Media as Tools for the Promotion and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Nigeria

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Abstract

The importance of promotion and preservation of cultural heritage in every society by media cannot be overstressed, especially in developing African countries such as Nigeria. Culture is the learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of a society. The promotion of cultural heritages has been a herculean task to accomplish as western culture and media have created undeniable changes in the Nigerian cultural space, subjecting it to continuous changes positively or negatively. Hence, there is a dire need for the Nigerian media to counter or check the influx of western media contents and increase efforts toward the promotion and preservation of indigenous cultures. Culture cannot be transmitted without communication; it must be through a channel of communication if it must reach a heterogeneous audience or populace such as Nigeria. Deploying Albert Bandura's social learning theory (SLT), this study assesses the functioning of Nigerian media as promoters and preservers of Nigerian cultures. It uses the qualitative approach through the modalities of historical-analytic and direct observation methods. In doing this, it highlights the relevance and influence of local media contents as packaged and disseminated by conventional or mainstream media to promote and preserve Nigerian cultural heritages. It concludes that the Nigerian media, going by their growing indigenous contents, are powerful cultural agents that should be increasingly used to project the Nigerian culture and people to the outside world.

***Keywords**: Nigerian media, Cultural heritage, Promotion, Preservation, SLT, Development*

Introduction

Media professionals in Nigeria have a mandate as elaborated by government to promote and preserve Nigeria's cultural heritage according to the National Cultural Policy – Federal Ministry of Youths, Sports and Culture (1988) and the National Broadcasting Commission (2002). A nation's cultural policy can be said to be the government actions, laws and programmes that regulate, protect, encourage and financially (or otherwise) support activities related to the arts and creative sectors such as painting, sculpture, music, dance, literature, filmmaking, among others; and culture which may involve activities related to language, heritage and diversity (Ben-Iheanacho, 2019). It is the expression of the government's willingness to adopt and implement a set of coherent principles,

objectives and means to protect and foster its country's cultural expression. The centrality of a country's cultural policy to its development is akin to its national ideology and "provides the closest set of ideas and objectives that can shape the country's political and social procedure and set the character of national culture" (Aig-Imoukhuede, 1991, p.9).

Nigeria is one of the few African countries with a written cultural policy that has fully established government institutions, parameters and linkages to ensure systemic approach to cultural administration and implementation of the cultural policy for Nigeria. However, Asiwaju (1991) argues that there is a missing link between the promulgation of Nigeria's cultural policy and its implementation. He clarifies this disconnect as a carryover of the tendency on the part of development planners to separate economic growth from cultural dimensions with the erroneous assumption that economic growth is a prerequisite for other forms of development (Asiwaju, 1991). This limiting understanding of the term 'development' as a quantitative index marginalizes full appreciation of the qualitative imperatives and social values which is primarily the realm of culture in society; being human-centred as its initial concern and ultimate goal (Ben-Iheanacho, 2019). Hence, there is the need to closely look at the national cultural policy in the context of Nigeria's media programming, with a view to promoting and preserving Nigeria's cultural heritage.

Under military regimes, the media in Nigeria remained resolute in their responsibilities of keeping the populace abreast of events while transmitting cultural heritage information and maintaining peace in spite of the cruelly unfriendly policies put in place by the military to hem them in. It was expected that such measures of developing healthy local media content would have been improved upon under democratic or civilian rule but the issues of conflict, nepotism and brazen regional consciousness in the country gives the impression that the media are not standing up to their responsibilities as the Nigerian society appears to be overwhelmed by the in-flow of western cultural contents. The media owe society the duty of promoting the diverse cultures from various ethnic regions represented in Nigeria. The transmission of people's cultural heritage from a generation to another is part and parcel of the educational function of the media (Ndimele & Innocent, 2006). Nonetheless, they contend that one major challenge faced by the Nigerian media is that of frequent exposure to foreign programmes that can engender total erosion of people's traditional values, debased standards and cultural domination. Corroboratively, Omoera and Ibagere

(2010) analyse television broadcasting and noted the pervasiveness of cultural imperialism in the Nigerian media ecosystem.

