

Sustaining Communal Media for Development in the Age of Globalization

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Abstract

Sequel to the challenges posed by globalization in today's world with reference to Nigeria, this paper calls critical attention to the need to sustain participatory communication through the communal media for sustainable development. It examines the prospects of deploying communal media which involve participatory communication that emphasizes interpersonal approach, face to face communication, traditional, indigenous media channels and group activities to foster change and development.

The paper adopts the Development Media Theory and the Participatory Communication. The Development media theory prescribes the functions of the press in developing nations such as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal etc. the theory argues that press must provide platforms that can accelerate the development of their respective nations. The participatory Communication theory stresses the importance of cultural identity of local communities and participation at all levels—national, local and individual. The theory asserts that participation is necessary in order to share information, trust, knowledge, commitment and a right attitude to development activities.

The paper therefore opines that communal media employs interpersonal means which can influence people, attitudes, behavior by informing and educating them for development purposes. Consequently the paper recommends a change in communication policy making and a re-deployment of interpersonal communal media of communication for sustainable development in today's global age.

Key word: Communal media; Development; Communication globalization

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INTRODUCTION

Communication provides the desired information which is necessary to bring change. This is especially true of a developing country like Nigeria, where there are inaccessible roads, poor health care facilities, poverty, unemployment and unstable government policies. It therefore means that there is a dire need to deploy communication for development purpose. This notion is emphasized by Okunna (2002) "as communication and development are closely inter-connected that there can be no development without communication".

In the same vein, communication uses the media to disseminate information that can impact positively on the lives of people. The media, in their capacity as change agents should seek to deploy more communicative participatory channels to effectively achieve the desired change and development. The media according to Enemaku (2006) should devise a communication for development that is participatory and not manipulative.

However, the new surge of philosophy that is influencing every gamut of life today is globalization, which involves the transborder movement of people, trade and economic integration, technologies, social movements and so on. The term globalization is used in this paper to express an all encompassing concept that portrays the realities of the time.

Globalization is dynamic, the impact of which is not predictable. It is the unpredictability and changing state that makes it imperative for communication scholars as adopted in this paper to advocate for communal media of communication for change and development.

It should be noted that globalization is being advocated by the developed countries of the world to advance their own interest, and not necessarily to promote the interest of the poor developing countries like Nigeria. Most of the benefits of globalization are positioned in favour of developed countries. Similarly, Li (2000) opines that globalization revolves around "an otherness, an alterity that disrupts the singularity of the global space. In the same light global media channels (Internet, satellite) abound with their apparent benefits, but significantly for a potent cultural developing nation like Nigeria, with 70% of its population residing in rural areas, communal media such as folklores, song.

1. DEVELOPMENT MEDIA THEORY

The Development Media theory prescribes the functions of the press in the developing nations such as Nigeria; Senegal etc. the theory argues that press must provide platforms that can accelerate the development of their respective nation. The theory recommends that the mass media should join hands with government to foster development in a country. The theory which was propounded by McQuail (1987) as cited by Folarin (1998) has the following assumptions:

- i. The media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with naturally established policy.
- ii. Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and languages.

This approach to media use in development, which also obtained in most of the developing nations sees the mass media only as the long arm of the government, and holds that their main function is that of obtaining the peoples support for and compliance with, the aims and objectives of the government. It is transmission-based rather than exchange of ideas-based communication strategy.

There is a general feeling among media professionals and government officials that access and participation which are unquestioningly the prerequisites for understanding of government policies and for attitude and behavior change can be achieved in centralized government controlled mass media. Results of past activities have not however proved them right, because of high illiteracy rates, scarcity of communication hardware, the poverty of the people and other factors such as scattered low density population and difficult terrains, centralized mass media operations have had very little impact (Moemeka, 2012) and have left a very large proportion of Africa's rural population virtually cut off from national communication networks. The right to communicate is virtually not exercised beyond the narrow confines of the local community.

2. PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

On the other hand, the theory of participatory communication emphasizes interpersonal approach

that utilizes the communal media channels and cultural activities to enhance development in communities. Communal media of communication facilitates social processes that involve the active participation of people with common interests, which can be utilized for social, economic and political changes. Participatory communication for development thus deploys communal media channels which can be utilized as a force for communal participation, whereby developing nations, communities and societies enjoy freedom of expression, and impression on the basis of their own existence and therefore make meaningful contribution to the shaping of society.

