

The Role of the Media in Tourism Development in Nigeria: The Rivers State Experience

CHIEME, Azubuike,
chieme.azubuike@gmail.com

NYEKWERE, Endwell Onyinye
onyifavor@gmail.com

NWAUBETA, Grace Nnennaya
nnennayah@yahoo.com

IKIRIKO, Stella I.G

Department of Mass Communication, Port Harcourt Polytechnic Rumuola, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

The media are potent tools in mass mobilization, information dissemination, entertainment, socialization, integration, cultural promotion amongst others. The media plays a major role in cultural promotion and preservation at all levels. Cultural promotion entails that the media transmit and showcase the cultural heritage of a people to others such that those who are not aware of it become fully aware and also acquaint the incoming generation with their culture. Most of these cultures have gone into extinction or tilting towards going into extinction as a result of non-transmission to incoming generation. This paper x-rays the role of the media in tourism development in Nigeria with focus on Rivers State. The work is anchored on the Agenda-Setting theory which explains the effects of mass communication on culture and society. The work recommends that the media should do more in terms of advocacy reportage on cultural activities of Rivers State to keep the people alert and informed of such cultural activities as well as afford others the opportunity to leverage on the opportunities that such avenues provides thereby leading to tourism development in the state which will transcend to Nigeria as a whole.

Key words: Media, Culture, Tourism, Promotion, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The media no doubt are pivotal instruments in society's development as well as promoters of culture. The media functions within the nexus of society and just like the media cannot function effectively without the enabling environment provided by the society; the society itself cannot function well without the media. "The media are important shapers of our perception and ideas. They are conscious industries which provide not simple information about the world, but ways of seeing and understanding it" (Orlu, Orlu, 2013, p.124).

One of the relationships between the media and the society according to Wilson, (2006) is that:

The communication enterprise gets all kinds of inputs such as human, professional and technology from the external environment. These inputs are used for the production of media products. The communication enterprise must respond to socially approved values and emphasize those held in high esteem. In other words, it must correspond with or reflect the economic, moral, cultural and political traditions of the society (p.80).

That is to say that the media must project programmes that are consistent with the values of society wherein they operate. Being that the "media are very important in the production and transmission of culture" (Okunna, 199, p.141), it becomes

imperative for the media to talk about, transmit and showcase such cultural practices that will not only endear the populace to such culture but attract them to the extent that they will visit the state, wherein such cultural promotions are showcased.

This movement of people from their location to another in order to participate in such cultural activity is what some scholars' term cultural tourism. Onijah-Obi (Cited in Chuku, 2011) explains that:

The most interesting aspects of tourism and culture are in the areas of cultural diversity. It is this difference in culture and values that allures and motivates tourists to leave their communities for another – to relax, to observe and to learn....Cultural tourism has to do with the rich cultural heritage of a people in the area of dances, music, custom, dresses, festivals, historical monuments, images, arts and crafts (p.85).

Chuku (2011) notes further that these cultural heritages do not market themselves but must be packaged by the people. In some cultures, members of the society are involved in the propagation of their culture (p.85).

From the above assertion, it is clear that one of such members of the society who are involved in the propagation of their culture are the media because they have the capacity to transmit to a large, heterogeneous and scattered audience.

MacBride (et al, 1981) resonates that the media are major carriers of culture and cultural instruments which supply the cultural force and shape the cultural experience of many millions of people in the modern world.

One of such cultural activities that the media can play significant role in promoting is the CARNIRIV- the Port Harcourt Carnival organized by the Rivers state government. CARNIRIV is an avenue where the rich and abundant culture of the Rivers people is showcased. Thus, the role of the media is crucial in determining the extent to which tourism can be promoted in Nigeria.

1.1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

For better understanding, key concepts and terms as used in this work are explained thus:

Media: This refers to the use of communication strategies to achieve social development. They include the mass media generally considered to be newspaper, magazine, radio, television, films, books and the internet including any other communication strategy that may help in sensitizing and educating the Nigerian populace on issues of tourism development. A medium is called a "mass media" if it reaches many people simultaneously (at the same time) and if it uses a technological device located between the sender and receiver.

Tourism: Refers to the actions of human beings who undertake a trip for pleasure. In this regard, people who come into Rivers State for site seeing or pleasure.

Development: This refers to social development geared towards the development of human beings and the environment. Whatever will enhance the well being of the human being and the environment wherein he lives is seen as development.

1.11 Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory. "This theory explains the effects of mass communication on culture and society. It describes a very powerful influence of the media ability to tell what issues are important" (Ndolo, 2006, p.32). The agenda setting theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we actually think; but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about (Folarin, 2005, p.67). Lippman (Cited in Ojobor, 2002) states that "the media help to put pictures in our heads". This explains the power of the mass media to set agenda and raise issues of public importance.

