media are expected to function as part of the national efforts in the arduous task of nation building and modernization. In specific terms Altschull (1995, p.229) observes that “ the media are 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 check the activities of the government that negate the principles of democracy by continually 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. Importantly, the media in the developing country are vested with the role of nation building and acting as development agents Akoja (2016).

Media are catalytic agents in national development. The revolutionary changes in the communication technologies have contributed to expanding the role of media in national development. They have accelerated the pace of development and made the world a smaller place by bringing people closer through communication. The rapid developments in the communication scenario and media technologies have provided ample scope to development practitioners to evolve appropriate communication strategies for development. Media have contributed tremendously to the development of nations and societies. They are powerful forces in today's world. They influence and shape the local, national and international issues. Media are expected to foster overall national development.

Because of the pivotal role of the media to national development UNESCO (1961) stipulated a minimum standard of mass communication channels for the third world; 10 copies of daily newspapers, five radio receivers, two television sets and two cinema seats for every 100 of country's inhabitant Khalid, Ahmed and Mufti (2015).

Television Programming in Strategic National Development

The advent of television herald the age of persuasive communication in a dimension that portrays truth as what can be seen, essentially because TV is more of substantiated visual than just sound bite. For example, through TV programming, the government is informed about the level of acceptance or otherwise of its policies and programmes by the populace.

Onabajo (2000) observes that searchlight on African Independent Television (AIT) was conceptualized as a programme that enlightens and entertains the audience. The programme shares human interest problems and also balances them by bringing serious societal problems. Also, government default is criticized in a

humorous way. The philosophy of the programme is to provide a form of heart-to-heart forum of presentation that will inform, educate, and enlighten its audience. Also, the programme draws attention to serious operational lapses of corporate and public organizations and government agencies.

Writing on the role of television programming in national development; a study of news line, NTA network service, Opara (2007) opines that TV programming plays significant roles in accelerating comprehensive national development. Findings of the study revealed that; television remains the most versatile and most effective media of communication and it exerts enormous influence on the people. Also, majority of the respondents hold the view that TV programmes, particularly News line, have been contributing to the cultural and socio-economic development of the country. The study further revealed that government functionaries and agencies hold News line in very high esteem, as a programme that binds the people and the government together in mutual interest of responsible citizenship and good governance as observed by Sanni and Ojewale (2013).

Meanwhile, Malikhao (2004, p.7) notes that although development strategies in developing countries diverge widely, the usual pattern for broadcasting and the press has been predominantly the same: Informing the population about projects, illustrating the advantages of these projects, and recommending that they be supported. A typical example of such a strategy is situated in the area of family planning, where communication means like posters, pamphlets, radio, and television attempt to persuade the public to accept birth control methods. Similar strategies are used on campaigns regarding health and nutrition, agricultural projects, education, and so on.

Girard (2003, p.7), writes that, low production and distribution costs have made it possible for the broadcast media to interpret the world from local perspectives, and to respond to local needs for information. More than other mass communication medium, radio and TV speak in the language and with the accent of its community. Its programming reflects local interests and it can make important contributions to both the heritage and the development of the cultures, economies and communities that surround it.

Shitak (2011) notes certain changes in the television system that he describes as a worldwide trend during the 1980s. The phenomenon was tending towards the commercialization of television. In that regard Herman and Mc Chesney (2001) also argue that during that decade the policies of deregulation and privatization were applied to national broadcasting and telecommunication systems that were traditionally regulated and often publicly owned and operated. That according to the duo had a detrimental impact on public service programs that were replaced with more and more entertainment programming.

Development Media Theory

The development media theory suggests that the media have a role to play in facilitating the process of development in developing countries according to Akoja (2016) based on the assumption that the mass media and communication can positively influence the development process (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010). Moemeka (2012, p.135) notes 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 theory sustains 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. In that regard a number of communication experts and development agencies are convinced that for communication to be effective, it must be systematically planned, implemented and coordinated effectively.

However, the theory according to Folarin (1998) permits and condones a degree of government control. That degree of control is not defined and as such governments in developing nations are wont to abuse such moderate oversight function and introduce very injurious tactics that kill cordiality among the constituent stakeholders and elements in the development drive like the media.

Research Methodology

The research design employed in this study is survey. The focus of this research is literate residents in the Federal Capital Territory that according to the National Population Commission in 2006 is 1,406,239 inhabitants. Thus, the population of the study is 1,406,239. The sample size for this study is 56. In order to draw the sample size of 56 respondents from the study population, the researcher adopted Paul Cozby's table for sample size and precision of population estimates with 95% confidence level at = 10% to arrive at the 56 respondents.