Participatory communication in urban and rural communities encourages systematic public debates whereby government decides the information needs best suited to their nation state and hence chart their social, political and economic course of development. No doubt Moemeka (1991), surmises that participatory communication gives top priority to the active participation of people and leading roles in development and social change projects. Therefore, the crux of participatory communication is implicitly working with the people, using interpersonal approaches of verbal communication, traditional, communal folk media and group activities. This however does not exclude the mass media. But participatory communal ensures the active participation of people using the communal media that is best suited to a particular people to influence an attitudinal change and behavior by informing, educating and motivating them for development.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of traditional communication is any form of indigenous communication system which by virtue of its origin form and integration into a specific culture, serves as channel of messages in a way and manner that required the utilization of the values, symbolism, institution and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes. Communal media (Ansa-Kyeremeh, 1998) is embedded in the traditional communication process. According to Wang and Dissanayake (1984), they are traditional communication systems or indigenous communication systems that are ingrained in the culture of the community. The concept of communal media is aptly expressed by Jussawalla and Hughes (1984) as Channels that are embedded within the traditional mores of people and contribute significantly to their history and culture.

Akinleye (2003), citing Fraser and Restrepo-Estrade (1998) explains traditional communication as a factor in ensuring change for development as it helps individuals, communities and societies to introduce and accept changes. Given these definitions by communication

scholars, one can attempt a summary of traditional communication as channels and processes that make use of cultural values, institutions and symbols which readily connect with the people and thus enhance the effectiveness of information that circulates in the community.

For the purpose of this paper, communal media benefits of these will express the channels of communication in a manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbolisms, institution and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes.

Thus communal media seek to explore avenues of communication for development that provides an interface of connectivity and participation of the people, utilizing their culture, and history. This concept is in agreement with Boafo (2006) who asserts that such media are useful in communal communication programs, as they serve as reliable channels of news, information gathering and dissemination in communities and also address local languages and cultural contexts which the community members can readily understand and relate with.

Consequently, communal media refers to all forms of indigenous communication means such as music, folklore, town hall meetings, festivals, storytelling; any of these channels could be used to reach out to communities and societies. It is pertinent to observe that they are still in existence today despite the global advent of the broadcast media (radio, television, newspapers).

4. THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

The importance of development has become a subject of critical discourse because more than ever before, the position of human existence has elicited a grave cause for concern. There is the need to achieve sustainable development for human existence, which will impact the generation yet unborn. In this stead, the concept of development in this paper is succinctly expressed by Colletta (1980) as cited in Dandaura (1999) “as a process of positive socio-economic change in the quality and level of human existence which is aimed at raising the standard of living, quality of life and human dignity”.

In the above definition, the Nigerian situation readily comes to focus. In Nigeria there is a urgent need for the people to have suitable health programs, increased food production by rural farmers, housing projects, environmental health, adult literacy, urban and rural development, child development, justice, cultural re-identification, democracy, population control and so.

Furthermore, development emanates from man. This is imperative because it is the desire for a qualitative road network, improved health facilities, standard education, provision of social amenities etc that informed the search for a better state of human life. The need for development can therefore be expressed as the answer to the human question on how to improve the quality of human existence.

In giving a final word about development, the concept of development should be people centered. It should encompass the entire society, impacting on the lives of people and emancipating them from all forms of deprivation and exploitation.

5. COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

The African continent (Nigeria) is bedeviled with diverse challenges—cultural, educational, social, economic and political. Boafo (2003) declares that despite the challenges faced by these African nations, their communication and information have functions in the bid to confront these challenges. With these daunting challenges confronting the Nigerian state, granted that are development agents that are poised to bring social, economic and political changes but what appropriate mode and media should they deploy in the face of a large population of people of illiterate rural dwellers, living in abject poverty and deprivation? Granted that the broadcast media of Television radio and the newspaper are relevant, they have highly formal and spatial forms that lack the desired connectivity with the target audience, especially in the area of literacy and reading.

Therefore, there is a dire need to sustain the traditional communal media that expresses their cultural interests, languages, history, values through social interactions and interpersonal group activities such as town hall meetings, village square meetings, drama, music, festivals, market associations’ songs, proverbs etc that will bring the desired development information.

6. DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

It is the use of the principles and practices of exchange of ideas for development purposes. Development communication could be seen as playing two major roles that are a transformational role and socialization role. Transformational role seeks to effect social change in the direction of higher quality of life and social justice. Socialization role strives to preserve some of the established societal values which are consonant to development and well being of the society.

7. GLOBALIZATION

Globalization describes the growing worldwide interdependence of people and countries (Awake, 2002). This implies their interconnectivity than ever before. Globalization supports foreign diplomatic relations with government and civil societies to confront global human challenges and prospects.

However, globalization is not a concept that should be taken for granted. It is a dynamic process, a machinery that is “always hard at work” Shome and Hegde (2002).

It relies on diverse emerging structures and relations that are open to local, global, past and present contexts. It should be noted that globalization is being advocated by the developed countries of the world to advance their own interest, and not necessarily to promote the interest of poor developing countries like Nigeria.

Given its unpredictable, dynamic context, Africa societies like Nigeria have their unique challenges of underdevelopment like illiteracy, insecurity, lack of social and health infrastructure, educational facilities, unstable government policies, unemployment and environmental challenges that requires a conscious approach to solving such problems in the global context. Consequently, there is need to chart and sustain a communal media course towards confronting such problems in a developing country like Nigeria.

