SELECTIVITY OF SOURCES: A CASE STUDY OF THE "HIGHLIGHT" PROGRAMME ON NTA IBADAN

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Abstract

This study investigated the selectivity of sources of a current affairs programme on NTA Ibadan. Data were collected using the six content categories which included agriculture, economics, education, health, and general. The analysis of the highlight programme indicates that panelists are selected from various sources private practitioners (50%), university (32.8%), public (6.9%), research institutes (5.2%) and others (5.2%). However, the study shows that NTA Ibadan Highlight programme uses more panelists from private sources who are visible personalities, close associates and often comment on issues tangential to their disciplines.

1.0 Introduction

Informing the public about their environment and the society they live in is a vital factor in the developmental process. Development requires educational process. Educational process is basically imparting ideas, knowledge etc. through information and on the long run, effect changes in the attitude and behaviour of those concerned. Early surveys conducted by a group of experts Rogers (1964), Lerner (1963) and Schram (1964) highlighted information as an important variable in the developmental process.

Another important factor in development is reaching effectively the lay public who the information is meant for. Again this factor is closely related to population size and literacy level of the public. The 1991 census figure puts Nigeria's population at about 100 million although speculations are that Nigeria's population is over a staggering 130 million. Over 80% of the population is rural and largely non-literate. The size and characteristics of Nigeria's population is rural and largely non-literate. The size and characteristics of Nigeria's population show that it has a huge population to contend with, with respect to information dissemination in the developmental process of the nation.

However, the electronic media, especially television among others e.g. public lectures, seminars, conferences and vocational training programmes have all been identified as effective channels for the lay public. Certain attributes of television as an information channel, explains its frequent use. Moemka (1990) puts it that the audio, visual and coverage of the television have significant advantages over other channels (radio, newspaper) in the field of development education. According to him, these outstanding qualities of television are of immense value in our situation, bearing in mind that over 80% of Nigeria's population are rural and to a large extent non-literate.

The role of the mass media in development has been the focus in recent times and has received considerable attention from researcher's, planners, politicians and media practitioners of developing countries. No doubt some measure of success have been documented in different spheres of development through the use of the mass media in formation dissemination. Politically, the ruralites in Latin America were able to preserve and create cultural identity for themselves through the media (Media Development, 1980).

In Nigeria, the usefulness of the mass media as a developmental tool points to the increase in the number of commercials in the mass media, especially in the purchase of goods and services, agricultural inputs and products, jingles announcing planting and harvest periods. In the area of integrated rural development, the role of the mass media is also remarkable. The Directorate for Food and Rural Infrastructure (DIFFRI) which has identified the news media as an agency for achieving worthy goals was created and located in the office of the president. It is an organ of the federal government for rural development (Dare, 1990).

Most developing countries, of which Nigeria is one, have thus found the mass media a useful tool in development. This is because as a developmental tool, the mass media educate the people to be aware of their social environment, identify their problems, mobilize and transform their society.

Therefore the information made available to the public will have far reaching effects on them, since the information provided is required to produce changes in their knowledge, attitude, behaviour and skill. These are the basis for social action and have several implications for development. It will be desirable that the information reaching the public is reliable, valid and can stand the test of time. In other words, sources should be credible or from known experts or authorities. This among other reasons is the basis for this case study of the Highlight programme on NTA Ibadan.

The mass media in Nigeria is known to play an active role in developmental issues, especially in the rural areas (Dare, 1990, Folarin, 1990). The Highlight programme on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Ibadan is one of such enlightenment programmes. This programme features discussion topics on education, agriculture, economics, health, politics and general issues. Discussants, which include moderators and panelists, are supposed to be experts knowledgeable in their various fields and are invited from different institutions. In other words, the discussants give expert advice and proven facts. As an enlightenment as well as an educative programme, it is important that the information reaching the public is reliable and can stand the test of time. Indeed, Shepherd (1981) stated that the present world depends on the knowledge of specialists and the advice of experts. She also contended that what most people in the developed countries know or think they know, they have learned through newspapers, magazines and television. This may be true of our society, Nigeria.

