ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Impact of Communication Policy on The Activities of Media Organisations in Ondo State

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Abstract

This study evaluates the influence of communication policy on the practice of journalism in Nigeria and the perception of journalists on the existence of communication policies in Nigeria. The study employed the survey design. The population was made up of all the journalists in Ondo State which are about 639. The researchers employed Philip Meyer sampling guide to sample 100 journalists to form the sample frame. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Findings revealed that the communication policies have helped to repeal restrictive laws in journalism practice, maintain self-regulations, increase in licensing of broadcasters and review the broadcasting code. The study also revealed that the communication policies do not allow free access to information in Nigeria and that it gives more power to government to control the press. The study concluded that the policies are established to register, regulate and control media in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the regulation approaches include licensing, monitoring, sanctioning defaulters, intervening and arbitrating in conflicts and other control measures.

Keywords: Influence, Communication Policy, Media Practice

INTRODUCTION

As cited by Uwom and Alao (2013), Gadzekpo (1997, p. 34) asserts that there is a correlation between communication and development needs. This standpoint agrees with Schramm (1964) that there is a link between adequate flow of information and social change and development. Uwom and Alao (2013) further argue that in most African and developing countries, the importance of communication cannot be detached from independence in that the media was used as a tool of liberation from colonial masters. To harness the different media outlets in any country, there is need for a policy to guide the operations so that they can work towards a common goal. This underscores the importance of a national communication policy.

Arbatani, Labafi and Khajeheian (2012) citing Des Freedman's formulation of media policy refers to it as the "formal as well as informal strategies, underpinned by specific interests, values and goals that shape the emergence of mechanisms designed to structure the direction of and behaviour in particularly media environments".

According to Lee (1976, p.33) cited Uwom and Alao (2013, p.63), UNESCO defines communication policy as "sets of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems." Boafo (1986 p.37) expounds that "a national communication policy enunciates the goals, objectives and functions of communication systems and aims at dovetailing these with the overall socio-economic, political and cultural development goals of the society." Arbatani, Labafi and Khajeheian (2012) define media policy as "compiling the major and strategic policies toward media, in consideration to media climate and public situation, so that offers a clear direction for media management activities to reach the missions and the goals, and offers a framework which media operational programs design and act within".

The basic purpose of a national communication policy according to Nnaemeka (1989, p.3) is using the mass media to achieve accelerated growth and transformation of the society, in different spheres and at different levels of national life. He further states that a deliberate and coherent mass communication policy is important for the media to play a distinguished role in the establishment and furtherance of a desirable new social order in post-Colonial Nigeria.

Although it has often been argued that communication policy has been largely technology driven, most of the decisions taken to deal with change are framed by political, economic, and

institutional dimensions as well as by international factors (Papathanassopoulos, 2017). The importance of communication policy lies in its linkage with politics, technology, and economics. The globalization of capital, markets, and competition, the convergence of the media, and the entry of new and global actors, both private and public, make the study of media and communications policy a relevant and exciting research field (Papathanassopoulos & Negrine, 2010).

However, the communication policy in Nigeria has some influence on the practice of journalism profession. In many cases, the government and journalists have disagreed about the application of the policies which have affected the practice of the profession. For instance, during the General Ibrahim Babangida military Junta in Nigeria, Mr. Dele Giwa, the editor-in-chief of the *Concord Newspaper* was charged to court for breach of the Official Secrets Act after his refusal to disclose his source of information. He was however discharged and acquitted on technical grounds otherwise he would have come under the legal sledge hammer. In view of the issues bordering on the use of communication policies in the practice of Journalism, the study seeks to determine the influence of communication policy on media practice in Ondo State.

Statement of the Problem

Communication has the capacity for awareness creation, consensus building, citizenship participation, engagement and involvement in developmental process. Government has the sole responsibility of providing the mechanism for the use of communication in developmental process: This is achieved through communication policy. Adekoya and Ajilore (2012) stated that Nigeria had a near perfect communication policy but with a fundamental problem of its implementation. Adekoya and Ajilore (2012) attributed this problem of implementation to certain economic and ethical factors such as poverty, corruption and unwholesome practices of media practitioners.

