



STRATEGIC MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES

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Abstract

In order to foster developmental agenda, ensure stakeholders engagement in the execution of government policies, the Mass media must play its strategic and sacrosanct role as the fourth estate of the realm with focus, clarity and objectivity. This is mostly dependent on the management of communication strategies with the relevant stakeholders' involvement and a clear cut philosophy. This is the nexus between the mass media, government policies and national development. However, the mismanagement of media communication as it affects government policies even after dissemination if not properly conceived could truncate national development and misrepresent government's good intentions. The crux of the paper focuses on providing empirical perspectives to understanding the place of strategic media forms, channels, processes, audiences in promoting government policies and drawing a synergy with relevant stakeholders in national development.

Keywords: Strategic Media Communication, Stakeholders, Government policy, Engagement, Mass Media, National Development

1.1 Introduction

The strategic role of the Mass media using its diverse channels to communicate government policies in achieving national development in any society is not in doubt. The Mass media in Nigeria as in other democracies is considered to be an integral component of government and governance. Hence, it is often referred to as the fourth estate of the realm. The first, second and third being the Legislative, Executive and the Judiciary respectively. The Mass media have potentials for significant influence on all sectors of the society to foster developmental agenda and execution of policies.

The Nigeria media overtime has consistently been on the vanguard of championing the cause for the development of government policies. It is on the basis of this that the Nigerian constitution has implicit and sacrosanct responsibilities bestowed on the Mass media as enshrined in Section 22 of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution. By this provision, the Mass media is expected to join hands with the government to promote and actualize its programmes and policies that will improve the living standards of the citizenry.

The Nigerian government had evolved developmental programmes and policies which suffered poor execution due to non strategic media and stakeholder's engagement. The Mass media as agencies of policies readily plays its role as purveyor of society and through its development oriented programmes, enlightenment, community relations, media campaigns and other ancillary activities becomes the nexus that is needed to bring to limelight government policies for positive interpretation and implementation.

The thrust of this paper is to identify, examine and propose strategic media communication methodologies and engage the appropriate stakeholders in a dyadic relationship in achieving government policies in Nigeria.

1.2 Conceptual Clarification of Terms

A. Communication

The term communication has been defined severally and more attempts are still been made by scholars to define the term. There are as many definitions of communication as there are writers on the subject each depending on how well it helps to answer the individual needs and situation at hand.

Iyorza (2015) defines communication to refer to a process by which information is exchanged between or among individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behavior.

Nwosu & Fab_Ukozor (2003) as cited in Agbanu (2013) see communication as the verbal and non verbal process by which individuals or groups share ideas, express their opinion or feelings and disseminate information between one another.

According to Ibara (2010), communication is the exchange of information and transmission of meaning which is broadly intended to ensure performance at all levels that result in the implementation of decisions and the achievement of organizational goals.

Uche (2020) defines communication as social engagement and community interaction through purposeful messages.

The basic assumptions are note worthy to enable us capture the ingredients of communication.

- * It involves people (Stakeholders)
- * It involves signs and code (Message)
- *It involves a process (Transmission Channel)
- *It involves social interaction (Engagement)
- *It is within a system (Culture and Policies)

From the above explanation, communication in our context could be said to mean the strategy or process of using messages, signs, behaviour or code to express policies, ideas to someone or people in order to create understanding and achieve a desired intention or programme. In general, communication is a means of connecting people or places.

B. Types of Communication

i. Intra personal communication

The type that goes on within the human body (When we dream, fantasize, consider difficult problem and try to make sense of the world around us particularly the COVID 19 lockdown)

ii. Interpersonal communication

The kind of verbal or non verbal communication that takes place between two people or a small group of more than two people. It used to be referred to as face to face communication but this has changed as a result of the New media convergences of ICTS and Global System for Mobile (GSM)

iii. Intra Group Communication

The exchange of ideas and information among members of a group. It is participatory as all members are participants in the mutual discussion. Examples include Conference calls or teleconferencing.

iv. Group Communication

It is communication between one person and an audience. It is the beginning of unequal communication according to Agbanu (2013). It is unequal because one person does the taking while the others do more of listening.

v. Organizational Communication

This is the kind of communication that takes place in an organization such as large businesses, industries and government institutions. The communication is formal within a defined hierarchy or organizational structure. In this group communication could be vertical or horizontal and roles are defined while organizational culture of house style is required and maintained.

vi. Cybernetic Communication or New media

This is communication and transfer of information from one machine to another. It is from the word Cyber as a prefix to define anything pertaining to cyberspace or online world. Indeed this is the use of machine to generate data and transfer such data to a different place with little or no human assistance. Example (ATM machine and Satellite Cable)

vii. Mass Communication

It is technology assisted transmission of information to a large heterogeneous and anonymous audience members.