While various sources of information used have been highlighted, the issue is what criteria does NTA Ibadan use in the selection of sources for its Highlight programmes. Furthermore, are these sources credible? Can these sources be seen as experts? It is against this background that this study seeks to determine the following objectives:

1.   To determine how NTA Ibadan selects its sources for the Highlight programme.

2.   To investigate if selected sources for the Highlight programme are expert sources and credible and,

3.   To offer suggestions for future selection of sources.

2.0   Theoretical Framework

Sources of information in news reporting are a pivot on which the mass media hinge. The reasons for this are not far-fetched. Individuals and public perception and attitudes towards societal issues are a function of knowledge based on available information. To this end, the mass media play an important role in imparting knowledge to the public through information dissemination. Dare (1990) opined that the mass media especially the electronic media are very effective channels of information dissemination to the public in the developmental process.

Present trends show that the public rely more than before on the knowledge acquired through the mass media. Developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, have found this trend useful in developmental issues. The FAO (1978) puts it that over 80% of Nigeria's population are largely non-literate. Implications are that while only a few know the appropriate areas to seek necessary information, the non-literate majority will have to rely on the mass media especially the electronic media. In view of this, it is important that the audience gets factual information. This raises the issue of source selectivity by the media.

Sources of information are experts and authorities, who are highly knowledgeable in their various fields. Shepherd (1981) stated that no expert is more esteemed today than the individual who supports facts empirically. This is due to the credence given to empirically proven facts and this makes them more news-worthy. In view of this, researchers in both the biological and social sciences are regarded as credible sources.

What makes news influence the media choice of information source. A careful search of literature shows that the media use various sources. According to Dunwoody (1982) one of those sources is usually a government or university employee who has been exposed to the media in the past and chances are that he will be asked to comment on the topic tangential to their field of specialisation. Frequently, public information officers are chosen by the media as sources. A group of researchers, Tichenor et al (1970) documented that 52% of scientists in a survey of media science stories affirmed that a public information officer or higher administrator or both are responsible for reporting of research findings to the public. This fact was further buttressed by Dunwoody (1979) that journalists often depend on public information personnel at scientific meetings to provide them with appropriate sources and information. Another set of sources used by the media according to Mazur (1981) are spokesmen, personally known individuals, individual reputation and stature, and proximity of sources institution. Other identified by Shepherd (1981) are a few celebrities and journal publications (articles).

However, several variables which influence media selectivity of sources have also been identified by various researchers. To mention a few of these variables, Dunwoody (1982) stated that these variables are type of sources, employer, source credibility and failure of both journalist and source to recognise their complimentary in information dissemination. Other variables highlighted by Shepherd (1981) are ability to interpret facts correctly, which facts are publicised and which sources are selected as experts.

From the catalogue of sources used by the media and their attendant problems, available evidence points to the fact that source credibility among other factors is crucial in selectivity of sources. This as Dunwoody (1982) rightly argues, that chosen sources should be seen by their audience as credible. This cannot be more true in view of the fact that one of the functions of the media is educating and sensitising the public to societal, environmental and national issues.

Selectivity of sources by the media is not an easy task. It is important that the media recognise that its representations of credible sources are bound to shape public perception of issues. Therefore the media in carrying out its function of selection of sources should not lose sight of problems associated with source selectivity and the implications that it will have on the public.

3.0 Methodology

To achieve the set of objectives for this study, the NTA Ibadan Highlight programme for a quarter was purposively sampled. A quarter is three months and has 13 episodes of Highlight programmes and each episode had a duration of 30 minutes. The 13 episodes made up the sample size since this is a pilot study. However, episodes from the month of March, May, June, July, August and September of 1991 were selected to make up the 13 episodes because it was not possible to obtain 13 episodes of any given quarter as the tapes were re-used for other programmes.

3.1 Procedure

The data for this study were collected from source using a format. Items contained in format are topics discussed, name of discussants, background (qualifications) of discussants, institutions represented, location (where discussants reside), relevance of questions asked and answers given and the number of times each panelist was asked questions.

3.2 Content analysis

The topics discussed were grouped into the following six content categories (disciplines), agriculture, economics, education, health policies and general.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Background of panelists (Qualification)

The panelists generally have a high educational level. The majority of them have university degrees which a few of them have professional degrees.

4.2 Institution represented

The panelists are drawn from various institutions. For the purpose of this study, the institutions are grouped into 5 categories such as university, research institutions, private practitioners, the public (government) and others.

