

Adult Attitude Towards Mass Media in Nigeria

by Osabuohien P. Amienyi*

Abstract

This study assesses adult attitude towards the mass media in Nigeria. The study answers two questions: (i) What are adult sentiments about the mass media in Nigeria ? and (ii) Are these sentiments varied by demographic variables such as location of residence, ethnicity and gender ?

The study analyzed data obtained from 367 adults, drawn from three ethnic groups in Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings show a generally favourable adult attitude towards the mass media.

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Attitude des Adultes Nigérians envers les Mass-Media

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Resumé

Cet article se penche sur l'attitude des adultes nigérians envers les mass-media. Il répond à deux questions majeures à savoir: (i) Quels sont les attitudes des adultes nigérians envers les mass-medias ? (ii) Est-ce que de telles attitudes des adultes varient suivant les variables démographiques telles que les lieux de résidence, l'appartenance ethnique ou sexuelle ?

L'article compare les données obtenues des interviews aux individus de trois groupes ethniques de l'Etat des Plateaux au Nigéria. Les résultats montrent que l'attitude des adultes est généralement favorable envers les mass-media.

Introduction

The conventional wisdom among Third World planners today is that the mass media should integrate with the indigenous modes of communication in promoting development. This wisdom has become intuitively logical because the traditional forms of communication are innate to Third World societies and, therefore, better suited for the dissemination of culture-centred development information to people at the grassroots. However, while the intrinsic nature of the indigenous forms of communication endows them with "a high degree of credibility and acceptance by the people" (Ranganath, 1977; Adhikarya, 1974), the attitude of Third World peoples toward the modern mass media are not yet clear.

This study explores adult attitude toward mass media (i.e. radio, television and newspapers) in Nigeria. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What are adult sentiments about the mass media in Nigeria?
2. How are these sentiments varied by the demographic variables of location of residence (i.e. urban and rural), ethnicity and gender?

These questions are necessary to discern what value people at the grassroots place on the mass media in Nigeria. Such knowledge will be crucial to the efforts by development support communicators to receive maximum influence from communication resources at the project level of development planning.

Literature Review

The origin of the proliferation of the mass media in Nigeria can be traced to the era of modernization theory. The undue emphasis that the theory placed on the mass media in its communications component has been partly responsible for the uncritical manner in which mass media institutions have been established in the country. This study provides a review of modernization theory, the role it assigned to the mass media and criticisms of the theory. The objective is to show that modernization theorists excluded the opinion of the people in their recommendation on the role of the mass media in development.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, intellectual thought on the definitions and discussions of development was structured by a

dominant paradigm (Rogers, 1976), which promoted the belief that national development was tantamount to economic productivity. Its advocates argued that the simultaneous increase in two economic indicators (per capita income and gross national product) in a country was the necessary yardstick for concluding that the country was developing. They asserted that the key to economic growth was modernization, which they said was driven by industrialization. The most influential writers of the period were Rostow (1960), Lerner (1958) and Deutsch (1953).

Theorists of the dominant paradigm considered communication as the intervening variable between socioeconomic factors and modernization. Consequently, they accorded the mass media a place of honour in development planning (Sonaike, 1988). For instance, Lerner (1958) argued that communication, more precisely the mass media, was the magic multiplier in the modernization process and would accelerate the rate at which Third World countries achieved modernization. Similarly, Schramm (1964) maintained that only communication would "plant the seed of change" in Third World citizens that would enable them to "accept new goals, new customs and new responsibilities" (p. 42).

