

MEDIA CONGLOMERATION AND MINORITY VOICES: NIGERIAN TELEVISION AUTHORITY AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This study is essentially about Media Conglomeration and Minority Voices. It looks into the nature, effects, impacts and consequences of Media Conglomeration on production, dissemination and consumption of Media products or contents. The implications of Media Conglomeration on the roles the media play as central political and social institutions in an evolving democracy like Nigeria's are also considered in this study. Using the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, as a case study, the research assesses the impacts of all the above on the Minority Voices in Nigeria. Findings show that in Nigeria, Minority Voices are really multi-dimensional cutting across tribal, ethnic, social as well as economic divides and that though NTA had tried to give minority voices representation in its productions and contents through the establishment of multiple local and specialized channels, much still has to be done in ensuring that all the over four hundred ethnic groups in the country are given fair and just representations, even if not equal opportunities.

Keywords: Communication, Media, Conglomerates, Media Conglomeration, Minority Voices.

Introduction

Matters relating to the concept of Media Conglomeration have for long been receiving attentions from scholars in the field of communication, policymakers and stakeholders in the industry. The phenomenon touches on wide interrelated issues which include questions on diversity, competition and market control. However, the greatest concern it ever raised is on the societal implications of a situation where large Conglomerates lord it over the global Communication system. The emergency of Media Conglomeration and all that goes with it has been a global phenomenon cutting across the United States of America, United Kingdom and Countries in Europe as well as Asia among others. Africa also has a fair share of it even if not in the proportions and dimensions obtainable in these earlier cited places. Of course,

Nigeria being an integral part of the African continent and even the self styled Giant of Africa is not insulated from this development in the mass communication spheres of human life. Since, it will be practically impossible because of time and geographical constraints to cover the whole of Africa, the study has Nigeria as its scope. The study will be using the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, as a case study. The choice of NTA is because of its place in the history of electronic Media in Africa and Nigeria in particular, operational national, continental and International outlooks, expansive spread across Nigeria and above all possession of virtually all features of a Media Conglomerate.

Theory

The public spheres theory was adopted for the study. This theory emanated from German word "Offentlichkeit" which refers to an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through such discussions influence social, economic and political actions. The term was originally coined by German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas. According to him, the public spheres are "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of the society." He goes further to assert that "We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs". This 'public sphere' is a "realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens". This theory is of relevance to this study in that Media Conglomeration has been having huge negative impacts, with dire consequences, on the Minority Voices, at all fronts and in all ramifications, to the extent that it has been generating and will continue to generate discussions across the globe among scholars and stakeholders on the way out. McChesny (1997) and Bagdikian (2004) are among notable scholars working who have been asking questions about how far and at what price a Communication system can be dominated by a handful of corporations, and how this might affect the diversity of information and argument needed for effective and well-informed citizenship. Such concerns make this study inevitable.

Methodology

Conceptual research methodology which according to Enago (2019) focuses on the concept or theory that explains or describes the phenomenon being studied was adopted for this piece.

Conceptual research is defined as a methodology wherein research is conducted by observing and analyzing already present information on a given topic. Conceptual research doesn't involve conducting any practical experiments. It is related to abstract concepts or idea. This is complimented by historical research method.

Communication

Communication as a concept, process, activity, means of interaction within a social context or a field of study, among others, is opened to so many definitions. That is why Oloyede (2008) says it is hardly possible to fully and comprehensively explain a subject like Communication in a single definition. In fact there are as many definitions of communication as those defining it. Be that as it may, Fatimayin (2018) observes that the general view of communication is that it is an interaction within a social context which usually involves a sender (source) and a receiver. According to her, it involves the interlocutors exchanging signals. These signals could be verbal or graphic, gestural or visual (photographic). She goes further to state that

Communication involves using codes that are done with the eyes, body movement or sounds made with the voice. Whichever way it is done, there is always a process in which someone initiates a meaning intent that is passed to the interlocutor (receiver).

The Oxford Advanced Dictionary of Current English (2004) sees Communication as the activity or process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information. Thus it entails the act of transferring information from one place to another and from one person to another person. To Daniel (2013), Communication involves participants reaching a mutual understanding beyond merely encoding and decoding information, news, ideas and feelings.

Media

According to *Macmillan dictionaryblog.com*, media is a plural form of the Latin word "medium" meaning "middle ground or intermediate." It goes further to state that its usage as a word to describe newspapers, radio and other sources of information likely derives from the term "Mass Media" which was a technical term used in advertising industry from the 1920s on.