According to Mc Combs and Shaw (1972) the audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media places upon it. Thus, the mass media, both print and broadcast media can anchor on their strengths to determine special topics on issues that can be discussed (Nyekwere and Nyekwere, 2012).

They could suggest other communication strategies that could be employed by those in position of authority or the relevant ministries in order to keep Nigerians abreast at all levels about issues that could lead to tourism development.

The import of this theory is that the media can raise special topics on tourism development and begin to project such issues. Their consistent reportage of such issues could result to attitude change and rub off positively on the lives of the people. This they should do “through the quantity or frequency of reporting, prominence given to the reports through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or timing on radio and television” etc (Folarin,2005).

1.1.2 Mass Media, Culture, and Society

The media plays pivotal role in cultural promotion in fact culture and society is like a seismic twin which cannot be separated. The Mass media perform their day to day functions through different communication channels.

Communication activity is one with a very high moral content and the structures affect man’s life, therefore both content and structures must be judged on the question as to whether they affect peoples’ lives for the better or for worse. In this context, communication structures include all those institutions and technologies which serve as facilities for public and political communications (Wilson, 2006). He notes further that the social consequences of development are captured in the Scio-cultural indices manifested in every society from the psychological to the spiritual therefore, “mass communication systems operate with the society’s political, social and economic climate as well as a product of their historical development” (Nwodu, 2010, p.380). Ndolo (2006) explains that the mass media serve very many functions for society as well as for individuals thus:

Information (Surveillance): The media provides information about local, national and international events and conditions (for instance, information on CARNIRIV provided by the media, information on the national conference, etc)

Correlation: Explaining, interpreting and commenting on the meaning of events and information.

- Providing support for established authority and norms
- Socializing
- Consensus building
- Set the agenda and confer status
- Coordinate separate activities

Cultural Transmission: Refers to the media’s ability to communicate norms, rules and values of a society, transmission of these values from one generation to another or from the society to its newcomers, expressing the dominant cultures and recognizing subcultures and new cultural developments, forging and maintaining commonality of values.

Cultural elements must be transmitted from one generation to another in order to ensure continuity and to ensure that norms are set in relation to reaction to events that take place within or outside the societal environment (Umechukwu, 2001,1997).

Entertainment: Providing amusement, diversion and means of relaxation.

- Providing escape from our daily problems and concerns
- Reducing social tension

Mobilization: this refers to the ability of the media to promote national interests and certain behaviours especially during times of national crises, advance national interests in the sphere of politics, war, economic development, work, religion, sports and mobilize the populace against dictatorial policies and regimes (Ndolo, 2006, p.22).

Integration: Okunna, (1999) explains that the mass media provide messages which people from different groups and nations require in order to know understand and appreciate each other. For instance, when stations in different states of the federation exchange programs about their people’s ways of life, this could be seen as an attempt at national integration through the mass media. By watching such programs, people of one state can get to understand and appreciate the patterns of life, viewpoints and aspirations of other Nigerians in other states. Such an understanding could minimize or even eliminate the fear and ethnocentrism which usually form the basis of the mistrust which divide people among cultural, religious, political and other lines.

1.1.3 Media and Tourism Development

Having established the role of the media in the society, it is expedient to translate such roles to tourism development in Rivers State and by extension Nigeria. In no other way can the media do this except through communication and this communication must be that which must bring development to the society. At the first General Obasanjo’s Farm House Dialogue, African

leaders defined development as “a process concerned with people’s capacity to manage and induce change”. They noted increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), improved health, housing and employment opportunities as development and concluded that knowledge; information, technological creativity and organization are the keys to development (Udoakah, 1998, p.13).

He notes further that of particular interest is African leaders’ identification of knowledge and information as the keys to development. To provide knowledge and information to citizens means to educate them. To carry development far and wide means to educate large numbers of citizens’ i.e. mass education. Mass education on the other hand can come through the mass media which are equipped with the capacity to reach a large number of person’s simultaneously. This characteristic has made the media an indispensable tool for development.

In other words, since “there is a feeling that development is likely to be achieved through a deliberately planned, organized and directed communication” (Udoakah, 1998, p.13), tourism development can be achieved through coordinated communication.

Since development in the context of this paper refers to social development geared towards the development of human beings and the environment which will transcend to national transformation. Whatever will enhance such well-being of the human being and the environment wherein he lives is seen as development.

Therefore, development communication becomes a potent tool in the hands of media practitioners. Development communication is defined as the application of the process of communication to the developmental process. In other words, development communication is the use of the principles and practice of exchange of ideas to fulfil development objectives (Moemeka, cited in Salawu, 2006).

The idea of using communication for the purpose of advancing the development goals received a boost when it was realised that development has to do with the generation of psychic mobility and changing of attitudes. It was also realised that the failures of certain development projects had been due to the absence of communication components in the development process thus, human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development (Salawu, 2006).

