

Media and National Development in Democratic Societies

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Abstract:

The operation of the media in terms of national development is fundamental for the productivity of any journalistic engagement. The objective of development communication entails the media carrying out development tasks within the context of the society as well as advocating the essence why society should develop. This is paramount because development is a process that should target individuals and groups and by extension the society at large and should aim towards improving the quality of all aspects of people's lives, ranging from the economic, the political, the socio-cultural and even the technological. In this direction, this paper examines media and national development, development communication and development reporting, the imperativeness of development news reporting, and the role of the media in fostering development. The paper adopted the theoretical tenets of Development Media Theory, and Agenda-setting Theory to interrogate media and national development. The secondary source of data was employed using journal articles, textbooks and the internet. The paper argued that the media played a double-edged role which may either enhance or derail national development. The paper concludes that the objective of development communication entails the media carrying out development tasks as well as advocating the essence why society should develop. The paper recommends that the media should be socially responsible in carryout development tasks that will foster national development, and such developmental goals should be based on a button-to-top approach.

Keywords:

agenda-setting theory, development media theory, media, national development, and society.

I. Introduction

The basic functions of the media are not to inform, educate, and entertain only but they are also a veritable channel for a wide range of development campaigns. To Okunna (2009), the mass media encourage and ginger people to achieve developmental goals of the society by promoting such goals in the media and stimulating the aspirations and activities of people towards achieving such goals. The media have become pervasive instrumentalities of modern existence. The media are expected to explain, inform and educate society on crucial issues affecting society's well-being and progress. Over the years, the issue of development has come to the fore as one issue that the media are expected to focus attention on. Since the 1960s modernization theorists have advocated the importance of the media in the development process of a nation. Their arguments have formed the basis on which development journalism is built (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

Development news is believed to have a positive impact on the lives of all or the majority of people that are exposed to it. This belief has generated so many controversies that have led scholars like Moemeka (2000) to seriously canvass for its use. Overtime, almost all the nations of

the world have been in constant search of effective approaches to achieving human and material development. In recent times, this search seems to be more pronounced in the developing world. Ironically, most early scholarly and professionally articulated views, models, theories and postulations relating to the development of the developed world were Western-derived. Western scholars tend to measure development from the economic point of view and also believe that the role of the media in Africa, Asia and Latin America is to support the process of the social changes taking place as a result of contact between the West and these emergent societies. They demonstrated that mass media by propagating western models and the values and practices of modernization and westernization would create certain psychological conditions and psychic empathy, which in turn will make these societies “achieving societies”.

Development is the socio-cultural, political, economic and well-being of society. In a truly developed state, there is the assurance of a good quality of life and the exercise of all human rights and freedom to participate in the democratic process. Development implies enhancing the quality of life, equity and justice, as it takes into consideration the wellbeing, growth and advancement of individuals within the society. Development is noticeable growth from one state or stage to another, which is higher, desirable or more advanced than the previous. For any nation to attain a desirable or laudable level of development there must be the effective use of communication, which has been severally identified as a major tool of mobilization. For development programs to be planned, implemented and rated at the end as successful, they must be all-inclusive, that is, they must be spread across the board to include both rural and urban areas (Yar’Adua & Aondover, 2021).

Development is a change process geared at improving or making better the life and environment of man. Where the media comes in the development process is through what is called “development communication”. This is the type of communication which is consciously packaged by the sender, such that the message content or information sent could persuade, encourage or convince the receiver or target audience to adopt an attitude and participate in actualizing a development plan or goal. Development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is classified as developed when it’s able to provide qualitative life for its citizens (Aondover, 2017). Nigeria has been battling with the problems of development despite the huge human, material and natural resources in her possession. This has created a knowledge gap in the existing literature, especially on the position of media and national development, which this paper intends to bridge.

1.1 Purpose and Objectives

This paper aims to examine media and national development. To achieve this broad aim, the following specific objectives are set based on the articulated gap identified in the literature:

1. To study media and national development.
2. To examine development communication and development reporting.
3. To find out the imperativeness of development news reporting.
4. To interrogate the role of the media in fostering development

1.2 The Context

In the last two decades, Nigeria's media and communication scene have been transformed, partly due to liberalization, deregulation and privatization of media and cultural industries. The increasing availability of digital delivery and distribution mechanisms has created new markets for media and communication products. The most visible change is in the visual media: television in Nigeria has grown exponentially as online media. Despite the poor telecommunication infrastructure, the internet has witnessed expansion in Nigeria, achieved

largely by mobile-enabled internet services, making Nigeria Africa's largest internet user. There is little doubt that this will further accelerate, with the growth of mobile internet, making 3G phones affordable and accessible and 5G available. As elsewhere, young people in Nigeria are the biggest consumers, as well as producers of mobile digital content and social media (Aondover *et al.*, 2023).