However, the media through its educational programmes could help individuals to internalize the cultural and moral norms of society. Media performs the duties of development, promotion and sustenance of culture by awakening and stimulating the imagination and creativity of individuals, thus leading to production of cultural artefacts (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). The cultural heritages of Nigerian society are disseminated via media outlets in various ways for the learning and understanding of the Nigerian people and those in diaspora, fostering peace and unity. The Nigerian media (radio, television, film and print) are and should be the agents of socialization. Sambe (2005) affirms that the Nigerian media has as one of its core functions to promote, preserve and transmit Nigerian's cultural heritages, thereby teaching Nigerians both at home and in diaspora the various ethnic norms and values of living. The broadcast media has been touted as the most prominent source of news to the public among other forms of mass media channels and possibly most influential in public debates and opinion generation. Perhaps, this is because of its ability to convey messages in colourful, creative and audio/visual aesthetics. This article uses historical-analytic and direct observation methods to examine the performance of the Nigerian media as tools for the promotion and preservation of Nigerian culture as against the argument that indigenous media project barbaric, obsolete and fetish traditions. The paper is theoretically anchored in Albert Bandura's social learning theory.

Media and Nigerian Cultural History

The chief objectives of media in Nigeria is that they are used as tools for education, entertainment, information and socialization; teaching the people to read and write, think critically and have advanced opinion on issues. Education comprises intellectual development, acquisition of skills and formation of character. Character formation is embedded in culture. The media are involved in the transmission of the knowledge necessary to achieve all aspects of education (Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). Historically speaking, the Presbyterian Mission established the first printing school in Calabar, Nigeria in 1846 to increase the literacy level of the people. A little over a decade later, specifically in 1859, Revd. Townsend established the first newspaper called *Iwe-Irohinfun Awonara Egbaati,* which means the "good news for the people of Egbaland and the Yoruba (Ukonu, 2006).

The establishment of the newspaper was to inculcate the habit of reading among the people of Egba and Yoruba who at the period were not literate in the western sense but very much educated in their own indigenous ways and values. The media, especially the newspapers, became platforms for education, news and information gathering, dissemination, interpretation and correlation. They served as templates for mobilisation, entertainment, and documentation of Nigerian indigenous ethnic milieus, peoples and their various cultures. As well, they formed part of the strategic political tools which Nigeria used to achieve its independence. The media, particularly the newspapers became weapons to fight against the injustice by the colonial masters and government of the day. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and, therefore, multi-cultural country (Otite, 2000). It is a conglomeration of many ethnic groups such as Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Edo, Ijaw, among others, with diverse cultures.

Ben-Iheanacho (2019, p. 207) posits that "cultural diversity can be quantified through the number of languages spoken within the specific cultural space as well as by the distinctive nature of cultural goods, services and activities undertaken as vehicles of identity, value and meaning within this region as artistic expressions of cultural diversity." Nigeria is the world's most populous black nation with an estimated landmass of 923,768 sq kilometers, a population of over 200 million, 257 to 400 ethnic groups and about 520 linguistic communities. Evidently, Nigeria can be said to be a haven of cultural diversity. Therefore, it is imperative to use available media tools to promote and preserve the richness of its diversity which must be seen and harnessed as cultural capital and heritage resource in the age of globalization in which information and communication technologies (ICTs) are chief purveyors of culture. Interestingly today, there is countless number of media outfits operating in different parts of Nigeria, communicating socio-cultural development via the use of ICTs.

Concept of Culture

It is a common belief in many African countries (Nigeria inclusive) that the elders are endowed with great wisdom and are custodians of morals, norms and ethical ways of living. They are, therefore, responsible for transmitting Nigerian cultures in form of folklores, folktales, ghostlores, stories, songs, among others, from one generation to another. In Nigeria, cultural values are largely transmitted from the elderly to the younger generations orally. They present and represent in-depth meaning to what bind people together or what they believe in. Mirja (1999) opines that culture has a special role in building up modern society and in

mobilizing the capacity of its members. Nigerian mass media have contributed to further transmit cultural values in the present age. With the advent of video recording, terrestrial and satellite televisions, among other ICT-enabled media, most people are identifying with aspects of Nigerian culture such as dressing, greeting, marriage, etc. everywhere in the world.

Different scholars have variously defined culture. Ezeh (2017) claims that culture entails all that humans do, how they do them; all that they say, how they say them; how humans feel, think, learn, teach and what they consider beautiful and ugly; good and bad. He argues further that culture cannot just be defined as a way of life, as animal also have ways of life but that what distinguishes humankind of life is the culture and that is the reason certain actions done publicly by animals such as having sexual intercourse openly, killing of their kind for food cannot be done by humans. This implies that culture eliminates that animalistic nature in human beings and makes them social animals that are able to relate, respect others' opinion and also be respected. Bello (1991) conceptualizes culture as "the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours" (p.189). In other words, "culture encompasses those conventional understandings and practices which give a people its uniqueness and thus render such people distinct from all others" (Biobaku, 1982, p.76). It subsumes the entirety of the material, spiritual, artistic, intellectual and other accomplishments of a people, which give some indication of their way of life, their mode of existence, and the by-products of their type or level of civilization (Unoh, 1986). It is a holistic way of life of a people that can be used as a pointer to the indices of development or civilization that is subject to the process of change and transformation. The end product could be cultural refinement, advancement or development.