Communication functions as a facilitator of development through information flow. It lubricates all social processes and helps to keep the society together (Olise, 2008). No institution or social group within a given society can set and pursue goals that can run counter to the cultural norms and values of the society in which the institution or group exists.

The implication of the above is that communication should be targeted towards achieving developmental goals in this regard; tourism development. The mass media should disseminate cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the past heritage of the people. The media can also help in the development of culture by awakening and stimulating the imagination and aesthetic creativity of individuals, thus leading to the production of cultural artefacts (Okunna, 1999).

“A British anthropologist Tylor defined culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws custom and any other habit and capabilities acquired by members of society” (Umechukwu, 2001, p.154). Thus, cultural activities wherein the beliefs, art, morals, customs etc should be packaged by the people while the media should help as the purveyors of these information.

Communication about tourism can be disseminated such that tourism begins to attract financial gains that will not only increase the industry wherein such profit is made but translate to the economy in terms of increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Chuku (2011, p.214) notes that tourism consists of three components namely: travels (transportation) Stay (hospitality) and attractions (cultural, historic and geo-physical scenes). He notes further that tourism is a service driven industry, with the ability to attract tourists. This of course depends to a large extent on the quality of services and facilities offered or available in a particular place/destination. According to him, tourists will return to an area in which they have felt welcome with warm reception. They will also return to a place where the services and goods received were considered to be fair valued in relation to prices paid.

So these areas should be reported by the media constantly to inform both the government and the populace of the situation. The media need to begin to torch-light those areas in which there are loopholes. For example, bad roads to tourist sites, abandoned recreational centres, dilapidated buildings etc and stress on the need to make such tourist centres attractive in order to encourage people who have visited to always come back which will in turn bring about financial gains and a boost to

the economy.

The media should also inform the people about tourist centres in the states or potential tourist sites. This will enable anyone who wants to visit to access these areas on arrival. For instance, not many are aware of tourist centres such as the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach, The Museum etc. These areas are hardly talked about in recent times. The reasons might not be unconnected to their state of decay. While the media are beaming their search lights on those areas, they should dedicate programmes that will discuss these issues so that those in authority are also kept abreast of the current state of these tourist centres. This will not only project them as the eye of the people but also help them to hold the governmental accountable to the people which is one of their cardinal responsibilities.

They should sensitize and educate Nigerians about the importance and benefit of tourism in order to erase erroneous impressions. For instance, some people think that visiting a zoo, an amusement park or attending CARNIRIV is a waste of time. This may not only apply to uneducated people but even educated ones alike. Such erroneous impressions can be changed through targeted communication.

Just like *Myles Muoroe* said “when purpose is not known, abuse is inevitable”. The real essence of tourism should be at the finger tips of Nigerians both home and abroad. For instance, Chuku (2011) explains that the social effects of tourism can be profound especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Local communities can be transformed for good using tourism. Living standards and the quality of life can be raised by the inflow of finance, new employment opportunities, education, revitalization of tradition and culture. These are only possible when tourism is sustained (p.35)

The media can build their campaigns on some of these benefits of tourism begin to encourage more government and private sector support and the need for more effort to be geared towards tourism development, giving practical statistics of successes recorded in countries where tourism development is one of the government’s topmost priority.

In line with the above, the mass media can do these through different programs, write-ups in newspapers, magazines and books as well as leveraging on the new communication dimension that the internet is offering through different applications.

Not only can information on tourism for instance, (CARNIRIV) be aired on radio and television, published in Newspapers, magazines or books written to project the event, it can also be published online on the Rivers State website as well as promoted via other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These media will not only give it the desired visibility, but will attract large followership from friends, friends of friends, especially when it is an interesting activity. Striking videos of past CARNIRIV can be uploaded on YouTube and as people access these videos, an understanding of what happens in Rivers State CARNIRIV comes to light.

CARNIRIV can become a trending topic on Twitter and attract the highest following depending on discussions that trail the events. CARNIRIV can attract the highest likes on Facebook depending on the information attached to it.

Apart from these other functions, the media can come from the angle of their entertainment function. While entertaining the populace via tourism oriented programmes, they can begin to impress it on the minds of viewers that such programmes can help them relax after a hard day’s job. Here, the media becomes an avenue for people to cool tempers and forget about the harsh realities of life. Watching different events on TV/internet about the CARNIRIV can provide such escape from daily problems as one does not only watch but laugh, reading well written articles on newspapers or magazines can relax nerves, giving the reader that sense of humour amidst relaxation. Hearing comments/discussions on radio about CARNIRIV might not only act as a form of information but may provide an avenue for people to concentrate on activities/events happening in the state thereby forgetting about their sorrows.

