

An assessment of the contributions of selected privately-owned radio stations in Kaduna, Nigeria to program quality and national development

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Abstract

Privately owned broadcast media registration and operations in Nigeria is a much recent phenomenon compared to the print which dates back to more than a century earlier, and electronic broadcasting about six (1932) to three (1959) decades earlier. While many studies have been conducted as to the development, maturity and contribution of the earlier media, not much however has been done to track and analyse the contributions of private broadcast media to program quality enhancement as well as national development in general. These newer entities came on board almost thirty years ago and raised the bar for credible performance against their counterparts owned by the government. This work surveyed 83 employees of two privately owned radio stations operating in a highly competitive arena of Kaduna, Nigeria, for positive and negative trends. Kaduna has the second highest number of registered radio stations in the nation (26) after Lagos (39). Program quality in comparison to government owned media was rated very high by the respondents, while ownership influence and financing were the major hindrances. Data collected was analysed within the framework of developmental media theory. A major recommendation for similarly situated stations was for them to find alternative ways of fundraising to deal with both ownership influence and lack of funding. That should help place them on stronger footing in serving public interests, and competing even better with their government owned counterparts.

Key Words: Nigerian Media, Media development, Development Communication.

Introduction

The Nigerian media history started in the mid-1800s with newspaper publications in the southern coastal area of the country where some forms of foreign (European) influence has been the standard since roughly slave trade era in the mid-1600s. Radio and television broadcast history in Nigeria, however, went in tandem with the global establishment of broadcasting. The first radio broadcast in Nigeria was initiated by the British colonial administration in 1932 (Nwantok & Aikulola 2020), about the same time BBC went global with its international radio broadcast across the world. Television, however was first established much later in 1959. The Western Nigeria Television, WNTV, was the first television station in Africa; an educational broadcasting entity (Umeh 1989) that was established a year before Nigeria gained its independence from British rule. That was a record, because even globally television was just finding its place. "Germany the pioneer, for example, began broadcasting its non-experimental national

television service in 1935, while England's British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) began broadcasting the following year. The first U.S. commercial television licenses were issued in 1941" but it was not until mid-1950s that television broadcasting gained significant viewership in the United States of America (De Leon 2015).

For most of Nigeria's history until 1999 when an enduring presidential system of government was established, the military were at the helms of the country's leadership. The nation's print media, for the most part, were accredited with the advocacy for independence from British colonial administration, 1914-1960, as well as the cessation of military dictatorship and establishment of an enduring democratic form of government (Uko 2002). For broadcasting, a break from the past came in 1992, when the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida endorsed a decree (Act) that allowed, by law, the registration and establishment of private electronic media, i.e. both

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radio and television stations to run parallel with the existing stations established by the state and federal government. An agency named National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, was established the same year, 1992, to set regulations for licensing requirements, as well as monitoring the privately owned stations for compliance (NBC, Our Mandate). Thus began the Nigerian media dual journey of government as well as privately owned electronic media, in addition to the print media which has previously enjoyed private ownership from day one.

For this research, the operational and conceptual definition of national development is; improvement in the economy and the quality of life usually reflected in enhanced social, economic, political and cultural life. As for program quality; it relates to enhanced program content, as well as the quality of recording, transmission equipment and expertise, leading to good reception signal of quality output (program). The whole concept is captured by the subject matter of mass media and society, where media plays a central role within and also between the society and its major functional sectors, including government and administration. It is also important to understand that the choice of these two stations, Liberty FM Radio and Freedom Radio in Kaduna City was informed by the fact that they are among the more popular privately owned radio stations operating within one of the most competitive radio environments in Nigeria. Kaduna has a total of 26 registered stations (Wikipedia) with a mix of both governments owned and privately owned stations, second only to the former Nigerian capital city of Lagos, which has 39 registered stations. For this specific study, the operational definition of program quality encompasses the quality of program content as well as overall quality of equipment used in recording (encoding), transmission and reception. National development means the contribution of relevant programming and information relating to the improvement of general life of the people and the nation, most especially in the social, political, economic and cultural arena.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has since 1992, seen a proliferation of electronic media stations, from privately owned television stations such as AIT, Channels, Silverbird, DITV, TVC, etc., to a significantly higher number of privately owned radio stations, mostly FM stations established across the country. Most urban centres in Nigeria today have several FM stations competing for the attention of the

same audience. Nigeria today operates about 510 radio stations nationwide, both public but mostly private. Lagos alone has 39 radio stations, while Abuja and Kaduna have 26 radio stations each. Raypower Radio, for example, is a private radio network that operate FM stations in almost all 36 states of the Nigerian federation (Wikipedia). After some twenty-nine years since the law that allows private radio and television to be established, this study aims to find out the nature of that journey. The specific questions the study intends to answer are two; (i) whether privately registered and owned radio mix has resulted in improved radio contribution to the quality of information and general content; as well as (ii) whether the privately owned radio stations have contributed positively towards national development by partnering in support of government development plans and goals, and via their own agenda-setting programming. Results from the survey may assist in better understanding as to the strengths and weaknesses of both privately owned and public owned radio stations operating in similarly situated local stations of northern Nigeria (at the very least), including how competition for audience and clientele affect technical quality, programming quality, etc. That will not only enrich our understanding, but assist in the placement of advertisements and general media related marketing.