Basically, the dominant paradigm reflected a top-down approach to development planning. In the two decades of its application, the paradigm did not change the pathetic situation in any developing country. Thus, it came under severe scrutiny during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s and was found to have several weaknesses. First, critics found that the paradigm assumed that development which followed the path of the "industrialized nations was necessarily right for everyone and that development was necessarily beneficial" (Postgate, *et al.*, 1988, p. 17). However as Gunder-Frank (1969) pointed out, that belief did not take into account the differences in the historical experiences of the underdeveloped and developed parts of the world. Secondly, many of the studies from which the dominant paradigm was formulated were essentially ahistorical. According to Gunder-Frank (1969, p.3), "this entire approach to economic development and cultural change attributed a history to the developing countries but denied all history to the underdeveloped ones." For instance, Rostow (1960) analyzed development at a specific period in history when most western nations were developed and then did a cross-national comparison with developing countries, which were at a different stage of development. For this reason, his stages of

economic growth did not correspond to the past and present realities of the developing countries that they were supposed to guide.

Thirdly, since much of the literature relating to the dominant paradigm was produced during the Cold War period, it was difficult to avoid noticing the ideological intentions of scholars. Gendzier (1985) noted that there was a clear intention by western scholars to attempt to control, by intellectual means, the political and economic direction of Third World countries so as to align it with the national interests and ideology of the United States.

Critics also questioned the role of the media in the dominant paradigm. Sonaike (1988) noted that during the era of the dominant paradigm the media were used to disseminate "information that was often in consonance with, and promoting, western capitalist ideals and values" (p. 93). According to him, media programmes were dominated by advertising and imported entertainment which raised the hopes and aspirations of people to a level far beyond what the government and available local resources could satiate. As a result of the ensuing "revolution of rising frustration," Third World countries have continued to experience unstable conditions today.

In the 1980s, it became incumbent on theorists and planners to seek alternative approaches to development. This produced the "humane" and the "culturalist" approaches. In the "humane" approach, development is seen not just as an economic process but as a process which encompasses the various issues affecting the quality of life of people.

Similarly, the culturalist approach advocates for attention and sensitivity to grassroots culture in development planning. Its proponents argue that "the key to development in the Third World lies in the traditional cultures of various countries, and hence (sic) advocate a deliberate integration of the traditional and modern communication modes to ensure greater success for development messages" (Sonaike, 1988, p. 100). They argue that the mass media failed to mobilize people for development because they were elitist, ambivalent to participation and separated from traditional communication media. Noting that too much attention has been given to the mass media at the expense of the more influential means of interpersonal communication, they argue that the use of the media as an index of development relied too often on the growth of hardware rather than the appropriateness of content (Sonaike, 1988).

A chief proponent of the culturalist approach, the late Nigerian

communication scholar Frank Ugboajah, proposed that town criers, the village market square, folk drama and village festivals were indigenous means of communication that could be effectively blended with the modern communication techniques. He explained that, as the interest of the citizens and their way of life were varied at national, provincial and local levels, it was necessary for development communication to recognize diversity and be tailored to interests and goals at each level (Quoted in Sonaike, 1988).

The mass media have attributes and abilities that dazzle people in Third World countries (Wang and Dissanayake, 1984), and that make them perhaps the most important source of new information. On the other hand, the patterns of interaction which traditional media engender epitomizes the communal nature of Third World societies. Thus, they will continue to be the best avenue for stimulating discussion on development issues at the grassroots level.

This suggests that only a marriage of the strengths of both media can produce the maximum impact that communications can have on developmental activities. Based on this realization, there is the need to ascertain if the degree of appreciation for both types of media are equal at the audience level. Such knowledge is critical because if the value placed on the mass media at the grassroots level is low, then marrying the mass media with the highly valued indigenous means of communication may actually become counterproductive to developmental purposes. This study seeks to empirically explore the attitude of a cross-section of adults towards the Nigerian mass media.

Method

To answer the research questions, a survey was taken among adults (20 years and older) in Plateau State, Nigeria, in March 1989. Plateau State was selected as the setting for the study because it is situated in the middle-belt zone and is one of the educationally developed states in the northern part of Nigeria. The state's population of 3.3 million comprises more than 50 separate ethnic groups and its economy centers around mining (tin, columbite and aquamarine), manufacturing, agriculture and tourism.