Pate, Akinfeleye, and Oso (2016) acknowledge the existence of Nigeria's communication policy but expressed concern about its poor implementation as a result of pervasive corruption, difficult operational climate, urban-centered journalism, weakening government investments, and failing public media sector. They called for the review of the national communication policy to accommodate an implementation strategy that should simultaneously take place at the federal, state and local levels, while re-stating the need to de-emphasize urban journalism. Pate, Akinfeleye, and Oso (2016) stress that the Nigerian government should identify organs through which the national communication policy would be implemented, as well carry out research and measurement of its effectiveness, and involve stakeholders such as the private sector, civil society and political parties in the review process. In view of these various viewpoints, this paper examines the influence of communication policy on the practice of journalism in Ondo State.

Objective of the Study

This study has two objectives, which include:

1. To determine perception of journalists on the existence of communication policies in Ondo State.
2. To ascertain the extent to which the communication policies influence the practice of journalism in Ondo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Communication Policy

Communication policy has been variously defined by scholars and ideologues. Based on the different stances, communication policy is a comprehensive document guiding the communication transactions of a given state. The mother concept 'policy' is derived from the Greek word "Politicia" relating to policy that is 'citizen' and the Latin word "politis" meaning polished, that is to say 'clear'. These policies which are generally formulated at top level help managers' sufficient freedom to make judgments and helps to achieve the organizational goals and objectives. According to Sarikapis (2004), media and community policy refer to "the general

principles which guide the decision of the authorities usually government about the function of the mass media". It is centered on the structures, organizations and regulation of the communication process of the given society.

Communication policy focuses on the legal, ethical, political, economic, infrastructural and social system within which public communication and the media system operate and function. It is politically regulated (constitutional provision) and in some cases self-regulated (professional ethical standards) in guiding the activities of key actors in the communication sphere of the public domain. Sobowale (1988) defines communication policy as "a careful, consistent and workable plan of action formulated by government or any other agency to harness the benefits of the process for the wellbeing of all Nigerians". It is the definition and description of the media within the sociopolitical and economic context of a given society.

Communication Policy in Nigeria

The Nigerian National Communication Policy was introduced in 1987 under President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's military rule. It was not until 1990 that the federal executive council approved it for use at the national level (Suleiman, 2018). It was the result of a one-week seminar organized by the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture with the help of a highly motivated interdisciplinary group of academics, experts, practitioners, and administrators from all the key related and auxiliary fields of mass communication. The philosophy and goals of the policy are covered in a chapter of the document. Other chapters cover a range of topics related to Nigeria's mass media (Suleiman, 2018).

The policy needed to be reviewed in September 2004 due to the demands of society's dynamism brought about by changes in communication and information technology and information resource constraints. The current Nigerian National Communication Policy was created as a result of this exercise in July 2010. The reason for the policy include to:

1. Positively affect the quality of life of the peoples of Nigeria.
2. Facilitate coordination and systematic enhancement of national communication strategies and activities to support development.
3. Promote participation in national dialogue on development issues by all citizens, consistent with the emerging democratic culture and national constitutional provisions.
4. Foster access to information and communication infrastructure and new technologies for all citizens.
5. Promote assessment, adaptation and adoption of technological and other communication innovations.
6. Preserve national culture identity, promote the national cultural patrimony and enhance the development of cultural and artistic capabilities and institutions for public communication.
7. Ensure timely, orderly and effective growth of information and communication institutions through professional standards setting, capacity building and human resource development.
8. Promote interchange of balanced information at community, national regional and international level.
9. Protect and promote the right and security of women, youth, children and the physically challenged.
10. Ensure repeal of all laws and statutes that impede the development and growth of independent media (NNCP, 2010, p. 4).

According to Michael and Kayode (2014), the policy's core values are increased life quality, information exchange, development, access to information, and information infrastructure. The policy suggests a desire on the government's part is to employ existing communication systems to promote national growth and create an informed populace through discussion of and exchange of information about important national issues.

Adekoya and Ajilore (2012) demonstrate how communication focused on providing the general public with the information they need would encourage them to take part in the development process, how an adequate communication policy could be executed to raise national development,

how the press can act as a platform for state - wide movements to assist of policies and practices aimed at enhancing the quality of life of Nigerians, and how raising the general public's level of consciousness can all contribute to national development. The Nigerian National Communication Policy specifies the following functions for the print media: To

1. Promote the exchange of ideas and information through accurate and balanced reporting as well as informed and objective comments.
2. Protect the basic interest of the public and ensure quality independent journalism.
3. Uphold the principle of plurality of ownership and control.
4. Prevent monopoly and concentration of media resources and infrastructure.
5. Improve feedback with readers through interactive technologies and practices.
6. Support the growth, development and utilisation of broadband multimedia and future emergent technologies.
7. Reflect the centrality of development efforts (NNCP, 2010, p.6).