Nigeria is already Africa's biggest mobile phone market and one with a sizeable number of English language users, the vehicle of global communication and commerce. What makes the Nigerian case particularly noteworthy is the scale and scope of the potential changes as a sizable percentage of its 168 million people are young. As their connectivity grows, many young Nigerians will increasingly be going online, produce, distribute and consume media. This connectivity will also bring Nigeria closer to its strong diaspora, one of Africa's largest and spread around the globe (Thussu, 2016).

While new media outlets have proliferated in such a digitized world, the growing competition for audiences and advertising revenue has also intensified, forcing media organizations to opt for infotainment-driven content which thrives on celebrity culture, centred on Nollywood, the world's third largest film factory (after India's Bollywood and Hollywood). As elsewhere in the developing world, in this commercialized and commodified communication environment, the 'public' aspects of media are often ignored. Much of privately owned media has almost negligible coverage of rural poverty or developmental issues in general, as they rarely translate into ratings or interest advertisers, on whose support the edifice of a commercial media is ultimately based. Relatively speaking, public broadcasters do a better job but have yet to acquire editorial autonomy from overly bureaucratized and deeply politicized public service media. Despite being an energy-rich nation with strong entrepreneur culture, Nigeria faces formidable problems of development, as well as the menace of terrorism from such groups as Boko Haram (Yar'Adua & Aondover, 2021).

Therefore, the objective of development communication entails the media carrying out development tasks within the ambit of the society as well as advocating the essence why society should develop. This is paramount because development is a process that should target individuals and groups and by extension the society at large and always aim towards improving the quality of all aspects of people's lives, ranging from the economic, the political, the socio-cultural and even the technological. Development and communication are seen as a chain process or two sides of the same coin. In this chain process, the media play a pivotal role in a sound economy, which in turn determines political stability (Abba *et al.*, 2021). In an ideal situation, the media are veritable channels for a wide range of development campaigns. The media also facilitate the achievement of government developmental goals and keep the public abreast of the state of development in society. Within this context, this conceptual paper interrogates media and national development (Yar'Adua *et al.*, 2023)

II. Research Methods

This paper is a conceptual paper that is based its discussion on the secondary sources of data. The paper used journal articles, textbooks, and internet materials. The paper interrogates the existing literature to substantially discuss the media and national development.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The major theories guiding this paper are Development Media Theory and Agenda-setting Theory. Development Media Theory hinged on the perception of the media as a powerful

instrument that can be used to achieve positive development in any society. Its basic tenets according to Okoro and Agbo (2003) are that the media should carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy; the media in developing nations should align their interest with news and information in other developing nations that are close geographically, culturally, and politically. Freedom of the media should be open to restrictions, according to economic priorities and development needs of the society; and media operation should be restricted in the interest of development in the state.

The choice of this theory to support this paper is based on the fact that its tenets are development-oriented. Besides, it clamours for the reportage or coverage of development issues by the media (especially in developing nations) to enhance national development. Despite the recent debate among communication scholars regarding Development Media Theory as a principle that describes the operation of the media in society, this paper still finds the theory to be apt in the discussion of media and national development.

Similarly, the Agenda-setting Theory of the media as posited by McCombs and Shaw (1972) also serve as a framework for this paper. They observed that the media tell us not what to think but what to think about. The proponents of this theory state that the amount of attention given to an issue in the media affects the level of importance assigned to that issue by the mass media audience. Agenda-setting is a media effect theory whose main thrust is that though the media may not change a person's point of view on a particular issue, it may change the person's perception of what is important (Agbo & Ukozor, 2000).

In the same vein, the media could place in the consciousness of people in a nation or society developmental issues which require their attention. The media could do this through frequent reportage or coverage of development news and issues that affect the people and society in general. That way, these issues discussed by the mass media will be considered important by the people and further activate national and community development possibly initiated and furthered by the people.

This theory is employed to support this paper because of its emphasis on frequent reportage or coverage of development news which will subsequently make the reported issues prominent; thereby setting agenda for the people to discuss and have the right public opinion and also attract the attention of the appropriate authority to act on the issue based on the opinion held by stakeholders or members of the public. Considering the criticism of the theory as to whether, is the media or the masses that set the agenda, the theoretical postulations of Agenda-setting Theory is fundamental in this discussion because if the media set the agenda on developmental issues in society, such development-oriented goals can be achieved by the nation.