The sample was drawn from three ethnic groups in the state: the Berom, the Jarawa/Afizere and the Mada. These groups were chosen through a stratified, multi-stage sampling procedure. 400 adults were chosen through the random procedure developed by

Backstrom and Hursh (1963), called the "respondent selection key." Of the 400 interviews attempted, 367 were completed giving a response rate of 92%.

The sample was demographically distributed as follows: 226 (62%) were aged between 20 and 35. There were 133 (36%) Beroms, 120 (33%) Jarawa/Afizere and 114 (31%) Mada. 210 (57%) were males and 208 (about 56%) were married. 117 (32%) had over 12 years, 133 (36%) had between 7 and 11 years, 66 (18%) had between 1 and 6 years of formal education, and 50 (14%) had no formal education at all. 213 (58%) indicated living in the rural areas, 259 (71%) were Christians, 90 were Moslems and 18 (4%) were believers in the African traditional religions.

Face-to-face interviews were held with the respondents using a two-part survey schedule that sought demographic information and data on respondents' attitude towards radio, television, and the print media. The schedule asked respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with 23 statements measuring attitude towards mass media, by stating "strongly agree" (5), or "agree" (4), or "no opinion" (3), or "disagree" (2), or "strongly disagree" (1).

Results

The means of responses to the 23 attitudinal items are presented in Table 1. The Table shows that the respondent agreed with all the statements that reflected a positive view of mass media, and disagreed with most statements that reflected a negative view of the mass media. There were only two statements on which the respondents gave ambivalent answers. These were: "Nigeria could not survive without radio" ($X = 2.75$) and "Nigeria could not survive without television" ($X = 2.56$). On these statements, the means of the respondents' responses fell somewhere between "No opinion" and "Disagree."

Table 2 presents nine attitudinal statements on which significant differences were found in responses based on the respondents' ethnic origin. The Madas significantly disagreed less strongly than the Jarawas on the statements: "Radio is nothing but a trouble maker," "Radio is dividing Nigerian tribes," and "Radio doesn't see anything good about Nigeria." The Beroms also significantly disagreed less strongly than the Jarawas on the statements: "Radio officials cater only to their own interest." The Beroms significantly expressed more "no opinions" than the Jarawas on the statements: "Nigeria could not survive

without radio;" "TV doesn't see anything good about Nigeria;" and "Nigeria could not survive without TV." the Beroms significantly agreed more strongly than the Jarawas with the statements: "I like watching TV" and "TV is bringing different tribes together."

Table 1: Mean Responses to Attitudinal Statements About Nigerian Mass Media (n = 367)

Item	Mean	SD
I like listening to Radio	4.43	.87*
Radio is nothing but a trouble maker	2.01	1.10
Radio is uniting Nigerian tribes	4.26	.99
Radio is dividing Nigerian tribes	2.08	1.20
Radio is bringing different tribes together	4.17	1.19*
Radio doesn't see anything good about Nigeria	1.92	1.14
Nigeria will be better off without radio	1.74	.92
Radio messages does nothing for Nigerian unity	1.81	1.01
Radio officials cater only to their own interest	1.98	1.11
Nigeria could not survive without radio	2.75	1.49
I like watching TV	4.33	1.01*
TV is nothing but a trouble maker	1.88	1.08
TV is uniting Nigerian tribes	4.14	1.18*
TV is dividing Nigerian tribes	2.21	1.29
TV is bringing different tribes together	4.20	1.09
TV doesn't see anything good about Nigeria	3.08	1.63
Nigeria will be better off without TV	1.91	1.10
TV messages don't do anything for Nigerian unity	1.87	1.06
TV officials cater only to their own interest	1.90	1.00
Nigeria could not survive without TV	2.56	1.39
I like reading newspapers	4.28	1.06*
Newspapers are nothing but a trouble maker	1.73	.92

Table 2: *Differences in Means Responses To Attitudinal Statements Based on Ethnic Origin*