8. STRATEGIES FOR MOBILIZATION OF RURAL DWELLERS

According to Oso (2004), there are variety of strategies and techniques for rural dwellers to mobilization. The strategies are:

8.1 Identifying the Real People to Be Mobilized

This involves not just knowing their names and locations, but their histories, locations within the social structure, power and hierarchical structure, economic and social base.

(a) Understanding of goals and objectives of these people and objectives of these people and groups and their methods of operation. This will help in approaching them at times convenient to them.

(b) Identification and recognition of the local authority structure as embodied in the traditional institution of the Obas, bales in many of our towns and villages.

(c) Reaching out to the elites social clubs and age grades that are abroad and come home occasionally to celebrate festivals.

(d) Identification of the special days of many towns and communities whereby people are expected to come together, celebrate their achievements, launch development programmes, raise funds etc.

(e) Identification of traditional festival days whereby youths, women, and the old come home to celebrate such festivals.

Such mobilization agents should relate politely with the rural dwellers.

8.2 Market Square Meetings

According to Oziwele (2007) in virtually all villages, there are markets and special days as observed by the people. It could be weekly, monthly or every five days. People visit the village markets from within and neighboring villages, and this could be a suitable means for integration, whereby information is disseminated and received with immediate feedback in some cases.

8.3 Village Viewing Center

According to Onabajo (2002) village viewing centers are a controlled theater for impacting knowledge as well as rallying point for people in the rural areas to be adequately informed about government programmes and policies. The centre could be a forum for encouraging taxation, special levies or introducing new improved seedlings, and farm tools to the rural dwellers.

8.4 Folklore/Drama/Music

Oziwele in Soola(2007) sees these as being used to pass information across to villagers. This can be used to express various problems and needs of the village. It can also be used to showcase the traditions and culture of the people. It can be used to condemn some harmful traditional practices like child marriage, widowhood practices, female genital mutilation, women trafficking, the consequences of drug abuse amongst others.

8.5 House to House Campaign

This has to do with visitation to the various houses of the villagers to pass information to them on first hand basis and face to face. According to Agbo et al. (2010) such visits provide a forum for the exchange of ideas on the latest developments.

8.6 Motorized Campaign

This has to do with information being passed around the village, town or cities fixing your microphone or instrument of communication to a motor vehicle. The vehicle takes you round while the information is being passed in a loud microphone affixed to the motor vehicle with the expectation that people or passers-by along the motor way will have the opportunity of listening or hearing the message and thus abide by the information passed.

8.7 Village or Town Announcer

This a process whereby the town crier goes around the village or community to disseminate information to residents in his immediate community with his metal or wooden gong. The announcer stands at strategic positions to disseminate the message of the traditional rulers to the members of the community.

8.8 Local Church

Sequel to the manner of acceptance and Christian worship, there is no community that does not have a church. Agbo et al. (2010) argues that the local church provides a veritable and effective forum for exchange of ideas and views on relevant topics.

9. BENEFITS OF COMMUNAL MEDIA TO DEVELOPMENT

Communal media employs channels that enhance socialization, folk and traditional concepts to deploy

development messages to the target audience. This approach has immense benefits which are enumerated below:

(a) It is highly participatory by all and sundry especially people in rural societies, which is best applicable to Nigeria that has 70% of its populace residing in rural areas. It incorporates the cultural ethics, symbols and values of the people thereby connecting with their sensibilities. It is interactive and appeals to the people.

(b) Communal media is not as expensive as the broadcast media of radio, and television or newspaper. It relies on an informal, community—based platform that integrates their everyday livelihood.

(c) Development messages are communicated in a manner that is acceptable to the people and is expressly understood by them. It employs their cultural interest and values and so appeals to them.

(d) It ensures immediate feedback which is paramount for communication and development in any society.

Therefore in sustaining the communal media of communication there should be diverse forms of preserving them such as:

- Repackaging them to adapt to the dynamics of changing societies and communities. E.g. songs and music, drums and drumming, drama, folk tales and folklores.
- Public and private enlightenment on the importance of preserving such cultural values in all social institutions like the family, religion and education
- Preserving them in their raw forms in audio, visual forms in heritage museums and archives for future references.
- Public enlightenment or re-orientation on the need to appreciate our traditional communal media in the face of globalization.
- Effectively complementing the broadcast and Print media with the traditional communal media for enhanced communication for development purposes.
- State and Federal governments should emphasize local contents in the various regions and localities of the country.

CONCLUSION

Given the diverse socio-economic, political and health challenges of Africa societies like Nigeria, where poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, poor health facilities, and diseases thrive, communal media of communication remains the potent means of driving communication for speedy development to over 70% of its population of rural dwellers. Communal media ensures active participation of the people and deploys channels that express their cultural values and interests which readily apply to them and are well understood by them.

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