Culture is that complex whole which includes laws, customs, knowledge, arts, morals, beliefs and any capabilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of a society. Nigerians are rich in material and non-material cultural heritages such as arts, artifacts, proverbs, beliefs, morals, language, dressing, music, work, religion, dancing, festivals, etc., as captured in the National Cultural Policy document. These heritages also include people's social norms, taboos and values that are understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. How much of these elements of Nigerian indigenous

cultures are being transmitted by the mainstream media (television, radio, film, print, etc.) in Nigeria? The mass media reflect the society as organized group of individuals living and sharing ideas, feelings, thoughts, etc. Therefore, the media can be considered as important tools and channels for promotion and preservation of the Nigerian culture through the diverse programmes disseminated, as they are capable of facilitating unity and fostering peaceful co-existence among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Culture as Tangible and Non-Tangible Heritages

Tangible cultural heritages include physical resourceful products which can be touched, seen or used by human beings such as architectural works or buildings, defensive walls and ditches, crafts, tools, ivories, cowries, paintings, textiles, pestles, mortars, iron furnaces, knives, foods, wooden objects, tombs and graves, temples, dresses, pottery and potsherd, pavements, monuments, books, among other works of art. The non-tangible aspects of culture are morals, traditional maxims, proverbs, tales by moonlights (known as *akukoifo/egwuonwa* among the *Igbo* of eastern Nigeria), adages, lullabies, poems, riddles, incantations, values, unity and oneness, praise songs such as *oriki,* recitals of African traditional religious ways such as the *Ifa* verses among the Yoruba of western Nigeria and other facets of community's cultural heritages. In fact, culture itself is "both physical and non-physical in character" (Ogundele, 2014, p.51).

Some members of society learn to kneel, prostrate, genuflect when greeting their elders as a result of their exposure to media contents in movies, dramas, theatrical performances, etc. The importance of culture either in a developed or developing country is evident in the lives of the people. Culture is a binding force as people are united through cultural identity. Thomas Hoffman identifies cultural identity as essential for peaceful cooperation stating that if people have a strong sense of self-identity through culture, they are more likely to interact peacefully with other cultures (2020). Cultural objects (artefacts) are used by humans in an attempt to cope with challenges and natural conditions. It is, therefore, important to state that humans cannot survive without constructive use of artefacts (Ogundele, 2014).

Dominick (1996) identifies cultural heritage transmission from one generation to another as one of the functions of the media. The mass media: radio, television, newspapers and magazines make learning, sharing and integration of culture among diverse backgrounds possible irrespective of the distance, race, language, sex and other variables. It is worthy to note that the media has from its

establishment anchored contents which promoted the culture of the Nigerian people though constantly interrupted by the mass influx of foreign or western mores. The cultural heritages of Nigeria are disseminated via the media outfits such as television stations in various ways for the learning and understanding of people in local communities as well as in diaspora. They mediate between individuals, communities or nations, fostering peace and unity.

To deprive a society of information is tantamount to chaos and hopelessness, and could create gaps for conflicts and lawlessness. Arguably, a society can be without government but not without the media. This, in a way, explains why it is commonly said that the pen is mightier than the sword. The media, for instance the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), are designed to project Nigerian cultures to change the narratives from war to dialogue and from westernization to true African consciousness. Programmes such as *Grassroots*, *Footprints*, *People and Events*, *African Pot*, *Goge Africa*, etc., are loaded with contents that promote the various cultures and traditions of Nigerian people. Cultural practices such as Iwaji (yam) festival, ancestral worship, respect for elders, Igue festival in Benin City, boat regattas in the Niger Delta, Arugungun fishing festival, Eyo festival in Lagos, Calabar carnival, etc. are regularly showcased on Nigerian television channels to provide learning templates for growing populations in Nigeria.