Statements/Mean	F	df	P
Radio is nothing but a trouble maker	4.65	2,362	.01
Jarawa/Afizere	1.77		
Berom	2.09		
Mada	1.17*		
Radio is dividing Nigerian tribes	3.66	2,361	.03
Jarawa/Afizere	1.85		
Berom	2.14		
Mada	2.25*		
Radio doesn't see anything good about Nigeria	3.92	2,362	.02
Jarawa/Afizere	1.72		
Berom	1.90		
Mada	2.12*		
Radio officials cater only to their own interest	4.92	2,362	.00
Jarawa/Afizere	1.76		
Berom	2.21*		
Mada	1.99		
Nigeria could not survive without radio	5.35	2,362	.00
Jarawa/Afizere	2.46		
Berom	3.09*		
Mada	2.73		
I like watching TV	17.28	2,261	.00
Jarawa/Afizere	3.96		
Berom	4.70**		
Mada	4.35		
TV is bringing different tribes together	8.08	2,362	.00
Jarawa/Afizere	3.97		
Berom	4.52**		
Mada	4.15		
TV doesn't see anything good about Nigeria	9.25	2,362	.00
Jarawa/Afizere	2.58		
Berom	3.42*		
Mada	3.22*		
Nigeria could not survive without TV	9.34	2,362	.00
Jarawa/Afizere	2.40		
Berom	3.02**		
Mada	2.32		

* Denotes groups significantly different from one group

** Denotes group significantly different from both groups

The respondents' gender did not significantly affect their attitude to the mass media (Tables 3). However, more males (63%) indicated that they liked listening to radio than females (53%). More males (58%) significantly agreed more strongly than females (48%) with the sentiment that radio was bringing different tribes together. Also, more males (47%) significantly disagreed more strongly than the females (44%) with the statement: "Radio messages does nothing for Nigerian unity."

Table 3: *Differences in Mean Responses To Attitudinal Statements Based on Gender*

Statements/Percent	F	df	P
I like listening to radio	6.11	1,363	.01*
% of Men Strongly agreeing = 63			
% of Women Strongly agreeing = 53			
Radio is bringing different tribes together	5.77	1,362	.02*
% of Men Strongly agreeing = 58			
% of Women Strongly agreeing = 48			
Radio messages does nothing for Nigerian unity	7.32	1,363	.01*
% of Men Strongly disagreeing = 47			
% of Women Strongly disagreeing = 44			

* Denotes significant difference between groups

Similarly, the location of residence (urban or rural) did not significantly differentiate the expressed opinions of the respondents on all but three of the attitudinal statements. More urban dwellers (53%) significantly disagreed more strongly than the rural dwellers (42%) with the statement: "Nigeria will be better off without TV." Fewer urban dwellers (20%) significantly agreed more strongly than the rural dwellers (33%) with the statement: "TV depicts nothing good about Nigeria." More urban dwellers (60%) significantly agreed more strongly than the rural dwellers (50%) with the statement: "I like reading newspapers."

Table 4: *Differences in Mean Responses To Attitudinal Statements Based on Location*

Statements/Percent	F	df	P
Nigeria will be better off without radio	5.81	1,362	.01
% of Urban Residents Strongly Disagreeing = 53			
% of Rural Residents Strongly Disagreeing = 42			
TV doesn't see anything good about Nigeria	6.75	1,363	.01*
% of Urban Residents Strongly Agreeing = 20			
% of Rural Residents Strongly Agreeing = 33			
I like reading newspapers	4.51	1,365	.03*
% of Urban Residents Strongly Agreeing = 61			
% of Rural Residents Strongly Agreeing = 50			

* Denotes significant difference between groups

Discussion

Generally, the findings suggest that the Berom, Jarawa/Afizere and Mada peoples of Nigeria have a positive attitude towards the Nigerian mass media. This is not surprising in light of the numerous positive contributions that the Nigerian mass media have made to communication, cultural exchange and national integration. Through the mass media, Nigerians, regardless of patterns of social differentiation, have gained access to instantaneous, uniform and consistent information, both at the national and state levels. This access has promoted cultural exchange, produced widespread uniformities in patterns of behavior among the population of the country and generally fostered the spirit of inter-ethnic understanding and cohesion.