A random survey using questionnaire as instrument for data collection was regarded as best for the study. Two out of the top four privately owned radio stations operating in the city of Kaduna in terms of popularity, Freedom FM Radio, and Liberty FM Radio, were chosen. About 100 copies of the same worded questionnaires were distributed to most employees of both stations to get their opinions and insight into their operations, and 83 of them were returned and used for analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Development theory, from media studies branch called 'development communication' provides a framework for the analysis and proper understanding of this study. Development theory has given us many thought provoking branches and studies including Rustow's 5 stages of economic development every society goes through (Rustow 1990); studies in domestic factors that influence development such as income inequality (Deininger & Squire 1998) to modernization and development studies. A study of six developing countries including Nigeria, for example, was conducted (Inkeles & Smith 1998) to see common

trends, as well as study the psycho-cultural factors influencing development. So long as mass media remain the means through which a great mass of the people in any nation are informed about the social, political and economic activities as they occur, including discourse around them from professionals and all stakeholders, media and community developments will remain intertwined.

The case for development communication was made by two scholars in 1974 (Inkeles & Smith 1974), originally meant to be the process by which Third World societies could become more like the western fully developed societies. The effects were measured in terms of political, and democratic systems imbued with continuous economic growth and high educational levels. Current trends however show major changes to the modernization concept of development theory, where scholars argue that focus on western industrialized countries and top-down information flow is being replaced with a more complex perspective in which communication is envisioned as a horizontal process aimed, first at building trust, then at assessing risks, exploring opportunities, and facilitating the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and perceptions among all stakeholders (Mefalopulous 2008). Among its features are the elimination of propaganda and the cultivation of special tools for building self-responsibility and self-determination.

Literature Review

Until 1992, radio and television broadcasting in Nigeria, remained an exclusive monopoly of the federal and state governments. In fact, in 1977 the federal military government confiscated both radio and television stations owned by state and regional governments, establishing federal government monopoly of both radio and television stations across the country. The stations were brought under two large broadcast conglomerates, named Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN. The broadcast media confiscation by the military administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo was vehemently dissented by a sitting governor of Kaduna State then, Group Captain Usman Jibril, who ultimately resigned and walked out of a meeting in protest (Abdallah 2009).

The tight control on broadcast media and for privatization coming that late, may not be unconnected with the fact that for two thirds of the nation's leadership history, it was under military administration, i.e. 29 years versus 19 years of civilian administration. The Nigerian media, most especially newspapers had for about a century

earlier demonstrated the efficacy of media to liberate people, fight political oppression and support social, economic and political causes (Ngara & Esebonu 2012). Some of the discourse therefore was whether private media can bring an alternative voice to government controlled media, so freedom of thought and action may lead to development. UNESCO has already identified radio in Africa as key to national and community development (Africanews, 2012), and its use as an educational tool (Sarma & Lama 2017). Another study (Mgbejume 1991) referring mainly to newspapers, criticized the press' counterproductive role, calling for a redefinition of the role of the press media in Nigeria away from the present westernized mode of antagonistic anti-government posture (Uko 2002).

The anti-government posture which was established by the press to fight the colonial administration, as posed by other scholars, should have been nipped at independence and self-government to allow for focus on nation building. Already, radio has demonstrated, most especially in Africa its potential to be used for mass dissemination of information, ideas and positive change advocacy for developmental programs. Its ability to reach the most remote areas is a plus (Myraid 2015)). It is cheap, portable, not dependent on electricity. And unlike newspapers, radio has the ability to transcend the barriers of illiteracy. The Department of International Development, now FCDO, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office in the United Kingdom, states that radio still leads as the major communication tool in Africa, and "in nations where Internet and electricity are limited, radio is the strongest medium for connecting isolated communities" (Myraid 2015). Television later added more credibility with visual ability in addition to watching news and programs live and on location.

After about thirty years, studies have documented some achievements as well as drawbacks regarding the contribution of private media to the nation's media environment, and to national development as a whole. A study (Onwumere 1983) on the contribution of government owned television to national development shows how Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, has successfully worked in tandem with federal economic projects, most especially in agricultural development, mass awareness, and educational programs. NTA was also used to encourage mass cultural development and awareness against practices that are counterproductive. Campus radio in universities

and community radio are also beginning to make a significant presence after privatization (Nwantok & Aikulola 2020).

