Re-Positioning Nigeria's Radio Broadcast as a Catalyst for Development

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Abstract
Throughout history, communication and information culture have remained a powerful means of disseminating information. Communication has become an infrastructure for the flow of information across all sectors even though there is imbalance, misrepresentation, and bias of news flow from western media concerning the third world. This paper critically looks at news report on the south (third world) and takes a stand that the bias reports of events and negative portrayal of the south by the industrialised nations is intentional attempt to distract the south from having a focus. In conclusion, the paper, focuses on the Development Media Theory and Social Responsibility Theory arguing that this trend must be consciously viewed as a real challenge by the Nigeria radio broadcast that needs not waste time to counter the negative trend being perpetuated over the years but however to reposition her radio broadcasts to focus on the task of serving as a catalyst for the development of Africa and the country in general. At the end, the paper provides an outline of how radio could be used in developing Nigeria.

Introduction

Throughout history, communication has remained a powerful means of disseminating information. In fact, communication has become an infrastructure for the flow of information across all sectors. Radio broadcasting has especially done a lot in this area. This is principally because of its wide coverage and ability to get everywhere; human beings are able to operate on land, inside the water and on air. Coupled with the wide coverage, radio is affordable. It costs as little as five hundred naira or just slightly above to own a radio receiver, this means people without jobs are also able to afford it. In addition to these advantages, the present revolution in technology has brought radio even closer to Africans than ever before for the fact that radio is part and parcel of most electronic gadgets including telephone handsets.

The problem however is that the developed nations, now more than ever before, disseminate more information to Nigeria, with the use of emerging technologies, most of which are not relevant information to developing nations but instead, a universal facet of life that destroys individuality and cohesion in our nation. With these technologies, they promote information imbalance in the sense that senders of information are only those that control these high-tech hardware of information. Nigeria and in fact, Africa is automatically cut off from what Africans do or what is African.

The industrialised nations of the North depict the rest of the world in various ways for instances, news coverage of positive developments and scientific breakthroughs; medicine, health, politics, sports, governance, and economy are portrayed only as selectively as these areas favour them. Culture and cultural aspects are emphasised as strong areas of concern as culture subsumes many social issues; however, there seem to exist a man-made gulf that is being perpetrated by use of technological credence between the

industrialised North and developing or under developed South, this is unacceptable. The South is ultimately portrayed as a region of hunger, disease and economic chaos, conflict, famine, official corruption, bureaucracy, inefficiency, catastrophe, military coup d'états, earthquakes and national disasters. Any negative incident or event becomes breaking news in the industrialised media coverage. How much of positive achievements or developments is reported by the North? This brings to mind the debate of bias in media coverage concerning national and international flow of culture and news. But taking a critical look at news report on the South, one wonders if this bias in reported events and negative portrayal of the South by the industrialised nations is truly bad. If these reports are deliberate attempt to portray the South in a negative way, what can our radio stations do about it? This is the thrust of this paper.

Since the New World Information and Communication order (NWICO) debate of 1970's and 1980's centred on the nature and content, direction, quality, quantity, fairness, balance and objectivity in transnational flow of information that is dominated by the media of the industrialised North, developing nations on the other hand clamour for social equity and justice in information dissemination and call for a restructuring of global communication systems. This in effect has not been achieved but as communication technology keeps changing or growing by the day, quantitatively and qualitatively, there is now hope for Africa. The good thing about this is that with the overflow of information technology, in Nigeria now there is more access to information broadcasting facilities apart from mere access to broadcast materials that originate from the west. One can utilise this opportunity to package and present more about

the way one prefers to be projected. Only then shall more about Africa be known to the Western world.

Theoretical Framework:

Through the years, quite a number of theories and other ethical guides have been propagated to control and direct the practice of media activities in the society. It has however, been difficult for media operatives to pick one and stick to it in their practice. It is common therefore to find media stations operating in-between a number of these theoretical bases. To some extent, this is as a result of factors that are there beyond the control of broadcasters and journalists.

One of such factors is what has given birth to the popular saying, ''he that plays the piper, dictates the tune''. The owners of media outlets generally control the content of such media to suit their interests (political, economic, religious, and social). As such it is not fair on the part of Africans to expect the Western media to be pro-Africa instead of pro-West. It could be argued however that broadcasters and journalists still owe the society balanced presentation, fairness in reporting, equity in presentation, and positive agenda setting.

It is on this backdrop that Mustapha Marmoudi argues that,

> The situation of imbalance has naturally prompted the wish for a radiant overhaul of the present international information system... and highlighting the need to establish a new world order for information. While representing one of the many aspects of the required transformation of the world situation, its primary purpose must be to initiate further reforms and to establish other new

international orders, more just and more beneficial to
the world community of mankind. (23-24)

In December 1977, UNESCO held its nineteenth general conference
in Nairobi, Kenya and the conference mandated its DG Amadou
Mahtar Mbo is to review all the problems of communication in
contemporary society as seen against the background of technology
and recent developments in international relations paying more
attention to complexity and magnitude. Through the director
general, a committee on the study of the problem of communication
under the presidency of Sean MacBride wrote a report termed
MacBride Commission Report. The report was titled *Many Voices,
One World*. The report acknowledges and accepts the fact that:

> Almost everywhere there are inaccuracies and
> distortions in information and that these inaccuracies
> and deficiencies in the flow of news that do exist
> could undeniably be found more on the various
> aspects of the distortions...in the content of
> communication in general particularly news
> messages, data supply, culture, leisure products
> (157).

