

The Impact of Privatized Media on National Development and Programme Quality: A Nigerian Case Study

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ABSTRACT: This work studied the trends set so far by privately owned radio stations after almost thirty years of operation in Nigeria. The Nigerian professional media history goes back a long way, with the recording of the first modern style newspaper in 1859. Radio came in the early 1930s, and television in 1959. But it was not until August 24, 1992 with the proclamation of a military decree No. 38, more than a century later, that media professionals in Nigeria were able to officially register privately owned radio and television stations through the National Broadcasting Commission. It's been almost thirty years of privatized media operations, but not much empirical studies have been conducted to measure the impact of privatized media on the industry, trends established so far, as well as impact on the nation's economic, political and social development. A survey of employees of two private radio stations was conducted. Program quality in comparison to government owned media was rated very high by the respondents, while ownership influence in programming decisions was a major hindrance, so also financing problems. Data was analysed within the framework of developmental media theory. It was recommended that the government generate and commit to solid short, medium, and long term development plans for the media to complement with advocacy and programming content. And for the stations to find alternative ways of fundraising to allow them function more in line with their professional calling and expectations, while serving public interests.

KEYWORDS: Nigerian Media, Media and development, development communication

Introduction

The Nigerian media history started in the mid-1800s with newspaper publication in 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, WNTV, the first television station in Africa, as an educational broadcasting entity (Umeh 1989), 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 an edict (Act) that allowed, by law, the registration and establishment of private electronic media, i.e. both 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 establishment, as well as to monitor the private stations for

compliance (NBC, About Us). 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.

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. After some twenty-eight 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 the privatized media mix has resulted in improved media contribution to the quality of information and general content; as well as (ii) whether the privatized media in Nigeria have contributed positively towards national development.

A random survey using questionnaire as instrument for data collection was regarded as best for the study. Two out of the top four private radio stations operating in the city of Kaduna in terms of popularity, Freedom FM Radio, and Liberty FM Radio, were chosen. Copies of the same worded questionnaires were distributed to 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 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 is informed about 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 are 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 2009). 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 across the country. brought under two entities, named Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN. The media confiscation by the military administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo was vehemently dissented by a sitting governor of Kaduna State then, Group Captain Usman Jibrin, 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, action may lead to development. UNESCO has already identified radio in Africa as key to national and community development (Africanews, 2017). Its use as an educational tool (Lama & Sarma 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 nation building. Already, radio has demonstrated, most especially in Africa its potential to be use 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's cheap, portable, not dependent on electricity, and unlike newspapers has the ability to transcend the barriers of illiteracy. 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 programmes live and on location.

After about thirty years, studies have documented some achievements as well as drawbacks to contribution of private media to the nations 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 programmes. 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 private stations giving the public 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 private media and found that private 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 2013), 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 programmes and advocacy.

Data Presentation and Analysis

For the survey, a total of 83 employees from Liberty FM Radio and Freedom Radio in Kaduna City Nigeria were surveyed. Both radio stations were originally registered as private broadcast entities. All respondents say their basic income is salary only, with no bonus or commission. 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 registered stations have to work doubly hard to attract enough advertisements and sponsorship programs to stay above water. As to specific data regarding questions posed by the study, 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.

Table 1. What major problems do you encounter at your station?

Issues	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Ownership	35	42.1%
Power Supply	2	2.4%
Tribalism	12	14.5%
Financial challenge	34	41%
Total	83	100

Maintaining ones' objectivity and saying it as it is, is not the norm at times, when it may negatively impact the political and/or monetary financial interest of the owner(s) of the stations. Interjections of opinion of owners into professional decisions of station operators at 42% of

respondent, even on important matters of national interest, is an issue (example). Advocacy and suppression of content (gatekeeping) does occur on subjective basis regardless of national interest, based mainly on ethnic and/or regional (north/south) loyalty. About 14% of respondents expressed ethnic influence opinion.

As for financial challenge, at 41% of respondents, industrial operations and activities in Kaduna and its suburbs has suffered major decline within the last 20 years (). The impact on commercial activities and resulting low marketing and sales including program sponsorship that such stations enjoy 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 private stations do stand out as they work hard to maintain their lead against their competition within the private 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. How would you rate the quality of broadcast on your station?

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	100

The study also sought the respondents' opinion as to what factors they think contributed to their strength and success in comparison with 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%.

Table 3. What do you consider your strength when compared to other stations?

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Quality of programs	5	6.0%
Longer hours of broadcast	2	2.4%
Wider coverage area	1	1.2%
Quality output	2	2.4%
All of the above	73	88%
None of the above	0	0(0%)
Total	83	100

The study has therefore been able to answer both questions. For question one posed by this study, the answer is yes. The private 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. 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. However, ownership interference and financial challenges seem to impact progress on

issues of social but most importantly political, and economic development. By populating their media outlets with their and other elite views (Okwuchukwu 2014) private media owners may skew ideas and negatively impact the society at large. It is therefore safe to say, in conclusion, that the present drawbacks barring stellar performance are undue influence from station owners plus insufficient operational finances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, a mutually significant role is possible if the Nigerian government at federal and state levels could come up with concrete short, medium and long term development plans, for the media to complement through advocacy and programming. “The media can only complement government” policy regarding law and order and other issues (Nwantok & Aikulola 2020)), the media does not have the power to make the law or regulations for the general benefit of the people. As for the private media, they should find ways to raise regular alternative funds that allow them to generate a buffer in cases where advertisements and sponsorship fail to raise enough funds for station operations. The study also recommends further studies along the same lines that will include the role of private television stations in order to get a better understanding of the entire private broadcast media industry.

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