In 1986, The Federal Minister of Information and Culture, Mr Tony Momoh hinted at privatization of broadcast media (Mohammed 1994), citing several foreseen advantages including the possible avoidance of undue government influence on the (broadcast) media; the possibility of healthy competition which may lead to improved services; and possible diversity in programming and production; the credibility rating improvement with private ownership and finally, that privatisation would lead to greater investments in the broadcast media industry. A study, 18 years after media privatization (Ariye 2010) show 'the privately owned stations giving the public owned stations a run for their money in terms of acceptability through quality programming leading to increased patronage and attraction of adverts.

Another study (Osadike & Udoh 2014), two decades into private media establishment compared the performance of government versus privately owned media and found that privately owned broadcast media evoke more credibility and acceptance than the government owned broadcast media. It was also found that private broadcast media messages affect the public positively and tend to give more in-depth coverage of events than public broadcasting outfits. It further confirmed that private broadcast media tend to encourage the expressing of divergent views on policies and other important matters. Other studies however (Okwuchukwu 2014) show how media owners and opinion leaders (elite) negatively impact the society, "...the ruling elite) are the core "news makers" whose views and opinions populate most of the views, news, opinions and information disseminated in the media in Nigeria. The findings further showed that the current media ownership pattern and the level of media control in Nigeria actually hinder the media from independently setting society's agenda."

A Scholarly study (Kur 2015) discredits the military for restricting access, and the politicians during civilian administrations with unethical news commercialization that corrupts objective reporting and genuine political discourse. Kur recommends making television broadcasting wholly private; introduction of community television broadcasting, and encouraging the civil societies and professional associations to advocate for best practices in the industry. On social development, a study (Chioma 2012), reveals that while 70% of the contents on federal television

NTA in Lagos are of cultural significance and promote cultural learning with 88% locally produced programs; only 43% of the contents on a private television station in Lagos, Silverbird TV, were of cultural relevance with just 54% locally produced programs. A need for reinventing Nigerian private media (Okunna 2003), to curb the negative effects of news commercialization and profit orientation that downgrades issues of national interest and development is advocated as a recommendation in her study. While some (Ugwoke et al. 2009) demonstrate positive and effective contributions of the Nigerian mass media in socio-economic development, others (Nwanne 2018) see the hindrance coming from the governments' lack of sense of urgency and commitment in setting effective development objectives for the media to complement through specially designed programs and advocacy.

Data Presentation and Analysis

For this study, a total of 83 employees from Liberty FM Radio and Freedom Radio in Kaduna City Nigeria were surveyed. Both radio stations were registered as privately owned broadcast entities.

The choice of these two stations was not coincidental. For wider generalization of the results of the study, these were the best choice. Of the 26 privately owned radio stations in Kaduna, the two involved in the study have a greater network of affiliate broadcast entities, one across the nation (Liberty Radio) and the other in several other major cities of northern Nigeria (Freedom Radio). Liberty Radio, an affiliate of Liberty TV, is headquartered in Kaduna the former northern administrative capital. Liberty TV usually broadcast simultaneously on several affiliate radio stations nationwide, and is linked across the nation via some television distribution services such as DSTV, GO TV and Star Times. Freedom Radio network on the other hand is headquartered in Kano, the northern commercial capital, and was registered as a privately owned radio in 2002, but continues to establish sister stations across main cities of northern Nigeria. Today it owns other stations in Dutse, Jigawa State; Maiduguri, Borno State; Sokoto, Sokoto State; apart from the Kaduna station, in Kaduna State, involved in this survey.

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to employees of both stations in Kaduna, and 83 were returned. As far as remunerations, all respondents say their basic income is salary only, with no bonuses or commissions. Broadcasting, unlike the print media is a capital intensive industry. What becomes clear from the

data is the stark difference between the respondents' counterpart stations where the government finance everything including salaries. The privately owned and funded stations have to work doubly hard to attract enough advertisements and sponsorship programs to stay above water. As for data regarding some of the

drawbacks they encounter, it is clear from the table below (Table 1), that ownership at 42 percent of respondents and financial challenges at 41% of respondents were chosen as the leading problems for both private FM radio stations involved in the study.

Table 1. Major problems encountered at the stations

Issues	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Ownership Influence	35	42.1%
Power Supply	2	2.4%
Tribal bias	12	14.5%
Financial challenge	34	41%
Total	83	11100

There are several sources for the negative effect of ownership on programming and other sectors. Maintaining one's objectivity and saying it as it is, is not the norm at times in the stations, when it may negatively impact the political and/or monetary financial interest of the owner(s) of these stations. Interjections of opinion by owners into the professional decisions of station operators at 42% of respondent, even on important matters of national interest, is an issue, for example. Advocacy and suppression of content (gatekeeping) does occur on subjective basis regardless of national interest, based mainly on ethnic and/or regional loyalty. About 14% of respondents expressed ethnic influence opinion.