The report still made further observations that

> Distortion of news...occurs when inadequacies or
> untruths replace authentic facts; or when a slanted
> interpretation is woven into the news report through
> the use of pejorative adjectives and stereotype... And
> this occurs where events of no real importance are
> given prominence and when the superficial or the
> irrelevant are interwoven with facts of real
> significance (158).

This report made these observations which were accepted and published several years ago, but it is disturbing to observe that the media of industrialised North still makes use of pejorative adjectives and stereotype in the presentation of the South (Third World).

A typical example in the use of pejorative adjectives and stereotyping of an African unity was carried out by the Voice of America (VOA) on 25th May, 1992 in its 'Daybreak Africa', a programme of 06.30 GMT. VOA aired this news to its millions of international listeners:

> The people of Burkina Faso, the POOREST NATION in Africa are going to the polls today to elect a president and members of a new national assembly in the first ever democratic election in fourteen years (Daybreak Africa, 25th May, 1992).

Would the above news item have been devoid or lost its value, accuracy, listening and credibility if VOA had not negatively portrayed Burkina Faso as the poorest nation in Africa?

MacBride's report also made an observation of how news media gives prominence and place importance on insignificant events or when the irrelevant events are interwoven with facts of real significance. This is expressed in the BBC newscast on 27 January 1992. Some major European Soccer clubs came to Senegal to scout for star African players for recruitment by their clubs during African football fiesta which was played on the 26 January 1992, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana played where Cote d'Ivoire defeated Ghana.

This event made no news in BBC world news. Rather, BBC informed its international audience most of whom are from soccer loving nations, that the Washington Red Skins had won the American football. American football is not soccer and is mostly important to Americans. Accomplishment in Africa is downplayed

by Western media but any negative behaviour becomes headlines in Western media.

The onslaught perpetrated against Africa and the third world by Western media has continued to dent and batter the image of the peoples of the southern world, since they are portrayed as lesser beings. To this a one-time Secretary General of the commonwealth, Emeka Anyaoku had to react to the damaging portrait of Africa by a London newspaper as 'The continent engulfed by economic collapse, war, famine, AIDS...which may bury the hopes and freedom, peace and prosperity'. To this Anyaoku reacted that,

> ...the projection of Africa in the Eurocentric world as a region of stagnation, if not outright retrogression is based essentially on historical prejudice...But when the prejudice of the ancients stemmed largely from ignorance that our modern pundits stem in the main from a mixture of motives not the least of which is a reluctance to acknowledge that, for all its afflictions, independent Africa has some achievements to its credit and in working even in auspicious circumstances to secure its future...(78).

The portrayal of African image in a negative way in the Western media in an era of 'new world order' treads the part of social injustice, equity and perpetration of the dominant powers; if the western world could eradicate its 'exalted' view of themselves and their view of their civilization as superior to all the world, there would be justice. Anyaoku asserts the African position thus,

> Africans ask for no favours in the reporting of their affairs. They ask...that civil wars and other human tragedies in Africa should not involve vocabulary that is different from that and from similar tragedies

elsewhere such as describing the casualties of European civil wars as being 'killed' while that of African civil wars as being 'slaughtered' (79).

Such vocabulary is capable of dampening the morals of any group or society that is addressed as such. It is based on these background facts that it is important to look at two media theories that will help in situating the thesis of this paper that the Nigerian radio should be repositioned to help in developing Nigeria, instead of thinking that Western media would be for Nigeria.

Development Media Theory

The development media theory rests on the assumptions about the developmental need of the concerned states. Quoting McQuail (1983:94), Udeajah observes that, for these states, economic and political developments are primary national responsibilities to which every other institution should submit (26). In a developmental context therefore, the media are used to highlight efforts being made by the communities in building health centres, feeder roads, civic centres, and similar self-help projects. Media, under this system, is used to focus attention on governments' efforts in developing the rural areas through the provision of electricity, pipe-borne water, small-scale industries, and roads in order to stop the drift of young school leavers to the urban areas. The media are therefore used by governments as channels for mobilizing the populace for economic, political and social development. Media ownership in developmental environment is therefore heavily in government hands with varying methods of control such as the National Broadcasting Commission in Nigeria.

Agenda Setting

The assumption of this theory is that, mass media directs public attention to issues and thereby chooses to emphasize selected items.

The mass media do place some emphasis on news item by size, placement and frequency of broadcast stories.

