

Communication as a tool for national development: A media studies perspective

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 15(03), 1640-1646

Publication history: Received on 16 May 2025; revised on 23 June 2025; accepted on 25 June 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.15.3.1923>

Abstract

Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages through verbal or non-verbal means; it includes speech, oral communication, writing and graphical representation (such as infographics, maps and charts), signs, signals and behavior. It is said to be the “creation and exchanging of meaning, playing an integral part in human evolution” (Richard, 2019). The constant proliferation of media communication system has brought about distinct decision-making amongst citizens in Nigeria. Using different broadcasting stations as primary data, this paper critically explores how some media outlets in Nigeria have been using communication as a tool for development. On this note, this paper aims to explore the effect of media communication systems in Nigeria in a bid to increasing capacity building and rural/national development in the country. In this research, the role of the Nigeria Press right from the time of pre-independence and post-independence eras in relentless and rigorous struggle to facilitate the growth and development of Nigeria would be explored as a case study. This paper therefore concludes that media outlets are playing an important role in Promoting C4D through Communication as a tool for development.

Keywords: Communication; Awareness Via Media; C4D; Development Media Theory; Nigeria Press

1. Introduction

Communication plays an imperative role in human emotion, decision and activities. In this light, communication has been used right from time immemorial as a means by media outlets to effect significant changes in the society. This implies specifically that media also play the crucial role apart from the government in advancing development towards the eradication of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, health, problems, social inequality & so on. By doing so, media outlets add value to the life of people by helping them for positive change.

According to the statement of (Israel 2018), “at the beginning of the second half of the 20th Century, international agenda began to focus on development and there came up the nation that growth in the economy did not automatically lead to better quality of life for members of the society, that it was important to determine and emphasize specific policies that would direct resources and enable the various strata of the society to develop socially and economically.”

Everything humans engage in is influenced by both our mental and physical communication. The transmission of the message from sender to recipient can be affected by wide range of things. These include our emotions, the cultural situation, the medium used to communicate, and even our location. However, as means of communication keeps improving every day, it has been recognized that the element of interaction between living things can be used to facilitate human development. Ibeanu (2007, p.10) sums up the process of development as that of “improving the conditions in which human beings live”. Earlier Rodney (2005) had located development within the realms of improving man’s understanding of the laws of nature; applying these understandings to better man’s working conditions and

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improved living conditions; and equitable organization of work and reward. If this be the case, Nwosu (1983) views that when development process is “static in the capacity of the people and their society to control and manipulate their physical environment as well as themselves for their own benefits, then underdevelopment sets in.”

1.1. Uche (1999) in Ciboh (2005, p.295) claims

Development is a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced in a social system for higher per capital income, living standards by modern methods and improved social organizations. It is the continuous process of harnessing resources in a manner compatible with culture for equality, liberty, freedom, justice, happiness and progress. It is a spontaneous nonlinear, irreversible process inherent in all societies, it implies structural differentiation and factual specialization which can be stimulated by external factors and measures.

Hence, the major industry that has been using communication as a tool for development mostly, are the media organizations. Through mass media, communication can be used a means to influence policy making in the country, thereby improving the industrial and economical sector of a country. “Development communication and policy sciences are regarded as distinct and mutually exclusive areas of study but are inextricably linked” (Flor 1991). He added that development communication and the policy sciences, although different in scope, stem from the same rationale: the need for actively applying knowledge from the principles of social sciences in solving large-scale societal problems under conditions of social change. In the words of (Ongkiko & Flor, 2006) “both endorse a normative or prescriptive role for the social sciences, work to alleviate societal problems and recognize communication's important function.”

In Nigeria, the development rate is moving at a very slow pace, which positioned the country as a developing country. In order to improve its developing sectors, the media in Nigeria has a pertinent role to play, which brings forth one of the six normative theories Development Communication, which places multimedia organizations in a significant role to develop their country through disseminating contents that will enhance development in the country. Ditto (2007) in underpinning the importance of multimedia approaches towards designing and dissemination of messages noted that; “it has got enormous impact on education as multimedia stimulated operations help in getting things done more appropriately, hence could be adaptable with these characteristics feature for social development purposes in course of networking and sharing of information.”