The objectives of this policy and the functions assigned to the print media are in line with the development media theory, which states that the media must accept and carry out positive development task in line with nationally established policy without prejudice to their traditional functions.

Therefore, the media must at all times ensure the development and progress of the country where they operate (Folarin, 1998). The media, because of their inherent qualities, should be a companion of government in development. Alao and Johnson (2013) underscore the importance of communication policy to addressing the imperfections of communication flow by providing a system of regulations that guide organisations, institutions and nations, and to fast track development. It is in recognition of these roles that the NNCP was established. The NNCP mandated the country's media to carry out their functions with the goal of aligning with government to bring about the development, progress and stability of the country. The NNCP adopted certain strategies to (a) positively affect the quality of life of the people, (b) Promote participation in national dialogue on development issues by all citizens, and (c) Promote interchange of balanced information at community, national regional and international levels.

Theoretical Framework

The gatekeeping theory serves as the theoretical foundation of this study. This theory is the "chocolate ice yoghurt of mass communication theory," claims Roberts (2005). This is due to the fact that, despite not being a favourite of every mass communication researcher, almost all of them can tolerate it. Additionally, despite its unremarkable flavour, it is used as a foundation for other theory and research perspectives. The gatekeeping theory was first mentioned by Robert Park in 1922 when he wrote in an article that the editor selects certain events for publication that he believes to be more important or interesting than others out of all the activities that occur and are recorded every day by journalists. He consigns the rest to obscurity and the trash can.

However, Lewin (1943) formally stated the gatekeeping theory when he used the term to describe individuals who control food channels and use within groups during the World War II and later to describe those who generally control transmission of media fare (Folarin, 2002).

The fundamental premise of this theory, which was put forth long before the Internet, is that no major media outlet can transmit all of the reports it receives throughout the course of a typical day. Some people must make decisions regarding which data to communicate, which to reject, which to modify, and which to completely delete. These people essentially open and close the "gate" that separates the information source from the audience. However, gatekeeping goes beyond simply accepting and rejecting information; it also encompasses structuring (editing), displaying, timing, emphasising messages, and other tasks (Folarin, 2002, p.95).

The main tenet of the gatekeeping theory,

according to Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso (2008, p.91), is that major media organisations and influential media figures serve as barriers to the mass of data coming from society at large. The gates can be either opened to allow for the processing and publication of some types of information or closed to prevent the processing and publication of other types of information.

Gatekeeping, as further defined by Shoemaker and Vos (2009), is the process of selecting and assembling the restricted messages that are delivered to people on a daily basis. It is at the core of the media's function in public life. The procedure establishes not only the information that is chosen but also the nature and content of messages, such as news. They further explain the gatekeeping process as follows:

1. In exercising its "surveillance" function, every news medium has a very large number of stories brought to its attention daily by reporters, wire services, and a variety of other sources.
2. Due to a number of practical considerations, only a limited amount of time or space is available in any medium for its daily presentation of the news to its audience. The remaining space must be devoted to advertising and other content.
3. Within any news organization there exists a new perspective, a subculture that includes a complex set of criteria for judging a particular news story – criteria based on economic needs of the medium, organizational policy, definition of newsworthiness, conception of the nature of relevant audience, and belief about fourth estate obligations of journalists.
4. This news perspective and its complex criteria are used by editors, news directors, and other personnel who select a limited number of news stories for presentation to the public and encode them in ways such that the requirements of the medium and the tastes of the audience are met.
5. Therefore some personnel in the news organization become "gatekeepers", letting some stories pass through the system but keeping others out, thus limiting, controlling, and shaping the public's knowledge of the totality of actual events occurring in reality.

Roberts (2005) points out that the chief value of the gatekeeping theory comes from summarizing the various forces that come into play as news people make decisions about what messages will be selected to present to their audiences. Its major weakness, however, is that it is fundamentally a descriptive theory with a normative bent that offers little if any predictive power.