2.2 Media and National Development

The mass media has been viewed by Hasan (2013) as a platform to improve the quality of the usefulness of information for the citizen. This can be outlined in the messages carried and sent by the media on various platforms on developmental issues. This development brings about positive change in society through the help of the media, which can be viewed in the programmes and strategies portrayed in the messages that are been sent to the audience. The media are the wheel on which the development of any society rotates (Akpoveta, 2006). This point out the social mobilization role of the media in society, because of the capacity to reach a large audience in different places. The success of development programmes in developing countries largely depends on the nature and extent of the use of media in the mobilization of people for development. It is important to note that to support development, the media need the

right environment in terms of freedom capacities and checks and balances. Thus, it is necessary at the core of equitable development. The mass media are used to let people voice diverse opinions on governance and reforms, which in turn help to build public consensus to bring about change.

Anaeto (2010) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth but also some notion of equitable distribution and the provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all to improve the individual and collective quality of life. Development certainly embodies all the attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies various improvements in the material well-being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today's consumption does not imperil the future. It also demands that poverty is the inequality of access to the good things of life.

The media, therefore, play a pivotal role in the development process of a country. The media are channels of communication that are capable of reaching a heterogeneous audience simultaneously with uniform messages. They regularly cover all sorts of issues on politics, education, economy and health, among others (Soola, 2004). The media transmit ideas and new information to target the audience in society. Soola (2004) observes that the media educate, inform and entertain. Beyond these functions, they also persuade and catalyze social mobilization. In other words, the media can be regarded as a powerful service of information because they have the capability for penetrating every segment of society. They can disseminate messages about issues, ideas, and products. Nwanko and Ucheni (2012) remarked that the media are very useful in audience penetration. It can deliver messages in both national and local languages and, therefore, is capable of penetrating both the literate and illiterate segments of the rural population.

The electronic media, which comprises the radio and television, are very unique in terms of information sharing. The sophistication of these media of communication distinguished them as the wonders of modern communication. Just as the twentieth century dawned, a system was perfected through which electromagnetic impulses could be sent through the air without wires carrying voice transmission over long distances (Uju, 2014). Graves (2007) in his contribution to the impact of broadcasting in a developing context, noted that electronic media are powerful and effective instruments for achieving national goals, such as widespread education for both children and adults, to realize the set objective in economic growth, healthcare, political and social awareness, political stability, self-reliance and national identity, among other things (Idris & Msughter, 2022).

It could be said that through educating, informing and entertaining, the media thereby make the society, society members or the nation as well as the leadership of the very society aware of the importance and need to undertake certain progress or processes of economic development (Uju, 2014). Also attached to these three basic roles of media is the role of persuasion, where media are seen as the virile tools of applying persuasive efforts to influence people's actions in a particular direction. The media are therefore seen for their role in furnishing the public with the necessary information to achieve development or change goals. Programmes on the media help to educate people about different social issues like farming, agriculture, health, small-scale industry, etc. The media provide the avenue for people to involve in developmental projects. The media platforms like radio and television provide the opportunity for communities to do phone-in when a programme is ongoing. Discussions on different topics are done as well as queries by experts are answered.

Television among other media channels appeals to the common person. For such reason, it is used in a planned manner to motivate people to participate in developmental programmes. Features, documentaries or development campaigns are put in place to create interest in the mind of viewers. Contents that are comprehensive and contemporary to attract people of all ages and capable of influencing viewers to take part in developmental programs are often initiated by the media.

2.3 Development Communication and Development Reporting

Communication is central to any human activity with specific regard to development. This could be the reason why Nwabueze (2006) established that it is the dissemination of development messages to the target audience often to persuade them to adopt a positive attitude change towards a development purpose at all levels. Therefore, communicating development issues in journalism involves the use of all the forms of communication in reporting, publicizing and promoting development at all levels of society.

Development reporting consists of the strict application of journalistic principles for development-oriented objectives. The media are charged with the obligation of reporting the news story, which has to do with the improvement of life or the enhancement efforts, which could contribute meaningfully to the upliftment of the society, infrastructural projects, skills development, planning and implementation of development policies and programmes. It is important to note that development news has to do with the specie occurrence in various sectors of society, such as health, education, sports, business or finance, crime, the civil service, science and technology, the military, etc (Anaeto, 2010). Also, in all the activities or trends which centre on the upliftment of the quality of life, journalists are charged with the responsibility of gathering, writing and reporting news about development effects on society. This includes featured or depth reports and interviews on key players in developmental issues, development-oriented governmental and non-governmental organizations and the initiators and beneficiaries of development efforts (Akinlaso & Ashemi, 2016).

