

PUBLIC AFFAIRS BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA: MYTH OR REALITY?

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Abstract: *The need to serve public interest through broadcast media programmes is imperative and the extent to which this can be achieved cannot be over-emphasized. Based on the foregoing, this paper examines the status of public affairs broadcasting in Nigeria, particularly in south-east Nigeria. It is undoubtedly evident that virtually all the broadcasting stations from federal to state level package series of public affairs programmes on daily and weekly bases. These programmes are designed for the general interest of the public. They are meant to address public problems, challenges, values and aspiration. One of the major challenges facing public affairs broadcasting in Nigeria is finance; others are: uneven flow, technological innovation and, lack of local content. This review, therefore, recommends that public affairs programmes should always be more of indigenous content than foreign. The content should be localized to fit into the Nigerian environment. Also, Broadcasters, Directors, Producers and other key personnel in broadcasting should be trained on recent technological innovations with regards to the use of Internet and other New Media innovations.*

Key Words: Mass Media, Public Affairs, Broadcasting, Myth, Reality

INTRODUCTION

Communication can be said to be the process by which information is passed between individuals or groups of individual by means of transmitting information through previously agreed symbols. It involves actions, reactions and interactions (Ezekiel, 2009). Page | 2

According to Nworgu (2010:1), communication is “the act of sending information, ideas or signals by a communicator or a sender through a means, a channel or medium to a receiver or destination”.

Communication is therefore, a process of sharing or exchanging of ideas, information, knowledge, attitude or feeling among two or more persons through certain signs or symbols. This can take different forms like:

- (i) Intrapersonal communication
- (ii) Interpersonal communication
- (iii) Group communication
- (iv) Mass communication
- (v) Non – verbal communication.

Intrapersonal communication: this occurs when an individual sends and receives messages internally.

Interpersonal communication: This is the type that takes place between two individuals.

Group Communication: This is an extension of interpersonal communication where more than two individuals are involved in exchange of ideas, skills and interest.

Mass Communication: It involves any mechanical device that multiplies messages and takes it to a large number of people simultaneously. This can be done through print and electronic media (Broadcasting) (Seema, 2014).

Print media: This is the publication of newspaper, magazine and books that was made possible with the invention of alphabets, papers, ink and printing press. These inventions aided the process of mass-oriented channels of communication, which engendered the scattered nature of human settlements in the early centuries.

Electronic/Broadcast Media: According to Odetoyinbo, (1998:47), in Ezekiel (2009:20), broadcast media are “mechanically or technically operated devices of mass communication. It is the machine that serves as pathways of doubling, repeating or representing communication that would have otherwise been limited to two or group of persons”. Hence it is the transmission by means of radio waves, of programmes; sound and vision, as well as, other similar service to the receiver.

In broadcasting, programmes are always majorly of two types. They are commercial and sustaining programmes.

Commercial programmes are usually sponsored programmes. They form the financial backbone of the station.

Sustaining programmes on the other hand are radio or television programmes that, despite airing on a commercial broadcast station, do not have commercial sponsorship or advertising; or identifiable sponsors. They are not paid for. They are part of the station's programmes. The station bears the cost of broadcasting sustaining programmes. However, sometimes a sustaining programme can be made a commercial programme when it attracts sponsorship. Public affair broadcasting comes under sustaining programme

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WHAT IS PUBLIC AFFAIRS BROADCASTING?

Public affairs broadcasting can be referred to as a form of broadcasting where the public exercises right to expression; right to know the things happening within and outside their environment; right to seek and disseminate information and also right to information disseminated.

According to UNESCO report (2000:4), public broadcasting can be defined as “a meeting place where all citizens are welcomed and considered equal. Also it is an information and education tool accessible to all and meant for all, irrespective of their social and economic status.”

Public affairs programming, unlike news, offers a perspective on events of the day and a commentary on the environment in which major events unfold. It provides a glimpse behind the headlines and offers a voice to important issues, from the less powerful in the society. (Ian, 2004).

Public affair broadcasting is the development and production of sustaining programmes by a media house. This is the social responsibility of the broadcast media to the public. Public affairs programme focuses on matters of politics and public policies that are educational, informational, and entertaining.

Public Affairs programme may be a special unit, separate from the news department, dedicated to producing long-form public-affairs programming. These programmes can be in form of; **Voxpop, Documentaries, News Magazine, Public Panel, Human Interest events, Interviews, Talks, Drama** etc. (Orjiakor, 2015).