Udeajah succinctly states that,

> Many government activities might never be known or understood by the people and government might never know how the people feel about social and political policies. There is no doubt that Nigerian politicians appreciate that the broadcast media of radio and television set the agenda for political discussions and public opinion. The evidence can be seen in the anxiety of broadcast journalists to cover political affairs by directing their attention to selected issues that project a healthy image of specific politicians and parties (29).

The position in this paper is that since one cannot stop the bias information dissemination of the North neither with legislation nor condemnation, Nigeria and Africa in general has some viable options left still, one of which is pursuing change through radio, the most available of all modern technology of communication, irrespective of what the North does.

Bringing Change through Radio in Nigeria

Throughout the world, radio is used for many purposes; news, entertainment, education, information and music. In Nigeria, one can consciously employ radio for the purpose of helping people to better their lives. Radio could be used educationally, or in community development, religion or for economic purposes to bring about the required development. In any of these sectors, the target should be to bring about change to Nigeria. The focus should be to work towards change.

To this Ralph Milton believes,

> If we are going to change some of the habits and practices of our people, we must know how these changes happen. It will not help just to make more programmes, or to put more radio sets among the people, or to have more people listen to our programmes. These things may help, but they cannot bring change by themselves (155).

By this statement, it means change cannot be brought about through the provision or availability of facilities only but much more. This is where Wilbur Schramm's comment on how changes in culture becomes eminent. Schramm succinctly states that, ''...one culture has contact with another culture for a long period of time, a conqueror or a ruler forces people to change, or when better information and better education make people want to change'' (156).

It is this 'better information' and 'better education' of bringing about change that radio fits in. Through radio, one can make people become aware that they need something which they do not have. Then when they know of this need, they must invent or borrow some way of meeting that need.

This is very easy to say, but it is very difficult to do. There are several challenges involved in order to bring about changes in the habits and thoughts of people. Milton identifies some of these challenges as follows:

a) *A culture is Tied Together*: Since old customs of a culture are tied together, when you isolate one and try to change it, it changes many other parts also. What one must do then is to think of the whole culture when trying to introduce a change. The new idea should be such that the whole culture

of the listener works towards helping the change, rather than working against it.

b) *People live in groups:* Since people live in groups, it is not proper to target individuals when aiming at introducing change in the society. Individuals discuss with others before making up their minds as to whether to accept a change or not. As a result, broadcasters should find ways to help a whole group to change. A tribe or clan is given some information about a challenge, talks about it, and then decides, as a group, what to do. The people are not told what they must do. They think about the problem, and perhaps with a little help are able to find a solution that fits their community.

c) *Radio Forum and Phone-in Programmes*: Both Radio Forums and Phone-in programmes provide opportunities for people to comment and input on broadcasts that have just been done or are on-going live. In both cases, listeners are empowered to 'not only decide what they would do themselves, but they send their decisions in letters or telephone calls to the radio stations' (Milton 156). In this way they have a small part in helping the whole country make the right choices.

d) *The Use of Radio*: Schramm tells us there are two important things we can learn from all of this:

> The mass media can fail to do the work they should. In fact, they can even do the opposite of what we intend, if we do not know enough about the culture we are working with. Time after time, people have failed in their use of the mass media, because they did not understand the people they were trying to

> help. There are some things the mass media can do and other things they can only help to do. On radio, we can only tell a farmer how to plant rice. Even if we were using television and could show the farmer how to plant, that still would not be as good as getting into the rice paddy and working with him (116)

In the pursuit of repositioning Nigeria radio broadcast as a catalyst for development therefore, one cannot make people decide to do a certain thing. Radio can help by giving groups the information they need and by encouraging people to talk about the problem. Radio cannot do the deciding, nor take action once the decision has been made. This simply means that before one decides to use radio programmes for certain reasons, one should first ask, 'Is radio the best way to do this? Should one use another form of mass media?

Can one use the mass media at all? Should one use the mass media as well as workers who will go out and talk with the people personally? The best thing is to use radio and follow-up workers. This has been the tested and successful method among churches and other agencies. They use radio as just one tool among many. They do their broadcasts and use people to also visit and explain or build on the information that has been broadcast.

In conclusion, broadcasters have a duty to report and interpret developmental concepts to the western world by internationalising local news items. Example, we have cooperative farming variously known as *ihumbe* (Tiv), *gaya* (Hausa), little is known about this practice in the Western world. When this is internationalised in news reporting, the West shall come to know about the social-cultural intricacies of farming such as ''music while farming'', a situation where others perform live music as motivation to those

working on a farm, and ''interactions while farming'', a situation where sometimes members of one's maternal family are brought in to help on the farm. Beer is brewed and taken to farms on such occasions. These are some elements that are good and better in the long run than industrialised farming and mechanical farming that utilises machines that make the whole exercise private and dull, serving the interest of the 'have's' mainly. While mechanised farming provides more food and money in the economy, it takes away land from the less privileged thereby causing land disputes that result into crises or wars.

Looking inward in radio broadcasting, would mean looking less at the information imbalance that divides the North from the South, a situation that even the New World Information Order has not been able to render null and void.

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