The purpose of development communication, according to Nwabueze (2006) is to advance development, which is the high quality of life for the people. It is concerned with the dissemination of relevant information that increases people's stock of knowledge and changes their attitudes and values to enable them to undertake and participate in the development process. It is a communication that helps one to understand the needs and social realities of people and mobilize them towards development goals. It seeks to mobilize the rural people for development actions by ensuring information flow among all those involved in development programmes.

2.4 The Imperativeness of Development News Reporting

An essential feature of the mass media is that the messages communicated through the mass media, especially the internet and other broadcast media like Radio and Television or print media like newspapers or magazines, have the potential of reaching a mass audience in a relatively quick and cost-effective way. Since the mass media serves an important function of agenda-setting, the media by covering development news regularly and frequently can help to raise development issues to the critical point of national policy decision-making and public discourse people will begin to talk about the issue (Yar'Adua & Aondoover, 2021).

By doing so, the media can also help to create public awareness about development problems and issues. They can also create public consciousness about development. Reporting development issues can influence policymakers. It is a fact because policymakers pay attention

and follow the news media closely where the news both reflects and shapes popular opinion. The international media frequently reports famine, floods, epidemics, earthquakes and other disasters suffered by developing countries. Reporting these disasters most times prompts governments and private organizations to launch relief assistance to the victims of such disasters in the affected countries. The national media can contribute to development and change by going beyond mere reporting to analyzing the causes of such disasters.

Development journalism facilitates participatory development in any society. It creates a two-way communication channel through which the citizenry makes their needs known to the government. Such needs are factored into development policies, which are also made known to the people through the mass media. This way, the government and the governed harmonize the development agenda in the interest of society. Another importance of development journalism fosters the watchdog role of the media and makes the media more responsive and more people-friendly. Development news stories make leaders conscious of the fact that they are being watched and expected to meet their responsibilities to society. That notwithstanding, it should be noted that the media cannot solve the immense problems of development. What it can do is play a participatory and supporting role in development by helping to focus attention, point out opportunities, attack indifferences or obstructions and influence the climate of public opinion (Aondover et al., 2022)

2.5 Interrogating the Role of the Media in Development

The central role of the media stems from section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, which states that “The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people”. The above citation from the Constitution suggests that the media is charged with the responsibility of circulating information among the members of the public as well as coordinating the information flow between the government and the people. The media cannot in themselves alone ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of all institutions and administrations on their toes by readily and regularly reporting cases of inefficiency and other related vices in the system. The media do not only transmit information around the world, they also construct agenda by telling people what is important to attend to. In other words, the media play a significant role in development through media campaign programmes, documentaries, editorial reviews, commentaries, news reports, interviews and other platforms as well as a presence in social media that can also foster the development of individual and societal levels (Stephen, 2008). Furthermore, Bommelaer (2015) found that the media, especially journalism, have a relevant role in many aspects of development, ranging from governance through inclusion, empowerment, peace, and youth involvement. The conventional media indirectly, and social media directly, give people the opportunity to be active and inform participants in the society and strengthen the ownership development process.

Asemah (2011) gave an outline of the mass media approach, which emphasizes centralized control for both mass media infrastructure and the direction of the flow of mass media messages. In this approach, programmes or messages are planned, produced and disseminated by experts and programme officers. Development messages are sometimes planned and executed without consultation with audiences to whom the message contents are eventually directed. Effective development messages demand some sort of organized actions at the receiving end as well as solidity in message content to ensure relevance. Electronic media is a technology which can be used for information dissemination down to the grassroots level. Radio internet and television are media of mass communication that are used to educate, inform, socialize, and entertain the masses.

The newspaper sets the agenda not only for the community, but also the central government regarding what development issues planners in the metropolis should consider in the overall national development plan. Rural newspapers also directly contribute to change in communities in various ways, such as promoting literacy, fundamental knowledge, useful change and linking leaders to the people as well as safeguarding culture and identity. Asemah (2011) remarked that parts of the problems faced in using newspapers in development are:

- a. Lack of adequate and competent personnel.
- b. Illiteracy and language problems.
- c. Lack of advert support, among others.

Television is also a powerful medium for broadcasting audio, visuals and motion. It is a medium for broadcasting audio-visual messages. It seems to have a great way of influencing its audience. Asemah (2011) posits that television influence can be seen as presenting models of behaviour and as providing information, which extends far beyond one's immediate experience. As a tool for development, television has a distinct advantage over the radio because it combines sight and sound, that is, its audio-visual effect. As a medium of mass communication, television plays different functions mostly on development issues. It brings its massive audience into a direct relationship with a particular set of values and attitudes.