Ihechiowa (2017) defined it as the exchange of information through Mass media to large segments of the population at the same time.

To qualify as Mass communication it must be;

- A. Technology assisted (Technology based on ICT)
- B. Mass or Large Audience (Too large to be accommodated in one place)
- C. Dispersed Audience (Scattered in different locations)
- D. Heterogonous audience (Different people, sex, age, ethnic group)
- E. Anonymous Audience (Impersonal)
- F. Active Audience (Freedom to listen or not to listen)

In every communication model, there is a sender, message, channel, receiver, noise and feedback mechanism.

C. The Mass Media

Ohiri (2002) cited in Uche (2012) considers the word media as the plural of the Latin word medium which means path, way or means. The phenomenon or institutions known as the Mass media are the agencies through which message, information, knowledge and Influence are transmitted to certain persons within a specified place.

The Mass media categories include the electronic media, print media, internet media and Tradomedia.

The electronic media include the broadcast media and the narrowcast media. The broadcast media are made up of Radio and television, while the narrowcast media include film, cinema, cables/satellite TV.

The print media includes the newspaper which could be international, national, local, community, weekly, weekend, Sunday, or specialized newspaper. It also includes Magazines of all types (Arts, Business, Online) etc. We also have books, newsletter, pamphlets, leaflets, journal, posters, fliers, directories, billboards.

- D. The internet media. It is also known as Social media, Cybernet or Nee media include Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, telegram, LinkedIn, twitter, Google, YouTube, Blogging etc.

E. The Traditional media (Tradomedia)

The traditional media or Tradomedia is the traditional mode of communication. Despite the complexities and new media convergences, the Tradomedia remains on the structure of the information Super highway and still reliable and effective in reaching out to the majority Nigerian population.

It includes the town crier, the talking drum, oral tradition, moonlight meeting, the village square, the Market, Age grade, etc

2.1 Strategic communication is an integrated communication process towards using the communication tools, forms and channels to actualize a given goal. In this context government policies.

The following steps are required in Strategic communication planning process, because it is not business or routine as usual. It is a new creative form of Mass media solutions template. The steps are as follows:

Step 1: Understanding the policy and problem

*Analysis of the problem of the government policy you want to address. Example (Eradicating Corruption, Food production and fighting insurgency)

*Familiarity with the current situation of the problem

*Policy problem analysis (direct and indirect causes)

*Stakeholders analysis (People directly involved or affected by the policy)

*How informed are the people on the policy.

*What is the communication content and how effective is it in quality and message delivery

*Does the policy enjoy national, ethical and legal endorsement by the relevant stakeholders?

*Are they political, social, religious or civil group support to implement the policy.

*What are the economic, technological and environmental impediments to the policy in the area of engagement.

*What motivates the stakeholders considering their culture, beliefs, values, needs, gender norms and age.

Step 2: Designing Communication Strategy

Develop a Communication Strategy. This is to give a clear vision and dynamic communication strategies to realize the policy.

Examine the communication objective which clarifies the specific policies, norms or national values to address. Use SMART communication objectives

S stands for specific communication you want to achieve

M stands for measurability of the objectives

A stands for the attainability of the objectives

R stands for realistic tendencies to achieve the objectives.

T stands for time bound which indicates when the objectives will be achieved.

Step 3: Channel Mix

This is the strategic use of a combination of Mass Media and communication channels with each other. The use of mix channels helps to reinforce the message. The channel types include;

*Interpersonal channels (One on One communication, social networks, enlightenment training)

*Community based channels (Bulletins, community meeting, stakeholders meeting, parent teachers meeting, community media)

*Mass and social media channels (Television, Radio, Newspapers, billboards, transit advertising, internet, facebook, blogs, SMS, YouTube etc)

However, the following factors can influence the choice of the communication channels. They are:

1. Complexity of the policy issue
2. Sensitivity of the issue
3. Audience Literacy level
4. Media reach
5. Prevailing social norms
6. Media cost
7. Media preference of stakeholders
8. Media habits of stakeholders

Step 4: Develop Implementation Plan

1. Engage the professional media staff to do the work
2. Budget for the media execution
3. Identify and intimate the stakeholders to partner in the media execution

Step 5: Evaluation of the media strategies

This is very important and required to measure the success or failure of the strategic communication plan. This will also help in sharing the findings, analysis within the media house and decision to improve or adjust the strategic communication plan.