Public radio and television operate in very different ways, and their record of providing public affairs and news is also very different. Public radio has consistently (since 1932) provided high-quality, innovative, daily news programmes, which are the backbone of their service and attract the largest proportion of listeners. Competition

among public radio programme services has helped to increase the diversity of voices and formats

Sets of topics or issues are being raised by the mass media which stirs audience attention and gets public reaction. The issue being raised by the mass media on daily bases focuses on public interest. The issues are handled or treated in a way that makes impact on the lives of the public or society. Page | 4

This actually shows that media contents set the media agenda that forms the basis of thinking and discussion in the public sphere.

Public affairs programme are mostly financed through private donations and grants from the government.

SIGNIFICANCE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS BROADCASTING

In public affairs broadcast programmes, issues of public concern are brought to bear, through thorough discussion and examination of those issues, to enlighten the public and awaken their sense of responsibility in the society. The treated issues equally give the public ample opportunities to participate fully in the next discussion programme as at when it is due. Their [public] contributions on issues of concern in the society will go a long way in tackling the problems.(Chima, 2015).

The mass media through public affairs broadcast programmes provide vital information which enhances knowledge and generates awareness of matters, issues, event or the happenings as the requirement for organizing or restructuring public influences, minds and opinions that are of public interest.

Public affairs programmes have helped people discover their abilities, impact and improve their own lives. Public affair broadcasting has also helped in curbing societal ills such as, indecency, corruption, obnoxious cultural practices, dehumanization etc.

It has served as a forum for public debate on burning issues that affects the society for mutual interest and general benefit. It also creates a platform for effective participation by members of the public which helps in widening their knowledge base about their immediate environment and the world at large.

News is core function of public broadcasting. Hence, it is in the public interest to encourage the growth and development of public radio and television broadcasting; including the use of such media for instructional, educational, and cultural purposes.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA: REALITY OR MYTH?

Public affairs broadcast can be affirmatively said to be obtainable in Nigerian broadcasting industry. It is a reality not a myth.

To start with, at the Federal level, Nigerian Television Authority- NTA news is a compilation of stories from Tuesday news letter, which the station's member receives each week. Investigations show that the station is beginning to reinvent itself with the now incisive deep and courageous reports. NTA compete for breaking news with the likes of AIT, Channels and other independent television stations. Page | 5

Apart from the regular NTA network news stories, at 9.pm, there is also the Saturday edition called "weekend file" in which guests are invited to speak on topical issues in the country, while "News Line" is the Sunday edition which focuses on human angle stories.

It covers development across the country in the areas of politics, current affairs, commerce, industry and infrastructure, sport, lifestyle, entertainment. Some NTA public affairs programmes include: "Tuesday live", "Platform", "Insight", "A M Express", and "one on one". The "Network News" is delivered with such great insight into events across the country and its wide coverage is quite over whelming. All these are public affairs/ sustaining programmes (Chima, 2015).

Also, African Independent Television (AIT) through their "News Analysis", "Kakaaki", "Focus Nigeria", "From the Senate", "Matters Arising", "Inside the Parliament", and so many other public affairs programmes play their social responsibility role to the nation. Similarly, stations like Channels, through their "news commentaries", "news analysis", "Documentaries", "News Track", "Tech Trends", "The Gavel", "Eye Witness Report", and many other sustaining programmes, performs their public affairs role to the society.

Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Public Affairs Programmes includes: "Nigerian Pride", "News Commentaries", "News Analysis", "Sports Track", "Every Woman", "Weekend File", "Police Diary" and documentaries on burning issues etc.

Down to state and local broadcasting media houses; In Imo State, virtually all the stations, both radio and television organizations have programmes purely for public affairs. In Imo State Broadcasting Corporation (IBC), sustaining programmes like; "News Commentaries", "Gentlemen Corner", "Youth's Corner", "Pacesetter", "Brain Teaser", "AM prayer", "Igirigi Ndu", "Uwa Nka Self", "Matters Arising", "Wake \$ Pray", "To whom it may Concern", "Night Ride", "Hello ladies", "The Vendow", "Omenala Igbo", "Oge Ndi Eze" and many others, are packaged by IBC station mainly to serve the public interest

Also in Hot FM, sustaining programmes like News Magazine, Documentaries, "Lunch Hour Show", "Battle of Sexes", "Traffic Watch Zoom", "People's Assembly", "Evening Showers" etc. are packaged on a weekly basis.