Media organizations in Nigeria such as NTA, Radio Nigeria, BCOS, Galaxy etc. are some of the broadcast institutions that have been identified by scholars that continue to contribute to the growth and development of the country.

2. Awareness in Communication: Mass Media Perspective

Mass media is an integral tool used in creating awareness about different aspect of issues a country is battling with. Be it politics, sport, infrastructure and health, according to Liana Wineth and Lawrence (1997), “using the mass media to improve public health can be like navigating a vast network of roads without any street signs.”

To further buttress, mass media performs 3 main functions information, education and entertainment. And while these 3 functions are being delivered by media, surreptitiously, it's creating awareness about arrays of issues. Thus, this put people in the position to be able to communicate about issues the country is embroiled in. Kreps and Thompson, (2005) believe media extend “people's ability to communicate, to speak to others far away, to hear messages, and to see images that would be available without media.”

The ability of media organizations to be able to influence peoples thought and emotions placed them in a position to enact or bring about changes in the society. This can be outrightly done by choosing to disseminate specific content which awakens people's consciences regrading a particular subject matter. This also helps the citizens to participate in the decision-making of the country which is often referred to as participatory communication. "Participatory communication is a term that denotes the theory and practices of communication used to involve people in the decision-making of the development process. It intends to return to the roots of its meaning, which, similarly to the term community, originate from the Latin word communis, i.e. common (Mody, 1991). Mass media can actualize this goal easily by choosing what stories to consider news-worthy and how prominence and space they give those stories (Folarin, 1998). In this light, Kreps (2005) noted that mass media channels play the role of a catalyst to bring change in the development process, and they become one of the key social and cultural institutions in society. The influence of mass media cuts across social and geographical barriers in society (Soola, 2003, Okorie, 2011), as they disseminate information to target audience in society (Cited in Effiong et al., 2020 p. 7).

In this regard, media and communication are pertinent tools for the development of any nation and no nation can claim to have succeeded, developed and modernized without having to use these tools. "Whether you are a doctor, an engineer, an accountant, or a wild fire biologist, if you wish to succeed in business, industry, government, or research, you will need to be able to communicate effectively" (Keene 1987: 7). Without mass media awareness, the conscious effort to effect desired change in the social system will not be feasible. Media relations play a very important role and we cannot live without media and communication (Livingstone, 2007). From the foregoing, Akinleye, (2003, p.65) asserts that "whichever way development is defined, communication is sinequanon to the process." Acknowledging Fraser and Restrepo-Estrade (1998) Akinleye further posits that "a prime factor in fostering change and development is the planned and systematic use of communication to help individuals, communities and societies to introduce and accept changes."

3. Development Media Theory as a Bedrock of Communication Development

Originally, the development media theory came about from the six normative theories of the press that were propounded by Siebert Peterson, Schramm, and McQuail between 1956 and 1981. These are the authoritarian media theory, soviet-communist media theory, libertarian media theory, social responsibility media theory, development media theory, and democratic participant theory. Their position is that "the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted" (Siebert, Peterson & Schram 1956: 1-2).

The development media theory was propounded by Denis McQuail after the initial four normative theories which he saw as a pivotal tool for national development. McQuail (1983:131) avers that the central idea of the development media theory is that the mass media in developing nations should be used for "the primacy of the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy; support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries". In other words, the essential benefit of the emergence of the theory is that it serves as a guiding principle for the media to transmit or disseminate content that would work towards advancing the political, economic, social, and cultural values of the state.