The finding that the Mada respondents did not categorically disagree with the statements relating to the radio being a trouble maker, a divider of Nigerian tribes and a harbinger of bad tidings about Nigeria, is somewhat puzzling. Given that radio and television are owned by the government and operated within a constitutional provision which mandates stations to air cultural programs, while

barring the airing of programs focusing on potentially explosive topics, it is difficult to understand why this particular group of respondents felt as they did. Perhaps, the respondents were reacting to the divisive role that radio and television have played in the Second Republic, when unscrupulous politicians used these media to instigate inter-ethnic hatred. Future studies are needed to explore the apparent inconsistency between programming policy and audience attitude about the effects of programmes. Specifically, content analyses could be undertaken to determine the extent to which radio and television programmes are fulfilling policy mandates.

The Berom respondents' lack of opinion on whether Nigeria could survive without radio or television suggests that some Nigerian groups may be hesitant to reveal their true feelings about projects on which the government has invested much money. This may be particularly true of cases where the government officials making the investment decisions were members of the hesitant groups. In that situation, the group may be hesitant because they may perceive communicating a negative feeling toward the project as an indictment of the overall decision-making ability of the entire group. Thus, they may prefer to express no opinion, as was the case with the Beroms. Future studies are needed to verify if such phenomenon is actually occurring.

There seems to be no logical explanation for the finding that the Berom respondents significantly agreed more strongly than the Jarawas with the statements "I like watching TV" and "TV is bringing different tribes together." From the researcher's experience, both groups live in and around Jos (the capital of Plateau State, where all radio and television programmes are originated), have similar geographic, climatic and social characteristics, and comparable access to the mass media. Could the explanation for this finding lie in the cultural and behavioral idiosyncrasies of the members of both groups? This is a question that future studies should seek to address.

The finding that more males liked listening to radio and significantly agreed more strongly than females with the sentiment that radio was bringing different tribes together is interesting. It could be explained by the fact that most of the radio personalities in Nigeria are male. As such, radio could be producing vertical integration between radio performers (regardless of their ethnicity) and the listening public. This explanation seems to be corroborated by the data which indicate that more males significantly disagreed more strongly than

the females (44%) with the statement "Radio messages do nothing for Nigerian unity".

The findings in Table 4 appear to verify the symbiotic relationships that exist between the mass media and urban centers in Nigeria. most Nigerian media institutions are located in the urban centers, where most of the media programmes are produced and where most ideas for programmes originate. This means that the urban dweller tends to depend greatly on the mass media. On the contrary, rural residents in Nigeria rarely participate in media activities. Not only are news and other programmes seldom focused on them, but they are also hardly asked to offer their views on decisions affecting the mass media. Thus, it is logical to find the rural dweller questioning the necessity for and the efficacy of the mass media more than the urban dwellers.

Access, education and language may explain why urban dwellers liked reading newspapers more than rural dwellers. Newspaper circulation is greater, there are more educated people, and more people speak English (the language used by most media) in urban areas than in rural areas. That 50% of the rural dwellers indicated that they like reading newspapers may be due to the growing appearance of vernacular print media in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study used selected questions to attempt to discern adult attitude towards the mass media in Nigeria. While the results are fascinating, they should not be generalized beyond the borders of the specific ethnic groups mentioned in this study. This is because Nigeria's high ethnic diversity makes it impossible to attribute the characteristics of one group to another.

In general, the paramount significance of the study is found in the fact that it is the first attempt at exploring an area that African scholars seem to have taken for granted. While the results may have limited external validity, they do provide the framework for asking questions about the importance of grassroots opinions in the decisions relating to communications in African countries.

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