Indigenous attires and dressing modes: Aso-oke, Akwa-ocha, Dansiki, modes of greetings, the different types of dishes from the different ethnic groups, the different ceremonies attached to marriages, burial rites, communal living, among others, are incorporated in many of the programmes regularly projected via Nollywood which is one of the major ambassadorial vehicles that carry Nigeria's rich cultural heritage to the world. Hence, collaborative efforts between NTA, Nollywood content creators and private media consortia such as African Independent Television (AIT), Channels TV, Arise TV, etc. to package professionally and disseminate aspects of Nigerian cultures could further edutain Nigerians through movies and other dedicated programmes that would help to preserve and promote Nigerian cultural heritages as well as foster unity.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is theoretically undergirded by Albert Bandura's social learning theory (SLT). It is a theory of learning process and social behaviour, which proposes that new behaviours can be acquired by observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1963). In other words, learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social

context and can occur through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement (Bandura, 1963). In addition to the observation of behaviour, learning also occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments, a process known as vicarious reinforcement that platforms such as media could provide through TV drama, films and related programmes. Bandura opens up the scope of learning mechanisms by introducing observation as a possibility. He adds to this the ability of modeling – a means by which humans represent actual outcomes symbolically.

Grusec (1992) affirms that models, cognitively mediated, allow future consequences to have as much of an impact as actual consequences. She further claims that an important factor in SLT is the concept of reciprocal determinism. This notion states that just as an individual's behaviour is influenced by the environment, the environment is also influenced by the individual's behaviour (Grusec, 1992). In other words, a person's behaviour, environment, and personal qualities all reciprocally influence each other. For example, a child who plays violent video games will likely influence their peers to play as well, which then encourages the child to play more often. Singhal and Obregon (1999), in conversation with Miguel Sabido, argue that entertainment-education (EE) in the form of telenovelas or TV dramas or soap operas can help viewers learn desired behaviours in a positive way from models portrayed in the programmes. Kumpulainen and Wray (2002) agree to the extent that the telenovela format allows the content creators to incorporate elements that can bring a desired response. These elements may include music, actors, melodrama, props or costumes, festivals, local cuisines, greeting scripts, belief systems and cultural values, among others, that could be factored into media programmes that are targeted at the audience.

Using the SLT symbolic modeling offered by EE in the context of promoting and preserving Nigerian cultural heritage via the media could be very profitable. Positive social behaviours could be reinforced with rewards and negative social behaviours reinforced with punishment in TV programmes, and films, among other local media contents that are packaged and beamed or targeted at the populace in Nigeria. The point for this study, therefore, is that we can observe and learn from the media in the context of Albert Bandura's SLT that explains that behaviours and attitudes can be modeled by observing the behaviours and attitudes of others by listening to television programmes, films and other wholesome cultural media contents, thereby acquiring what Ukaegbu (2017) calls

emotional responses and new life of conduct. This implies that the media have the power to influence society and such influence emanates as results of the various contents embedded in the various programmes carried by the various media channels, especially television and film. The media using the various channels would be able to promote, preserve and project Nigerian cultural heritages to the world.

Media Potency

Over time, the media have become potent forces to be reckoned with in the promotion of socio-cultural values and norms in any civilized society. The broadcast stations have strategically developed special entertainment programmes and the emergence of cable television such as DSTV, GOTV, Startimes, etc., has enhanced the promotion of the Nigerian's diverse cultural heritages (Simon & Ndoma, 2016). These satellite and cable television platforms have over the years established themselves as formidable forces in the promotion of aspects of Nigerian/African cultures through their dedicated channels established exclusively for the massive promotion, circulation and preservation of African cultural values (Agbana, 2018). For instance, NTA educational channel package and frequently show programmes that dwell on teaching and entertaining viewers with different Nigerian cultures of the Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Edo, Hausa, etc., and their traditional marriages, dressings, cuisines, languages, proverbs, values, histories and stories that enlighten listeners/viewers about the peoples in different regions that make up Nigeria.

There are many media programmes such as *Sokoyokoto*, *African Pot, Ewa To wo,* etc., that showcase Nigerian indigenous cultural values, greetings, marriages, drama, dancing and dishes regularly. Many of them colourfully showcase different Nigerian indigenous foods such as *edikaikong, tuwo, ngwobi, isi-ewu, ofe-akwu, amala* and *ewedu, gbegiri, afam,* etc.; the cooking methods and how they are served and eaten, all geared towards encouraging the present generation of Nigerians to learn and preserve the cuisines for future generations. Some other TV programmes/media contents such as *Arts World, Goge-Africa*, *People and Events*, etc. depict carnivals such as the Calabar carnival, Iwaji, Argungu fish festival, Abuja carnival, Eyo (Lagos) festivals and other indigenous cultural activities on NTA, AIT, and Channels, among others. These are all aimed at educating Nigerians on production, promotion and preservation of Nigerian arts, artifacts, tangible and intangible heritages.