2.2 Key Stakeholders in Government Policy Implementation

Strategic communication is cardinal and critical in motivating the citizenry to engage in media message need. The Stakeholders engagement ensures feedback from them to respond to government policies positively.

In Nigeria some of the stakeholders include the Youths, Women, Children, albinos, the physically challenged, the displaced persons, politicians, professional group, civil rights

group, students, religious Leaders, health personnel, the agitators, the aged, military, judiciary, military and others not mentioned.

These stakeholders are affected by the police decision of government in one way or the other. Therefore, a careful strategic media communication template should be evolved to address the government policy as it affects them in their peculiar situations.

3.1 Strategic Media Communication and Stakeholders Engagement in Democracy Policy

Many developing countries including Nigeria have emphasized and promoted the enactment of democratic political culture in their countries. This has led to neo-liberal policies, such that the media have been deregulated, liberalized, privatized and commercialized. This Oso (2012) points out is all with the hope of deepening their democratic role as the Mass media are essential in the process of building a democratic policy and polity.

The Mass media should be strategically involved in a total departure from the 1st and 2nd republic media strategy where they were operated along ethnic and Inter group relations. The Mass Media was mostly used for unedifying role of publishing what differentiate, rather than what binds us members of a country.

During elections, the mass media are perceived to wield enormous influence on the people especially on their participation in the electoral process. Whatever the stakeholders hold as information is communicated by the Mass media.

The Mass media has proven that it is impossible to do political campaigns without adequate media coverage. Therefore, the mass media should develop strategies and responsible communication in fostering public enlightenment and accountability by giving the public a critical analysis of policies, to promote effective popular participation in government by keeping the people informed.

The media should also be strategically engaged in political Mobilization. This is the role of the Mass media in creating awareness, interpretation of issues, personalities, programmes to motivate the citizens to exercise their franchise and take political informed decisions to participate in elections and help deepen the democratic policy of government.

The Mass media should engage in political sensitization in conjunction with the relevant electoral bodies to educate the citizenry on voting procedure, conducts during elections, campaign procedures, campaign against rigging, electoral violence and other vices associated with the political process.

The Mass media is also involved in political education and media debate is one of the potent ways of achieving government policy of providing political education for the masses. The media should also make the elected public office holders accountable by initiating programmes that will bring them closer to explain their stewardship. This should also be engaged to enable them present their manifesto before running for elections .It has to be done without prejudice or bias as all parties and its candidates should be given fair opportunities to sell themselves to the voters.

The vision 20_2020 is organized on Political participation through political education and enlightenment of the stakeholders. The Mass media should from time to time conduct objective opinion poll on democratic policies and key players in this sector to assess the public acceptance or rejection as it is done in other developed democracies.

The Mass media should engage in participatory democratic regime that is all inclusive and truly participatory and ensure the degree of openness of media channels to a wide range of voices. According to McQuail (2012), especially those with little Power or limited resources who in a thoroughly mediated World should be provided the political participation platform using the Mass media.

3.2 Strategic Communication and Stakeholders Engagement in Agricultural policy

Ensuring food security and sustainable agricultural policy is one of the major government policy thrust in any administration. The Mass media engagement in information sharing and training of all agro stakeholders has been identified as key to food security in Nigeria. Isiaka (2012) opines that a well informed literate and highly skilled farmer has ten times the likelihood of efficient agro _resource utilization than the illiterate one. Communication and the Mass media play the role of producing a knowledgeable farmer.

The media must engage in this skilled and strategic agro information to ensure implementation of comprehensive national agricultural policy. The intensive development journalism practice by Agricultural Communication Practitioners (ACPs) with a strong advocacy shift will sensitize the citizenry and the relevant stakeholders that implement agricultural policies.