Methodology

This paper employed a survey method. The population of study consisted of registered journalists working within Ondo State. The population of the study was 639 journalists in Ondo State. A sample of 100 journalists was drawn for the study, using Philip Meyer sampling guide (Senam & Akpan, 2014). This sample was obtained using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Simple random sampling technique was then used to obtain the individual sampled journalists for the study. This was done using a table of random numbers. This approach of using a table of random numbers in simple random sampling has been successfully put to use by many communication researchers (Bordens & Abbott, 2002). A questionnaire was designed as an instrument to obtain data for the study.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The bio data of respondents shows that 35 representing 35% were female while 65 respondents representing 65% were male. The data also shows that a majority of the respondents are bachelor's degree holders. This implies that the majority of respondents had a higher qualification and as such were exposed to media and understood the subject of discourse.

Table 1 shows the level of the journalists' awareness of the communication policy. 57% and 31% of the respondents said that the level of awareness of the communication policy is very high and high respectively. This implies that the level of awareness was very high.

Table 1: Level of Awareness of the existence of communication policy

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	57	57
High	31	31
Low	12	12
Total	100	100

Table 2: Journalists' Perception of effectiveness of communication Policy

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfactory	66	66
Satisfactory	29	29
Undecided/neutral	3	3
Unsatisfied	2	2
Total	100	100

Table 2 shows journalists' perception of communication policy in Ondo State. A majority of respondents 66% and 29% were very satisfied and satisfied respectively with the existence of the communication policy in the practice of journalism.

Table 3 shows that 72%, 81%, 69% and 85% of the respondents admitted that the communication Policies have helped to repeal restrictive laws in journalism practice, maintain self -regulations, increase in licensing of broadcasters and review broadcasting code respectively.

Table 4 shows that a majority of the respondents 88%, 74%, 65% respectively believe the communication policies allow free access to information in Ondo State, increase government control of the press and place more responsibility on the journalists.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the level of the journalists' awareness of the communication policy. The majority of the respondents believe that the level of awareness of the communication policy is very high in the state. The findings of the study agree with Job (2014) who notes that the operation of broadcast journalists in Nigeria has shown that they have very high knowledge of NBC code. This study also corroborates Anaeto and Anaeto's (2010) study which avers that awareness of communication

Table 3: Perception of Journalists on the existence of communication policies in Nigeria

Item	Yes %	No %	Total %
Repeal of restrictive laws	72	28	100%
Self-regulation	81	19	100%
Increase in licensing of broadcasters	69	31	100%
Review of broadcasting code	85	15	100%

Table 4: Influence of Nigeria communication policies on the practice of journalism in Nigeria

Item	Yes %	No %	Total %
It allows free access to information	88	22	100%
It increases government control of the press	74	26	100%
It restricts the press freedom	14	86	100%
It places more responsibility on the media	65	35	100%

policy allows the journalists to understand the needs, resources and ability of a nation, and it is relevant to the social, political and cultural conditions of the nation. It is a policy that should contain information on different media, their uses, messages and training for communication personnel. The policy makes provision for application of funds and resources for communication activities. The policy also addresses the issue of ownership in the media and government roles in regulation.

Table 2 shows journalists' perception of communication policy in Ondo State. A majority of respondents 66% and 29% were very satisfied and satisfied respectively with the existence of the communication policy in the practice of journalism. Table 3 shows that the respondents admitted that the communication Policies have helped to repeal restrictive laws in journalism practice. This aligned with the NNCP's view (2010, p.21) that one of the strategies to promote exchange of ideas and information flow among the citizens, protect the basic interest of the public, and improve feedback with readers was to abrogate laws restricting freedom of information. The NNCP states that the state shall enact laws that promote access to information and the free and balanced flow of information, and ensure repeal of all laws impeding the free–flow of information (NNCP 2010, p.14). The government has repealed laws that inhibited media freedom. Such laws include those dealing with circulation of newspaper decree 2 of 1966, offensive publication decree 35 of 1993, the official secret act, sections 50-52 of the criminal code on sedition and sections 373-379 of the criminal code on criminal defamation to mention a few. Ownership of media by citizens, groups and associations is now permitted.