McQuail (1981), cited in Kadijat (2009:128), elucidates further: *Development media theory advocates media support for an existing political regime and its efforts to bring about national economic development.... By supporting government development efforts, media aid society at large. This theory argues that until a nation is well established and its economic development well underway, media must be supportive rather than critical of government. Journalist must not pick apart government efforts to promote development but, rather, assist government in implementing such policies.*

Folarin (2002) avers that the development media theory was espoused because the other normative theories of the press could not be easily applied to developing or third world countries due to some certain characteristics that are peculiar to them. Some of those characteristics as explained by him include:

- Absence or inadequate availability of required communication infrastructure
- Limited supply of requisite professional skills
- Relative lack of cultural production resources
- Relatively limited availability of media-literate audiences
- Dependence on the developed world for technology, skill and cultural products.

In lieu of this, development media entails the science and art of information dissemination which is applied to the swift recovery or development of a country from a state of underdevelopment to a developing or developed state. Be it in social cultural, political, economic, military and infrastructural aspect of growth. Thus development media theory gyrates around the structure and activities of the media in underdeveloped and developing countries and "encompasses a great variety of socio-cultural, economic and political conditions which however, tend to converge in a primary concern to use the media for development purposes". (Folarin, 2002:38-39).

The mass media organizations in this aspect use media for systematic application of different communication models, niches and contents for the aim of developing a nation, which in turns increases people's participation in developmental activities.

In corroborating the aforementioned points, mass media organizations must master the use of communication in an effective way which will bring about commonality amongst people and ultimately foster the spirit of dialogue, participation and partnership towards state building. "In Africa, the mass media fulfil an educational role which they

are not necessarily called upon to assume in the advanced countries. News about development is important in stimulating further development" (Ansah, 1990:34).

Ansah opined that media organization can accelerate or perhaps contribute to the development of a country by disseminating news which will stimulate development:

Development news is new schools, hospitals, bridges, roads, etc., especially if these achievements were made possible through collective, self-reliant local effort. More importantly, such reports should illustrate how the projects were accomplished, so that they can provide inspiration to other people (Ansah, 1990:34).

It is mostly argued by scholars that dissemination of information in African countries should be more of positive and less of negative elements in order to ensure development. Therefore, mass media organizations are seen as key players in bringing about development in their respective countries.

The principles of the development media given by McQuail (1987) in Anaeto (2010) are as follows

- *The media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with established national policy.*
- *Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.*
- *Media should give priority to news and information that link with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically.*
- *Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.*
- *In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in or restrict media operations, and direct control can be justified.*

The media should work hand in hand with the government towards nation building to bringing about pragmatic achievements to the nation.

4. Media Relevance in Nation Building: The Case of Nigeria Press

The relevance of media in a nation or state is a phenomenon that cannot be underemphasized. In a bid to understanding the crux of development in Nigeria over time, it is inarguably pertinent to dive into the onset of press in Nigeria which influenced the emergence of notable changes in its policies. Moreover, there is a significant interrelatedness between various epochs of Nigeria journalism and how it came to be the most crucial weapon in making Nigeria a developing country as well as the "giant of Africa" as it is said.

The Nigerian press establishment could be divided into three_ the pre-colonial era, colonial era and the post-colonial era, with each of these having come couples of media organization which is being used for developmental agenda for economic, political, military, social cultural and other positive motives till date.

Although, the oppression of journalists by colonial masters was significantly vibrant, as stated by (Olutokun, 2002) "the colonial state sought to circumscribe the boundaries of discourse through censorship laws as well as through commercial support for pro-imperial media, the post-colonial state has sought, in changing contexts, to limit challenges to its hegemony by jailing opposition journalists or starving their media of advertising support and by co-opting influential journalist into their legitimizing framework".

Discussing on the role of the media in Nigeria's first republic, Diamond (1988:84-85) stated that

The press was the most potent institution supporting democratic freedom. There is tradition of hard hitting, fearless and independent journalism which has carried over from the colonial 46 days, when the press was the spearhead of journalism. Though most papers are intensely partisan, they have several times agreed with each other and opposed the authorities that sought to restrict freedom of the press or individuals.