To promote and preserve indigenous culture in Nigeria, there are no better options than for relevant government agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to employ the media to design and shape contents that will suit the cultural needs of the Nigerian society. This is because of the ability of the media to provide cultural learning points or platforms for Nigerians as demonstrated in the symbolic modeling of behaviour through observation that the social learning theory (SLT) highlights, supports and concretizes in entertainment education formats of telenovelas and other media contents. Thus, the relevant government agencies and NGOs should use the media as instruments of national cultural development to solidarise Nigerians and foster values, norms and principles that humanise and upgrade Nigeria's indigenousness. For example, Naija FM 103, a popular radio outlet among Nigerians, promotes Nigerian cultures in music, poetry, radio-dramas, etc. and serves as a rallying point for many people. This, in a sense, explains why Agbana (2018) posits that the mass media owe the audience the duty of promoting the diverse cultures represented in Nigeria. Although a daunting and complex task, it is rewarding and is worth the effort because Nigerians and other peoples will have the opportunity to know more about the rich and diverse Nigerian cultures even as it fosters unity.

Challenges of Media in the Transmission of Cultural Roles

A major challenge confronted by the media is the constant domination of foreign programmes in the Nigerian media ecosystem. This is not just as a result of the emergence of modern tools such as ICTs (smart phones, tablets, etc.) that have virtually made the conventional forms of communication such as books, newspapers, radio, television, film, etc. appear almost old-fashioned but because the Nigerian media are still under the ownership of some persons who believe that selling foreign or western contents generates more funds. Okunna and Omenugha (2012) point out "that because mass media is such a powerful vehicle for the dissemination of culture, but for the fear that massive flows of foreign mass media contents produced will negatively influence local cultures" (p.21). In fact, there is the palpable fear that through the use of modern technology some cultures risk losing their identity as they will become submerged by cultures belonging to those who control the modern technology and communication software (Ansah cited in Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). With the advent of the Internet, many of the traditional functions of the mass media are constantly being challenged and there is the fear that some of the Nigerian cultural heritages if not promoted and preserved using available media tools, risk being atrophied.

The ICT-enabled devices and applications such as smart phones, I-phones, Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc., are handy and convenient to use but lack censorship in relation to Nigerian cultural interest. So, the inflow of all sorts of cultures into the Nigerian culture space is likely to continue if a deliberate effort to amend and use existing policy documents such as the National Cultural Policy and the National Broadcasting Commission to reflect current tendencies that would uphold Nigerian cultural values is not emplaced. For instance, nakedness or nudity was and is still a taboo in many cultural jurisdictions in Nigeria. However, western media, a ravaging cultural behemoth, introduced nakedness as fashion, beauty and a way of life to many a Nigerian youth who unfortunately now buy into the idea as a result of frequent exposure to the foreign media contents.

A look at the popular *Big-Brother Nigeria* (BBN) show reveals how immorality disguised as competitive game show has grossly exposed both the youths and adults to an unwholesome non-Nigerian culture. Nigerians are vicariously compelled to view or watch adults having sex openly all in the name of televised entertainment. Furthermore, the over promotion of foreign culture in Nigeria has not only relegated, raped and underdeveloped Nigerian indigenous cultures, but also has made many Nigerians' especially the youths' interest in their God-given heritage – culture– to be forcefully and abruptly killed. Western culture mimicry has become the order of the day, where parents and schools compel their children and wards to learn how to speak like foreigners. Another issue is the lack of documentation. Many discoveries and cultural feats by Nigerians or Africans were neither documented nor recorded in any form of information source (Okoro, 2010). This, therefore, poses a great threat to Africa's cultural heritage as lack of documentation and preservation could lead to total destruction.

Conclusion

This article posited that media is still in the business of performing one of its core duties: information dissemination in society. Information they say is 'power;' it has great impact on human behaviour and public discourse in developing societies such as Nigeria. Members of the Nigerian society can be influenced positively or negatively and can be transformed or changed as a result of the amount of local or indigenous media contents that they are exposed to. Hence, the functioning of the media in cultural education and entertainment cannot be overstated as it indexes the cultural wellbeing of a society. Drawing on this, it is suggested that relevant policy documents such as the National Cultural Policy, National Broadcasting

Commission, etc., should be strengthened and implemented to provide a congenial environment for the media to effectively be used as tools to promote and preserve Nigerian cultural heritages. Such a deliberate effort is capable of promoting the collective consciousness in terms of unity, oneness and nonviolent co-existence among the diverse cultural ethnicities in Nigeria. Hence, the mainstream media of radio, television, film and print in Nigeria should focus more on aspects of Nigerian indigenous cultures that enthrone peaceful co-existence and showcase less of the aspects that portray Nigerian cultures as backward to the outside world.

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