The Mass media should formulate specific agro communication policies to address the issue of rapid enlightenment, education, training and retraining of farmers using telecentres, community learning centres, mass campaigns in rural and farming settlements. The use of the New media is gradually gaining ground in developing countries with mobile phones, SMS, and the internet is increasing among rural farmers and should be employed.

The use of folk media and traditional media should also be engaged and targeted at the rural population's attitude towards nutrition, agriculture and their related issues. Print materials used by extension workers, radio programmes on agriculture, television and other multimedia technologies that cover all areas of agriculture and the stakeholders.

The actions of effective implementation of government policies in agriculture can be effective when the Mass media motivates all stakeholders in agriculture and rural development into quick actions in promoting effective food production and desired food security. This may be feasible only if the agricultural journalist wield their powers as watchdogs and agenda builders as well as push development journalism to a level where the information needs of the pro- poor farmers are met

3.3 Strategic Media Communication and Stakeholders Engagement in Health Policy Implementation

Health is a critical policy issue in any nation. Full realizations of global health have now more than ever been confronted by unprecedented challenges and continue to unfold uniquely. In the face of these challenges, especially the recent COVID 19 pandemic, the attainment of both good health and health equity remains a policy thrust of the government. The World Health Organization incorporates the five key action area in Health promotion namely;

*Build healthy public policy

*Create supportive environment for health

*Strengthen community action for health

*Develop personal skills

*Reorient health services

(Gothae & Opara, 2016)

In the accomplishment of these key action areas the Mass media should use strategic communication strategies to enable, mediate and advocate on health policies. This must happen when there is community and stakeholders engagement for decision making based on evidence based plan.. Some of the new health challenges are the rising prevalence of chronic diseases. The reason why these health challenges are prevalent is because many people according to Yta (2015) do not have adequate knowledge about the causes, prevention and treatment of the diseases.

The Mass media should strategize and develop a people centered health (PCH) reportage and promotions. The people centered health media project advocates for a process where all the media apparatus is employed to identify health related issues and policy of government. When they are identified, a strategic media plan, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities which are community based should be prompted.

The future of health education policy and promotions is dependent on people centered principles and should involve community participation. There is need to have a high level stakeholders forum with relevant government officials at all levels and those in the health practice and community stakeholders.

The imperative of Mass media education is paramount not only to eradicate diseases but build a positive value on health policy overtime. The Mass media as part of its social responsibility and agenda setting functions should through its programmes and content promote health policy thrust of government.

3.4 Strategic Communication and Stakeholders Engagement in Fighting Insurgency, Agitations and Crisis

No nation of the world can thrive and achieve national development policy and targets in the midst of crisis. These crisis ranges from Insurgency, Agitations, Communal war, Herdsmen attack, Electoral violence among others. Uche (2020) posits that the crisis has been so distributed among the Six geo political zones of Nigeria with Boko Haram in the North East, Herdsmen attack in the North Central, Banditry and Cow rustling in the North West, IPOB Agitation in the South East, Niger Delta Militants in the South South and Kidnapping in the South West.

In order to foster developmental agenda of government and provide solutions to conflict, the Mass media must play its role with utmost fairness and objectivity. The mismanagement of communication strategies according to Owoicho, Bello and Waziri (2019) has contributed to a large extent to the crisis and the media has consciously and unconsciously aided the rise of crisis through some of the information disseminated through their channels.

The symbolic symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorism may be a dangerous one. Terrorists possess an overwhelming influence of attracting global attention using the Mass media. Indeed the Mass media platforms have served a viable access to agitators including IPOB, Shittes, Niger Delta Militants, Boko Haram or by whatever name they are

called. The media has a great role to play in these crisis-torn situations as crisis and conflict are two deterrents to the implementation of government policies.

Ekeanyanwu (2007) stresses that Nigeria mass media should develop a Communication media strategy that is more attuned to developmental reporting and addressing crisis issues. He further opines that caution is required by the Mass media in reporting crisis issues that undermine the unity of the country. Such issues include politically motivated crisis, godfatherism, election rigging, ethnic clashes, judicial handling of elections and judicial interpretation.

There should be drastic attitude change media counter terrorism campaign. Hence, the De-Bokoharamization campaign as proposed by Ibrahim, Gujbawu and Aji (2019) should have the right combination of not only seeking the condemnation and dehumanization of the terrorists and their activities but also seeking protection for the vulnerable groups such as children and women.