This size was considered adequate for this study because as Cozby (2004) argues, a sample size of 150 respondents will describe a population of 1,500 or 15 million virtually with the same degree of accuracy. The instrument used for this research is the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews.

The choice of FGD and interview as instruments was informed by the literacy level and exposure of the respondents with the regards to the subject of this study. Six FGD were held in all six council areas of the FCT: Abaji, 9; Bwari, 10; Kuje, 11; Kwali, 9; Gwagwalada, 10; and Abuja Municipal, 7 respectively. Members of the groups were aged between 18- 50 years. The researchers were in each case passive observer.

The respondents discussed six issues bordering on Nigeria Today on NTA News 24. The discussions were held in the Area Councils. In-depth interview was used to supplement the FGD. The carefully designed questions were deliberately tailored to generate data that will answer the research questions at the beginning of this study. Discussions of the respondents in the FGD were transcribed and analyzed in line with the objective and research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Five research questions were proposed at the beginning of the study namely:

1. What does the public see as Television Programming?
2. How does Television programming influence National Development in Nigeria?
3. What is the ratio of Television development programs to other programs on NTA News 24?
4. How do people respond to Nigeria Today on NTA News 24 to Television programming in Nigeria?
5. What are the indices of measuring effective Television Programming in Nigeria?

To answer question one, the research depended on the consensus response, which is that: Television programming in this era of technology is a visual town hall where public concerns are mentioned for public discussion. Analysis shows that 87 % contend that a program should not be an announcement portal or podium where prepared ends are relayed but a destination that people collectively walk into in their discussion. The direction is worked out by the discussion as a collective endeavor.

In answer to question two, many of the discussants at the six FGD agreed that there are gains that accrue to development by exposing people to enlightenment programs. Specifically, they note that success in development initiatives at some point requires identification of people, organizations and institutions inclined to the area of need and networking with them.

Thus, in response to the question, Television programming influence National Development in Nigeria by enlightening Nigerians, serving as a bank of information and ideas, aiding as a buffer for network link between individuals and organizations, galvanizing public support and change of audience orientation to participate in development initiatives like Back to Farm campaigns, Green Revolution, Operation Feed the Nation, etc., that were measurably applauded as success when they existed.

In answer to question three, the analyzed data shows that the ratio of "Nigeria Today", in comparative context of quantity, to other programs that are not development inclined, is negligible. There is more of entertainment than talk of development; politics than economic discuss. The ratio of these genres appears way more than scientific, educational and technological innovations aired on NTA 24.

In answer to research question four, the discussants of the FGD say "Nigeria Today" is not very popular in terms of followership and patronage because other stations' programs seem to be contending as alternatives and are fairing better plus they appear more bided and are considered more interesting. Part of the reasons as they note is that NTA has not evolved in its style of presentation. The set of the program shoot is conservative and not appealing.

The other reasons are: issues often raised are beside the concerns of the audience. They are

pedestrian issues that have reached saturation point with the audience. Nothing new is put down and there is a general lack of a unique selling point. The discussions on Nigeria Today don't hit a cord with the people. These seeming little issues were exploited by competing TV stations with similar goals and it was only a matter of time before they poached on NTA's audience. Another reason is the advent of social media. The demographics shows that the youth, the greater age bracket in Nigeria today, pay more attention to social media platforms, podcasts, blogs and other Internet releases. The traditional media is clearly taking relegation.

In answering the question of indices of effectiveness certain factors must need to be considered. Strong among the issues is ownership pattern.

The discussants contend that the he that owns the pipe dictates the tune. In that regard, they argue that a program meant for development like "Nigeria Today" will be typically skewed to reflect strongly government's perspective. To them development program should stream from the agenda, interest and concern of society. That way it will be people oriented. Thus, a program that will be popular with the people and effective as well should come from the womb of society's creation.

The other issue noted by the discussants that can make a development program sellable is the narrative line of issues and the involvement of society on the issue. They argue that producers should allow issues to be discussed exhaustively by experts and stakeholders before new issues are raised. In other words programs should be approached as issues and not one event that can be talked about and left off after just a session. There must be follow-ups, feedbacks and a community resolution of matters.

Several works consider the suitability of content to a viewer's interests, opinions, needs and demands (Ishikawa, 1992; Sánchez Taberero, 2006) as dimensions for assessing quality in television programs. This perception of TV programming is responsible for public patronage of TV program in Nigeria.

The finding has shown that Nigerians regard highly TV as a central fulcrum in development of people, infrastructure and society in general. This is supported by some of the literature examined earlier in this study. For example, Television is seen as constituting an important and influential aspect of developmental environment (Singer & Singer, 1990). A lot of climes have operationalized and maximized TV for development like in India (Sen Shitak, 2011).