Dictionary.com defines media as the means of communication, like radio and television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet that reach or influence people widely. To *marketbusiness.com*, the term media refers to the Communication channels through which we disseminate news, music, movies, education, promotional messages and data. It includes physical and online newspapers and magazines, television, show radio, billboards, telephone, the internet and fax. Janssen (2017) in *techopaedia.com* says the term refers to components of the Mass Media Communication industry, such as print media, publishing, the news media, photography, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), digital media and advertising.

Conglomerate

A Conglomerate, according to Cambridge dictionary is a company that owns several smaller businesses whose products or Services are usually different. To *yourdictionary.com* a Conglomerate is a large corporation formed by the merger or acquisition of a number of companies. Kurtovic, Siljkovic and Dalsic (2013) describe Conglomerate Companies as emerging markets phenomenon. The phenomenon cuts across all spheres of businesses and industries e.g. trading, finance, industry and media.

Media Conglomerate/ Conglomeration

Wikipedia says a media conglomerate, media group, or media institution is a company that owns numerous companies involved in mass media enterprises, such as television, radio, publishing, motion pictures, theme parks, or the Internet. According to Moglen, et al (1999) in the magazine *The Nation*, "Media conglomerates strive for policies that facilitate their control of the markets around the world. Card (2021), explains media Conglomeration as the term that describes when a significant number of Media entities are all owned by a single company. Media Conglomeration can result from acquisitions or mergers. For instance, NTA was given birth to from the merger of the existing state or public owned television stations in 1977. Media Conglomeration reduces ownership of Media institutions as large media outfits will own smaller media. As of now as pointed out by Card (2021), 90% of all American media outlets are owned by either National Amusements, Disney, Timewarner, Comsat, News Corps or Sony. She adds that six Corporations, all with their agendas, and all of which are prone to

prioritizing profit over journalistic integrity, set the agenda for what the public and the Government deemed relevant, and with little or no regard for the question of ethics outside of how it might impact their reputation.

Minority Voices

Minority Voices, as it relates to Media Conglomeration, captures individuals, groups, business concerns, religious bodies or adherents, tribal or ethnic groups, among others, whose entitlements or accesses to balanced and unprejudiced media coverage which is important for social interaction, understanding, integration, cohesion and development are curtailed for no fault of theirs. In other words, such groups of people identified above suffer discrimination in terms of representations, portrayals, uses and enjoyments of Media offerings, (Clark, 1969). This can result from media concentration, Conglomeration, commercialization and diversity, etc. Aquiar and Vazquez (1995) assert that every human being should be portrayed comprehensively and impartially in the media. However, reverse has been the case across the globe most especially in the developing world. Clark (1969) identifies four stages of Media representation for minority groups. They are:

- A. Non representation which is outright exclusion from the media;
- B. Ridicule. This is when formerly non-recognized groups are shown on TV but only as objects of derisive humours;
- C. Regulation. Here minority groups are represented but in limited social roles and;
- D. Respect which is when minority groups are presented in both positive and negative roles of everyday life.

NTA as a Media Conglomerate

The Nigerian Television Authority, popularly known as NTA, is owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria. According to Nwulu, et al (2010), the history of television broadcasting in Nigeria and by extension the Nigerian Television Authority can be traced to the first television station in Nigeria, the Western Nigerian Government Broadcasting Corporation (WNTV) which began broadcasting on 31 October 1959. The Eastern and Northern Regions followed the example of the Western Region with the establishment of their own Television Stations in 1960 and 1962 respectively. What is today known as NTA, according to Umeh (1989) was inaugurated in May 1977 with merger of all existing television stations and re-branded as Nigerian Television (NTV) under the supervision of the Nigerian Television Authority Board. This followed the takeover of regional television stations by military governmental authorities in 1976. From 1977 to early 1990s, NTA has the monopoly over television broadcasting in Nigeria. Although, NTA is not in the mould of global media Conglomerate but in the Nigerian and African media spaces, it qualifies for one going by the operational definitions of the term.

As stated in the Nigerian Broadcasting Article 19, the NTA runs the largest television network in Nigeria with stations in several parts of the country. At a point in time, it was regarded as the largest television network in Africa. It is widely viewed as the "authentic voice" of the Nigerian government. Aside having stations in the capitals of the 36 States making up the federation and the federal Capital Territory, Abuja, NTA runs 62 Community Broadcast Stations, Digital Multi-Channels and subsidiary companies. NTA's digital Pay TV service, Startimes, was established in 2010 as a partnership with Star Communications Technology of

China. Additional NTA channels include NTA Yoruba, NTA Ibo, NTA Hausa, NTA Sports 24 and NTA Parliamentary Channel (Etienne, 2013).