In Heartland FM we have sustaining programmes like; “Early Morning Chat”, “News Review”, “Heart Mending”, “Issues of the Moment”, “Religious Half Hour”, “Udokamma”, “Ututu Tara Oji”, “Nwayoo Bu Ije”, “Yagazie”, “Agwa Bu Nma”.

In Abia State, Pacesetter Umuahia FM, another FRCN station, there are PAB programmes such as “oge ajuju”, “youth round table”, “News report”, News Review and Analysis, and many others. On Dream FM radio Enugu, Public affairs programme like “Nna Men”, runs on a weekly basis. Page | 6

Public broadcasting resources and assets are valuable today and hold great potential value for tomorrow’s nonprofit online media sector. The sector will have to transform to fulfill that potential. Scenarios include: going local, going national, partnering up, or fighting it out, each of which offers opportunities to those who care about preserving the public service media. (Pat & Jessica, 2008).

CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA

Orjiakor (2015), highlighted some challenges that characterize public affairs broadcasting in Nigeria. These include:

1. **Bias in Topic Selection:** public affairs broadcasting originated through educational programmes to educate, entertain and inform the public, but today most public affairs programmes focus on matters of politics and public policies at the near exclusion of educational programmes.
2. **Funding:** In Nigeria, the issue of creating an act that will incorporate public broadcasters, producers of programmes, individual public television and radio stations in the disbursement of federal budgetary allocation, which is obtainable in the United States of America, is a non-existence factor as far as public broadcasting is concerned in the country. This poses a strong challenge to public broadcasting in Nigeria.
3. **High Cost of Production:** Local production will cost more money, hence, funding presents barrier to moving public broadcasting towards local issues.
4. **Imbalance Flow:** New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) came about owing to qualitative and quantitative imbalance in the flow of news programme. In Nigeria media stations are not to be blamed for national programmes and /or foreign programmes, as they are cheaper than producing local programmes.
5. **Graveyard Slot:** Most public affairs programmes are most times slotted when few listeners/viewers tune in or are not even available. For example Christian programmes slotted between 5 – 6am on Sunday; 12 mid night programmes etc.
6. **Recycling:** This entails the exclusion of new and more diverse programmes because of loyalty to dedicated audience on old programmes.

7. **Partiality:** Most public affairs programmes aired in government-owned stations in Nigeria are perceived by the audience to be partial because all that is being aired is towards the interest and favour of the government in power.
8. **Technological Innovation:** Well seasoned journalists are not technologically compliant. This poses a great challenge when they occupy sensitive positions, like the Director of programmes, Producers etc. Also, recent technological innovation in New Media is overshadowing the old Media through the use of internet and satellite technology.

CONCLUSION

Public Affairs broadcasting is indeed a reality in Nigeria, virtually all the broadcasting station from federal to state level package series of public affairs programmes on daily and weekly bases. These programmes are designed for the general interest of the public. They are meant to address public problems, challenges, values and aspiration.

Public affairs programmes, however, cannot be without challenges that try to hamper on the continual existence of some of these programmes. One of the major challenges is finance, others are; Imbalance Flow, Technological innovation, lack of local content, etc. Efforts to develop nationwide public affairs programming for the emerging digital TV channels have been stymied by lack of funds and the complications of implementing shared solutions in sharply different local contexts.

Public broadcasters have conducted isolated experiments in interactive and participatory media, with mixed results. Tools and funds for reliably measuring the impact of such projects have not materialized, and commercial yardsticks do not track the public benefits of such media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Financing must be substantial through public funds, so that public affairs broadcasting can be a counterweight to commercial services and not be confined to a marginal role.

Financing must be independent from both commercial and political pressures; it should not be subject to the mood of the government or economic fluctuations, there should be a special allocation to public broadcasting from federal account.

Financing must be predictable; its stability must therefore be assured. Also it must be growing according to the broadcast cost of the public affairs programme.

Environment in terms of facilities should be made available; broadcasters should have *Espirit de Corp* attitude towards one another.

Public affairs programmes should always be more of indigenous content than foreign. Its content should be localized to fit into the Nigerian environment.

It should be more informative, educative and entertaining. Public affairs programmes should be packaged and produced to appeal to the imagination, desires and aspiration of the audience. Page | 8

Programmes should be slotted at the right time, when viewers and listeners are very much available.

Broadcasters, Directors, Producers and other key personnel in broadcasting should be trained on the recent technological innovations with regards to the use of Internet, computer and satellites; and have a grounded knowledge of the New Media.

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