Due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure like electricity in rural areas and even some parts of urban areas, programmes which bear directly on development in such areas as health, nutrition, agriculture and environment protection and sanitation could make little impact. Therefore, television cannot be considered a tool that is used for development purposes to benefit the majority of the population. But then, it can be seen as one of the most effective sources of communication in any society that is desperate for up-to-date and effective communication. During the commissioning of the first television in Africa, Western Nigeria Television (NTV) in October 1959, Chief Awolowo (the then premier of the western region) in his speech stated that "Television will serve as a teacher, an entertainer and a stimulus to us all, to transfer Nigeria into a modern and a prosperous nation".

Radio just like television is a tool that can be used to bring about positive attitudinal change in the audience of the mass media. Generally available to Africans, it is most widespread and accessible. Therefore, radio can be a major force in bringing about the development of any quantitative and qualitative improvements in the lives of the people. It helps to achieve development both in rural and urban areas as issues of development are aired to the audience in the form of various programmes and individuals are exposed to happenings in and around their society through listening to programmes. One of the constraints is the issue of lack of visual impact, which often makes radio ineffective in most cases because it only appeals to the ear. The internet has become important in social and economic change, transforming how government, businesses and citizens interact and offering new ways of addressing development challenges. Since it became widely available in the 1990s, the internet has enabled new products and services, improved economic efficiency, transformed access to information and facilitated greater collaboration between governments, businesses and citizens (Bommelaer, 2015).

Nigerian media are mostly filled with stories on development at various levels in the country, ranging from Federal, State and Local Government Areas. The Nigerian media have made so much effort to bring development news to the people. However, Nwabueze (2009) notes that government-owned media organizations seem to be at the forefront of development journalism in a bid to amplify the efforts of their employer (State or Federal Government) to the masses. But the problem here is that they tend to concentrate on the commissioning of projects,

family planning, agricultural programmes, military activities and ceremonies, etc. Most of these media platforms hardly focus their searchlight on stories about the embezzlement of funds for development projects, the supply of inferior material for projects, the substandard development projects done by contractors or abandoned projects, etc. This type of reporting led critics of development reporting to describe this branch of journalism as “Handout” Journalism, which replicates “half-truths put out by official information agencies” and reports only “Positive News” to the exclusion of negative or unflattering news (Shrivastava, 2003, p. 16).

However, the competition posed by the privately-owned electronic media has made some government-owned broadcast media, especially the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Cooperation of Nigeria (FRCN) stations, wake up to the challenges of reporting the two sides of the issue in development journalism.

The media, therefore, are seen as the mirror of every society, which is why its role in development is vital. This is why some analysts see the success of society largely depends on the independence and success of the media. Meanwhile, for the media to contribute immensely to the development of society, it has to be socially responsible and work with the profession’s ethics. Journalism is often criticized and hardly enjoys public confidence due to what journalists do or fail to do. Every profession is usually guided by certain laws, rules and regulations, whether formally coded or only recognized as conventions.

The professional must therefore maintain some decorum and keep to certain standards of integrity to earn trust and command respect in the performance of his chosen career. One of the problems is that no media house can ever be sure that none of its staff engages in the distortion or omission of the truth. In other cases, the trouble even starts from the top where the owners or their managers pass policies designed to help one group or so against another down the line. This one way or the other has impeded development in Nigeria due to the polarization of the media and the unwholesome practice of media personnel.

III. Conclusion

This paper examines media and national development. The paper argued the media played a double-edged role which may either enhance or derail national development. Based on the theoretical postulations of the Development Media Theory, the media should carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy; the media in developing nations should align their interest with news and information in other developing nations that are close geographically, culturally, and politically. Arguably, within the context of the Agenda-setting Theory, the media are to be placed in the consciousness of people in a nation or society developmental issues which require their attention. The media could do this through frequent reportage or coverage of development news and issues that affect the people and society in general. The paper concludes that the objective of development communication entails the media carrying out development tasks within the ambit of the society as well as advocating the essence of why society should develop. This is paramount because development is a process that should target individuals and groups and by extension the society at large and always aim towards improving the quality of all aspects of people’s lives, ranging from the economic, the political, the socio-cultural and even the technological. Based on the findings of the paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. The media should be socially responsible in carryout development tasks that will foster national development, and such developmental goals should be based on a bottom-to-top approach.

2. In carryout national development initiatives, the media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in the Constitution and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.
3. Communication is an important segment of the social system which needs another subsystem to function adequately, and the media should not miss out in the subsystem because it is through information and communication that ideas on national development can be communicated to people.

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