Also, the communication policy allows maintenance of self-regulations. The print media in consonance with the NNCP 2010 implementation strategies is allowed to practice self-regulation through an independent media commission. This independent body is the Nigerian Press Organisation (NPO). The NPO administers a code of ethics prepared by professional media organizations. The organization comprises media practitioners and government appointees with experience in communication. In 2017 the NPO banned all 'beat associations' in the country for reasons of unethical practices involving financial and material corruption. Members of the NPO such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists have a code of ethics that guides the conduct of their members in the performance of their functions. The NPO is the promoter of the observance of the code as a means of holding the print media accountable to the public. The other perception of the communication policy is the increase in licensing of broadcasters and review of broadcasting code respectively. The first implementation strategy for the broadcast media (NNCP 2010, p.15) is to "recognize and promote three tiers of broadcasting, public, private/ commercial and community". This resulted in the increase of licenses to commercial and community broadcasters, and expansion of public broadcasting network. As at 2012 the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) licensed 402 operational broadcasters of which 123 were privately owned. There were also 233 radio and television stations owned by the federal and state governments, as well as 46 cable stations. This was not the situation before 1990 when the NNCP was approved. The number of government owned broadcasting stations was far lower compared to the current figure.

The outcome of the study also shows that the communication policies do allow free access to information in Ondo State and that they give more power to government to control the press. Also, the communication policies are dents on the freedom of the press. In many cases, the government applied the policies to deny free access to information or to imprison journalists. For instance, in 2006, Mr. Gbenga Aruleba, a presenter at the African Independent Television (AIT) Abuja was arrested by state security operatives and charged to court for treason. His offence was probing into the purchase of an aircraft for the former President, Olusegun Obasajo. Instead of the government to release the plane's documents showing whether it was new or refurbished as Aruleba alleged, it resorted to arrest

and threat. The government was later pressurized by civil rights organizations and the media to drop the charge brought on Mr. Aruleba.

Conclusion

Communication policy and regulation is one of the instruments used by the society to check media content and portrayal. The political system of a country determines the direction its regulations follow. In Nigeria, the policies are established to register, regulate and control media in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the commission's regulation approaches include licensing, monitoring, sanctioning defaulters, intervening and arbitrating in conflicts and other control measures. The communication policies are used by the commission in-charge to perform all these duties with overt showcase of bias against the private stations, thus, making it an "irregular" regulator. It is believed that the inability of administrator of media policies to exercise its duties independently rests on the fact that the power to issue licenses is with the president, and not the commission. Also, the laws erroneously gave the commission too much powers – making it a regulator and an arbitrator – thus it commits some fundamental flaws that places the country far behind other nations in terms of positive regulation. As an aftermath of the licenses being issued by the country's supreme political authority, the commission would always bend the rules to protect the stations established by government. This scenario fosters the principles of the authoritarian theory. In order to uphold democratic principles in a period Nigeria is being re-branded, it would be pertinent to adopt the principles of the libertarian theory by reviewing the policy formulators and the policy application, and create an equal competitive atmosphere for all and sundry. This will be in line with the international standard that preaches against indecent content but in favour of equal opportunities and the fairness doctrine (Dominick, 2009). Nigeria should emulate the success stories of the media atmosphere in Britain, USA, Ghana and South Africa among other nations.

Recommendations

Based on this, the study recommends that

1. The policy document should refrain from dabbling into the criteria for news determination as this a professional issue which should be left for mass media professionals to handle. There are enough safeguards in our statutes and professional codes of ethics to guard against journalistic excesses and recklessness. Indeed a national communication policy that dabbles into this core area of journalistic practice diminishes its essence because of the difficulty in enforcing such a policy.
2. In reviewing the existing national communication policy, emphasis should be placed on the protection of journalists from the hands of unscrupulous media owners. Perhaps, one of the greatest problems of journalistic practice in Nigeria today is that of irresponsible or exploitative employers who treat journalists' welfare with levity.
3. Similarly, due to the hazards associated with journalism practice in Nigeria, the policy document should stipulate among other things provision of life insurance cover for all journalists working in mass media organizations. Any media owner who cannot provide such should not even be allowed to open shop in the first place.
4. The national communication policy document should stipulate minimum standards and qualifications for entry into the journalism profession in Nigeria. The situation where the profession is still an all comers' affair after over 150 years is unacceptable. There should also be acceptable minimum conditions of service to be guaranteed by potential media owners in the policy document.

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