Uche (2019) advocates for Peace journalism in dealing with crisis, conflicts and insurgency in Nigeria. Peace must be maintained at all cost and no amount of resources expended can be too much for the maintenance of peace and harmony in any society. The Mass media is a very important stakeholder in this direction.

For the Mass media to achieve the desired objectives of crisis and conflict management, there is the need for the Mass media to train its reporters and personnel who engage in crisis and conflict reporting on peace journalism which promotes alternative methods to resolving conflicts through mediation and cooperation. The Mass media should involve development journalism by public advocacy and education of the community in crisis time by proper information management and counteracting public fears and uncertainties about such. This the media can do by providing timely, factual and accurate information on the crisis to avoid distortion. The Mass media and all relevant stakeholders should be engaged including the youths in violence prone areas to assuage them and resolve conflicts.

The Mass media holds a fundamental position in positive societal engineering and should stick to its professional code of ethics and be unbiased in the reportage of crisis nor fan the embers of crisis and conflict. If this is treated with kid gloves or ethnic coloration and loyalty as Mustapha and Abdulbagi (2012) stated, the media will do a lot of irredeemable damage to the corporate existence of the country it serves and thereby may transform from being the fourth estate of the realm into the fourth estate of the wreck as it may wreck the society it serves

Community dialogue is also an integral part of crisis, conflict management and community participation in development of government policies. The stakeholders such as the traditional rulers, youths, women, religious leaders and others should be effectively engaged to resolve conflicts and community crisis. The Mass media can be a community dependent Ally.

3.5 Strategic Media and Stakeholders Engagement in fighting Corruption

The cardinal policy thrust of the present administration is the fight against corruption. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation and the Mass media as a socially responsible organ cannot afford to sit and watch because even the Mass media is not spared from the decadence. The list is endless from the National assembly, the educational institutions the police, religious groups, political parties, among others. The implications are that corruption affects the Nation's economy and diplomatic policy so negatively. It distorts

public spending by deflating allocated resources away from the original purposes. It discourages investment and growth indices and places participants at risk of international castigation.

The Mass media as the watchdog of society should in line with its social responsibility agenda develop a Communication Strategy for naming and shaming in their contents production. The hardworking should be extolled while the corrupt should be exposed and condemned by the Mass media. The era of fanning the embers of corrupt officials and celebrating them should be jettisoned.

The media and all stakeholders should deploy all the available and appropriate media, advertising and public relations as well as News formats, editorials, opinion, documentary, talks show, features among others to publicize cases of corruption.

The Mass media should also educate and encourage the public to report cases of corruption to the appropriate authorities promote public awareness of the evil of corruption and make advocacy campaign to the legislature and government to implement policy and legal instruments to make corruption and its practice unattractive. The Mass media should in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders such as the civil rights society, religious leaders, community traditional rulers, and transparent organizations with integrity to promote ethics and best practices.

4.1 Conclusion

The paper has carefully examined the concept of communication with all its adjuncts and forms. It also explored the issue of government policies vis a vis the implementation through the engagement of the stakeholders and particularly the communication strategies as presently engaged by the Mass media. It also took a review of the strategies being employed by the Mass media in addressing the policy implementation in selected critical areas such as health, agriculture, corruption, crisis, agitations, insurgency, political participation just to mention.

The paper has not exhausted the discussion of Stakeholders engagement as they abound. There are still other grey areas where the media engagement is highly solicited. They include citizen journalism, Gender, Equality, Media Imperialism, The vulnerable, Women and Children, The Displaced persons, Civil society, Youths, The education sector among others. However, these areas will be recommended for another study. The fact is that the media holds the ace to fashioning out strategies to address misconceptions, misrepresentation and implementation of government policies.

4.2 Recommendations

The recommendations are as follows:

1. The need for more research in new strategies of stakeholders and media engagement in the implementation of government policies and should be conducted regularly.
2. The need to engage peace journalism and development communication in journalism engagement to implement government policies.
3. The training and retraining of journalists to conform to the professional ethics and best practices

4. The Mass media to ensure its engagement of the agenda setting and social responsibility template with the relevant stakeholders.
5. The need for the stakeholders to exercise the gate keeping function and check fake news and the rascality of the new media operators.
6. The need to effectively engage a combination of the other media forms with the traditional media forms relevant to the community
7. The protection of the media personnel in the dispatch of their duties and be accorded welfare privileges.

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