Television programs that are prized as effective share certain characteristics. Apart from station's ownership pattern that strongly determines effectiveness, from the perspective of media managers, quality programs must present certain characteristics, such as respect for plurality and integrity (Blumler, 1991), truth-telling (Mephram, 1990), ingenuity and the absence of coarseness and sensationalism (Sánchez Taberero, 2006). Other works allude to management and financial aspects, such as audience data and cost per program production hour (Medina, 2006). Generally, quality of content is the price for the money paid and audience members need that.

Thus, for many of the discussants Television program must be anchored on audience demands. The reasoning is that Television should act like a service station where it is audience interest that ought to drive and direct program production. The other flank of the argument is that program producers like news craft men are agenda setters. As that they should feel free to conceive and create programs of interest when they are able to identify a need expressed or suppressed as long as it can be identified to be within the confluence of what will engineer development in society.

Many of the discussants believe that in this age of globalization the Nigerian society must find a way of catching up with other societies within the index of development. Almost all of the discussants' agree that the media, especially Television is strategic in activating a phenomenal campaign that will enlist patriotic support and engagement of society. Some of them mentioned once developing nations like India, Malaysia etc that maximized the potential of effectually using Television for development initiatives and objectives. They mentioned enlightenment programs in the Nigerian media that have galvanized public support and change of audience orientation like Back to Farm campaign.

Some of them retain that development and enlightenment are like Siamese twins who should inseparably journey in any course of progression. Those so inclined note principally that most cases of unimpressive attempt in the pace of general development and GDP growth is because the fission between enlightenment and development was weak and absent at best between development initiates and

enlightenment. Good Television programming may well be the needed adhesive.

Although “Nigeria Today” is almost a daily program on NTA News channel, the structure of the program is hardly consistent in terms of content. They note that in ratio to other programs that are not, “Nigeria Today” in comparative context of quantity of programs, it is negligible. Many times issues are hardly flogged exhaustively within the time frame of each segment. The discussants’ also noted that issues are trivialized when they end without really looking at them exhaustively as is often the case with many of the issues that are discussed in the program. There was also the consensus observations that hardly are development issues made as series that could run in the program segment for a time. No agenda is set when issues are not recurrently discussed. Thus, in the opinion of the discussants Television programming in this era of technology is a visual town hall where public concerns are mentioned for public discussion. A program should not be an announcement portal or podium where prepared ends are relayed but a destination that people collectively walk into in their discussion. The direction is worked out by the discussion as a collective endeavor.

In terms of response to “Nigeria Today” the discussants’ said the program is not very popular with them because other stations’ program seem to be contending as alternatives and are more bided and considered more interesting. The other reason they gave is that NTA has not evolved from its strong attachment to the government, making the station an appendage of government. For that a lot of the respondents said Nigeria Today was not a reflection of people’s agenda, rather the government of the day.

The discussants reason that in measuring the effectiveness of any Television Programming in Nigeria certain factors must need to be considered. Strong among the issues is ownership pattern. They contend that the he that owns the pipe dictate the tune. In that regard, they argue that a program meant for development like Nigeria Today will be typically skewed to reflect strongly government’s perspective. To them development program should stream from the agenda, interest and concern of society. That way it will be people oriented. Thus, a program that will be popular with the people and effective as well will come from the womb of society’s creation.

The other issue noted by the discussants that can make a development program sellable is the narrative line of issues and the involvement of society on the issue. They argue that producers should allow issues to be discussed exhaustively by experts and stakeholders before new issues are raised. In other words program should be approached as issues and not one event that can be talked about and left off after just a session. There must be follow-ups, feedbacks and a community resolution of matters.

Conclusion

Television programming like democracy needs to be situated in public’s interest, society’s concern for a developmental program like Nigeria Today to succeed. Television still has a bountiful place in steering development campaigns if programming is gotten correctly. The correct approach is to make programming people centered.

Recommendations

Based on the forgoing this study makes the following recommendations:

1. Television stations should change their approach and understanding of programming from a station’s interest content to public interest concerns.
2. Television programming purpose for development should be invigorated and spiced as a driver of development in society like Nigeria.
3. The ratio of development programs like Nigeria Today should appreciate in Television content production more than what it is today.
4. Authorities of NTA, the producers of Nigeria today must allow freedom for the station to evolve and be more innovative in content production. One way to do that is to treat development matters as issues that can be discussed to create agenda in public space.
5. Variety and creativity plus public interest concern programs should be the best test of programs effectiveness.

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