The representation of sources of information used by NTA Highlight programme are private practitioners (50%), university (32.8%), public (government establishments) (69%), research institutions (NISER, NSPRI, IART) (5.2%) and others (Co-operative Bank, worldwide insurance company, chamber of commerce) (5.2%). Often the choice of source depends on the producer of the programme. This, in turn, is a function of the producer's training and background. The frequent use of private sources compared to other sources such as the university and research institutions is an indication that the producer of the Highlight programme used close associates, visible personalities they have met before or those that have been exposed to the media before. For example, some panelists are bound to comment on subject matter tangential to their fields of specialisation. This fact further buttresses the above point mentioned earlier and is in consonance with separate studies conducted by Mazur (1981) and Dunwoody (1982).

4.3 Location

It was observed from the data analysed that majority (99%) of the panelists reside in Ibadan, where NTA is situated. Implications are that Ibadan, being a capital town, is highly urbanised and has various institutions. As such, sources are easily reached at little cost compared to when sources reside outside Ibadan.

4.4 Topics and background of panelists

It was necessary to ascertain if the background of panelists matched the topics they were asked to comment on. To this end, topics discussed were categorised into seven disciplines (Appendix 1). The background of the panelists were then matched with the different topics discussed. Results obtained are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Topic and Background of Panelist

Topics	Number of Panelists	Related Background	Percentage (%) of Related Background
Agriculture	8	7	87.5
Economics	10	2	20.0
Education	11	4	36.4
Health	10	6	60.0
Politics	5	-	-
Insurance	5	2	40.0

It is evident from the results presented on Table 1 that all the panelists (100%) who commented on the general topics have the necessary qualification or background. Data collected show that these panelists have university education. For example, all panelists (5) who commented on secret societies in higher institutions have university education. Three of the panelists are from higher institutions while one of the panelists is a member of a secret society in his university days and he is still very conversant with the activities of the society. A high percentage (87.5%) of the panelists who discussed topics on agriculture have related background. Data collected reveal that the panelists are from agriculture-related research institutions, departments of agriculture in universities and practising farmers.

Health also recorded a high number (60%) of qualified panelists. However, the background of the majority of panelists who commented on topics such as economics, politics, education and insurance have unrelated backgrounds. Indeed, all the panelists that commented on the political topics have unrelated background to the topic discussed. However, most of them are visible personalities who have been exposed to the media before. One of them is an ex-commissioner in Oyo State.

It is, therefore, clear from data obtained and analysed that sources used by the NTA Highlight programmes are not necessarily experts. Although it can be said that participants in most cases'have in-depth knowledge of the subject matter but lack empirical data to substantiate facts, which is the most acceptable method of proving facts.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Major findings of the study

The first objective of this study was to determine how NTA Ibadan selects its sources for the Highlight programme. This study reveals that various sources such as private practitioners, university lecturers, public (government establishment) officials, research institutes' personnel and others are used by NTA.

However, it was observed that the private sources are more frequently used compared to other sources. Also, it was observed that visible personalities and probably close associates of the producer of the programme are also frequently used. Observations also indicate that majority of the panelists reside in Ibadan city.

The second objective was to investigate if selected sources for the NTA Highlight programme are experts and credible sources. It is evident that majority of the sources are highly educated and have university professional degrees. As such, sources can be regarded as experts and credible, but not necessarily on subject matter they were asked to comment on. This fact is based on the finding of the study which shows that majority of the panelists commented on subject matter tangential to their disciplines. It was observed that only three of the seven disciplines were commented upon by sources that can be regarded as experts. Indeed none of the panelists who commented on the political topic is a political scientist.

6.0 Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and facts derived from this study, the following conclusions are drawn.

i.   The NTA Ibadan Highlight programme uses various sources such as private practitioners, universities, public, research institutions and others.

ii.   The NTA Ibadan Highlight programme uses more private sources, followed by university, public and research institution personnel.

iii.   The sources used by the NTA Highlight programme are situated or resident in Ibadan, visible personalities and close associates of producers.

iv.   The NTA Highlight programme uses experts who comment on issues tangential to their disciplines/background.

7.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study. Experts in related disciplines should be used as sources. This makes for credibility. Nothing gives credibility than experts' views buttressed with empirical facts. What we claim to know are facts we have read or seen in the media. This source credibility shapes the views and hence the stance of the lay public on societal issues. This has implications for our developmental process.

Sources, irrespective of their locations, should also be used by the NTA highlight programmes, although more financial loss may be incurred.

Finally, the NTA Highlight programme should minimize the frequency with which it uses visible personalities and same sources. Obviously, such sources may not be experts in the various issues discussed.

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