As for financial challenge, at 41% of respondents, major reason expressed was the effect of the continuous decline of industrial operations and activities in Kaduna and its suburbs within the last 20 years, forcing advertising revenue to drop

significantly, as supported by a study of the phenomenon (Okpala et al., 2019). The impact on commercial activities and resulting low marketing and sales including program sponsorship that such stations enjoyed meant a significant reduction in income and financing.

Another finding relating to the second question this study aimed to answer is displayed on Table 2, as below. The quality of programs carried by the two privately owned stations do stand out as they work hard to maintain their lead against their competition within the privately owned stations domain, as well as the more financially sound government stations. For the four categories of quality rating presented as choice to the respondents, 45% of them at 37 respondent rated quality at very high, while 55% at 46 respondents rated the quality at high. None chose average or below standard rating.

Table 2. Ratings of the quality of broadcast on the stations.

Rating	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very High	37	44.6%
High	46	55.4%
Fair	0	0%
Bellow standard	0	0%
4.9 Total	83	11100

The study also sought the respondents' opinion as to what factors they think contributes to their strength and success in comparison to other stations. The Listed attributes were; quality of

programs, length of broadcast, station's coverage area, and technical quality (i.e. in relation to equipment and clarity of reception). Those who picked 'all of the above' were by far the highest at

88% of respondents, followed by quality of programs at 6%. As for 'wider coverage area' as a choice, and as noted above, though broadcasting on frequency modulation mode, FM, which does not travel far, these popular privately owned

stations have a network of stations they link to for core broadcasts, providing a much wider reach and more enriched experience for their audience.

Table 3. The two stations' strength compared to other stations.

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Quality of programs	5	6.0%
In-depth coverage of issues	2	2.4%
Wider coverage area	1	1.2%
Technical Quality	2	2.4%
All of the above	73	88%
None of the above	0	0(0%)
Total	83	11100

The study has therefore been able to answer both questions. For question one posed by this study, the answer is yes. The privately owned media appear to have raised the bar for quality of programming content, i.e. in-depth coverage of issues and analysis, as well as technical broadcast quality. It is however important to notice that there is still room for improvement even for these privately owned stations, as there is an 11% difference between those who chose the highest rating (44%) and the one just below (55%). Their strength tends to lie more on timely service of the real information and entertainment needs of the public to draw more audience for obvious financial reasons. This is further confirmed by an earlier comparative study (Obono & Mada 2018) of three television stations broadcasting in Lagos, southern Nigeria, namely NTA (government owned television network), Silverbird and AIT (both privately owned television). To compete favourably and attract the most audience for advertising revenue maximization "most private stations create programs based on audience need." The study further disclosed that the federal government owned network NTA "is viewed more as a government mouthpiece" (Obono & Mada 2018: 77).

While this study's focus was privately owned radio stations, even for privately owned television stations, as far as comparison on various criteria, they appear to do better. Channels Television, a privately established and owned station won first position based on several criteria for twelve years in a row between the years 2000-2016 claims, an award set aside by Nigeria's Media Merit Award (Nigeria Communication

Week, 2014). And for the second question on contribution to national development, the private media have significantly improved media performance in that arena owing to in-depth coverage of issues and agenda setting on issues of national interest, including expansion of competing views and opinions that enriches discourse. This finding confirms the one from 2010 (Ariye 2010), conducted 18 years after allowing private broadcast media to register, when the findings show higher quality of programming for private media and higher competitive edge.

However, ownership interference and financial challenges seem to impact the stations' progress in certain areas. The respondents however are of the opinion that the stations stress expert as opposed to government opinions on issues that matter to the public including social and economic to expand their sources beyond government personalities coverage, as supported by an earlier study (Obono & Madu, 2018). Some scholars however charge that private media tend to populate their media outlets with elitists views (Okwuchukwu 2014) and by so doing owners may skew ideas towards the rich. It is therefore safe to say, in conclusion, that the present drawbacks for similarly situated privately owned radio stations that bar stellar performance, are undue influence from station owners plus insufficient operational finances.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, government owned broadcast media may be at advantage as far as funding, but they may need to address issues of both program and technical quality. There is also the need to use government financed stations

positively, as an arm of policy advocacy to complement their financiers. "The media can only complement government policy regarding law and order and other issues" (Nwantok&Aikulola 2020)).As for the privately owned media, they should find alternative ways to raise regular funds that allow them to generate a buffer in cases where advertisements and sponsorship fail to raise enough funds for station operations. Privately owned stations, if able to surmount their challenges, have greater prospects and promise for boosting development. The study also recommends further studies that will include the role of private television stations in order to get a better understanding of the entire privately owned broadcast media industry in Nigeria.

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