There is a handful of developmental activities that the Nigeria press has always engaged in, even as far back as the establishment of the first newspaper in the country named the Iwe Iroyin. Some of the leading papers of the earliest periods include; the Lagos Times (1880), Lagos Observer (1882), Eagle and Lagos Critics (1883), Lagos Weekly Record (1891), Lagos Standard (1894), and Nigerian chronicle (1908), Other are the Nigerian spectator (1921), Lagos Daily

News (1927), The Come-t (1932) and West African Pilot (1937). And each of these precolonial newspapers played out in contributing to the development of Nigeria.

The first among litany of newspapers then that was seriously involved in the business of development was the “Iwe Irohin” established in 1859 by Rev Henry Townsend at Egba Community in Yoruba land. This newspaper paved way for other newspapers operations in this part of African continent with a special bias and flair for missionary activity (Daramola,2006 p.11).

Nationalist newspapers like West African Pilot established in 1937 by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, The Nigerian Tribune founded by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1949 and Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo vernacular newspaper, first published on January 1, 1939 and established by the colonial administration in the north and later managed by the Northern Literature Agency with Mallam Abubakar Imam, one of the few educated northern elite as the Editor of the newspaper in 1938 to oversee the operations of the newspaper house which featured prominently in the nationalist struggle among others (Daramola,2006 p.72, Okonu, 2006 p.51).

In spite of the political motive and coloration of these newspapers, they had a common goal of resisting indirect rule in Nigeria, and as well, educating and sensitizing Nigerians on the evils of colonial rule in Nigeria on one hand; on the other hand, they orientate Nigerians on the importance of self-rule in the country. In the consistent struggle of these newspapers against colonialism in Nigeria, West African Pilot and Nigerian Tribune played a significant role as unofficial opposition parties to the colonial government despite the differences in their political ideologies. These newspapers devoted their news contents, editorials, features and even cartoons to fight imperialism in Nigeria and other West African countries irrespective of their political jingoism built upon the surveillance of the country (Oyesanya, 1985).

According to Oyesanya, “these newspapers were virtually political parties in disguise”. In effect, they were organs of Nigerian Youth Movement, Northern People’s Congress, National Council for Nigerian and Cameroun, Action Group, etc with the ultimate desire of achieving self-governance in Nigerian polity.

It is this post-independence government and politics that produced a more vibrant press which moved from the turf of pugnacious journalism to then assume a fourth estate position in order to accomplish the watchdog goal. Not only that this era has seen the emergence of more state newspapers but also private initiatives in newspapering (Okoro, 2012). From the foregoing, this establishes the fact that media engage consistently in the act of nation building and development.

5. Conclusion

It is pertinent to note that media practitioners are supposed to work by a guiding principle that will enable them work for the development of a nation. FAO (1994:5) avers that “communication is the key to human development and the thread that binds people together”. This assertion is supported by Moemeka’s (1991) view that development efforts cannot be successful without planned communication because its flow determines the direction and pace of dynamic social development.

And by perceptive examination, development communication requires effective communication programme. This starts with accurate information and in-depth understanding of the problem, the people, existing policies and programmes etc. Ultimately, this will help the people bring to the fore their pressing needs and how they can be actualized.

The Nigerian press is guaranteed the freedom of expression and of the press in the constitution, and other international human rights which Nigeria is a signatory; it is imperative for government at all levels and its agencies to uphold these provisions. Fundamentally, the press in assuming rightful roles must fight doggedly for the exclusion of intimidating provisions limiting the performance of their duty from the constitution. All these essential attributes cumulate to bring about rapid growth and development of the nation politically, economically, socially, and culturally.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

This article does not involve any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author. All referenced materials were properly cited, and academic integrity was maintained throughout the development of this work. The

author adhered to ethical standards of scholarship, including accurate representation of sources, originality of thought, and avoidance of plagiarism.

The author declares no conflict of interest. No financial, institutional, or personal relationships influenced the preparation or content of this manuscript.

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