The media no doubt cannot carry out these roles alone but should do this in conjunction with relevant ministries bearing in mind they can be utilized to change the orientations and attitudes of Nigerians.

Programmes showcasing the rich and abundant natural resources of Nigeria can be packaged in documentaries and videos. Nollywood can become a change agent in this regard by packaging such information to showcase to the outside world. When this is done, it will not only change the mindset of people in the country but will help to erase some of the negative perceptions people about Nigeria, translating to more people coming around during such activities e.g CARNIRIV. This is because ‘*charity they say begins at home*’. People in the state must be acquainted with the importance and benefits of tourism before it can translate to the larger society or the outside world in general. This is because, “culture is one of the major motivations for tourism. People embark on tourism trips just to have a feel of alien cultures”... (Chukwu, 2011, p.73)

Since most tourism oriented programmes aim at explaining people's culture, the media should depict such culture to tell the true essence of the Rivers people way of life. As encapsulated in the statement of Governor Chubuikwe Amaechi during the inaugural edition of CARNIRIV in 2008, he referred to the carnival as one of the avenues of government to reiterate 'who we are' and our history. Indeed the media should showcase the culture of the Rivers people and Nigeria at large as part of their social responsibility.

Conclusion

From this paper, it is evident that the media are indispensable in championing the cause for tourism development in Nigeria as well as act as a potent tools in the transmission of culture.

Apart from the media being proactive in their reportage on issues bordering on tourism development, there should be consistent support and encouragement to all and sundry to preserve their culture. This can be further strengthened through provision of community media to serve the interest of the ruralities.

The media no doubt serve as vanguard of information; they should utilise and leverage on their powers to lend their voice strongly on specific issues. In this regard the need for citizens to be aware of the importance and benefits of tourism. They should not only inform but sensitize and educate Nigerians bearing in mind that they are agenda setters and as such can decide what people should think about by the importance they accord such issue.

This they can do by projecting events about tourism. For instance, the hype and promos of 2015 CARNIRIV should be on air by 2014 as a way of preparing the minds of the people to participate when such programmes kicks off in earnest.

The media should do more in terms of advocacy reportage on cultural activities of Rivers State to keep the people alert and informed of such cultural activities as well as afford others the opportunity to leverage on the opportunities that tourism provides thereby leading to tourism development in the state which will transcend to Nigeria's national transformation.

References

- Chuku, C.D. (2011). Tourism and sustainable development in Nigeria. Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Rohi.
- Foarin, B. (2005). Theories of mass communication: An introductory text. Lagos: Sterling-Horden.
- Johnson, P. (1997). The media and truth: Is there a moral duty?" In annual editions: *Mass Media Guild Ford*: McGraw-Hill.
- MacBride, Sean et al. Many voices, one world (Nigerian Edition). Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Mc Combs, M & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36: 176-187.
- Ndolo, I.S. (2006). Mass media systems and society. Enugu, Nigeria: Rhyce Kerex.
- Nwodu, L.C. (2010). Mass media and society in Nworgu, K.O. (Ed.). Mass communication theory and practice. Owerri, Imo State: Ebenezer Productions.
- Nyekwere, E. O and Nyekwere, C.O. (2012). Mass media influence on women's participation in politics among residents of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, Vol. 4, No. I, April 2012, 51-61.
- Ojobor, I.J. (2002). Mass communication theories, in Okunna C.S. (Ed.). *Teaching mass communication: A multi-dimensional approach*. Enugu, Nigeria: New Generation Books.
- Okunna, C.S. (1999). Introduction to mass communication (2nd Ed.). Enugu, Nigeria: New Generation Books.
- Olise, T.P. (2008). Mass media use in controlling drug abuse in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*. Vol., 6, No 1 & 2, ACCE Nigerian Chapter.
- Orlu Orlu, H.C. (2013). Media literacy, religion and child upbringing in a multimedia society. Imo, Nigeria. HYSAB Publishers.
- Salawu, A. (2008). Development communication: The preliminaries, p.13-22.
- Udoakah, N., (1998). Development communication. Ibadan, Nigeria: Stirling-Horden.
- Udoakah, N. (2006). Communication and society in Wilson, D(ed). *Fundamentals of Human Community*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Stirling-Horden. p.75-84.
- Umechukwu, P.O.J. (1997). Mass communication in Nigeria: A student's companion. Enugu, Nigeria: Joen Associates.
- Umechukwu, P.O.J. (2001). Mass media and Nigerian society: Developmental issues and problems. Enugu, Nigeria: Thompson Printing and Publication Company.
- Wilson, D. (2008). Development communication and globalization. In Mojaye, E.M (Eds).
- Oyewo, O.O., M. Bayo, R; and Sobowale, I.A. (E.ds). Globalization and development communication in Africa. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ebenezer Soola Conference on communication (P. 1-11).