A number of NTA programmes can be viewed online via Africast as well as TelAfric Television in the US and Canada. NTA News bulletins are frequently aired on Africa Independent Television and BEN Television in the United Kingdom, where the station was also launched on Sky on channel 213 in 2008. It moved to channel 202 on 1 September 2008 to give space to new channels. In early March 2010, NTA refused to broadcast as a pay-per-view channel on Sky, and was removed from Sky EPG the following day. The channel returned on Sky in the UK on 20 June 2018 on channel 781. NTA is also available on the IPTV platform SuncasTV, and via free-to-air satellite on Galaxy 19, Intelsat 905 and Intelsat. To confirm its Conglomerate status, NTA has the following subsidiaries:

1. NTA TV Enterprises: Involves in facilitating and promoting non-core broadcasting business activities.
2. NTA Property and Investment Company (NTAPIC): Responsible for the management of NTA's facilities, properties and other investments.
3. NTA Educational Television (NTA/ETV): Produces educational programmes for NTA Educational Channels.
4. NTA TV College, Jos: Pioneer training institution for the broadcast industry.
5. Integrated Television Services (ITS): Manages the distribution of digital signals and NTA's relationship with other broadcasting stakeholders in the digital system (The Nigerian Television Authority - About Us).

Card (2021) identifies some negative features of Media Conglomeration some of which are applicable to NTA as a media Conglomerate in Nigeria. First is that media Conglomerates are prone to prioritizing profit over journalistic integrity, set the agenda for what the public and the government deem relevant, and with little or no regard for the question of ethics outside of how it might impact their reputation.

The NTA regarded as the authentic voice of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, like other Government owned television stations at the state levels, is like the often talked about piper turning out the tunes of the player. With the mission to provide excellent television services worldwide and project the true African perspectives, the corporate objectives as published by google.com include:

- A - To influence, promote, sustain and improve Nigeria's positive societal values through social, cultural, economic, political and technological programmes;
- B - To serve as a means of impacting knowledge through educational, informative, and entertaining programmes;
- C - To preserve Nigerian culture and promote cultural and political awareness in the country and beyond;
- D - To provide viewers with the most reliable, authoritative and independent coverage and analysis of contemporary issues of national, regional and international events through News programmes;
- E - To enrich national output through fostering the spirit of hard work and productivity;
- F - To promote civic responsibility;
- G - To promote indigenous technology;

- H – To ensure the establishment and maintenance of high standard for efficient operation of the broadcasting system;
- I – To implement all the objectives with an eye on competition in order to ensure competitive advantage and profit; and
- J – To become an integral part of the information highway.

From its functions, it will be clearly seen that NTA is a media outfit with its eyes on profit making. Established as a government-owned and partly commercial broadcasting outfit, objective (I) above which states that the NTA must implement all the objectives with an eye on competition in order to endure competitive advantage and profit says it all. Of late, NTA seems to have gone fully commercial most especially for certain categories of news promo, coverage and usage. In such situations, only those who have the financial wherewithal can really benefit from the services of the television authority. Others are automatically shot out. To underscore the importance of its money making mandate, there are always breaks during news and programmes transmission for commercial/economic reasons. According to Uniproject Materials, advertisers buy fixed times during news and other important programmes of NTA network to air their commercial messages. This amounts to advertiser's exercising undue influence over the regular contents of the network which is detrimental to news substance, continuity and presentation. Also, as the organ set up primarily to promote the programmes, policies and activities of Federal Government in spite of the above objectives, its news and programmes are pro-establishment. They help to impress government's agenda on the people in the name of the often talked about "Public Interest" which many have seen as the interest of those in power. There is also the problem of the public not always knowing where their money is going or what company they may inadvertently be endorsing even when they want to boycott a certain company in the Conglomerate for one reason or another but failed to realize that other companies you had continued to support financially were inextricably tied to the one you had a problem with. On that note media Conglomeration make life more difficult to hold corporations accountable for their actions or inactions because the extent of their reach makes it almost impossible not to engage with them in some capacity. It is a known fact that a lot of people complain about the NTA news and current affairs programmes as too pro- government and hence do boycott such and opt for other news channels mainly because of what Egbai (2018) describes as such news and programmes lacking in the areas of news accuracy, relevance of reports to issues of the moment, reliability and absence of bias. Orlu-Orlu (2017) in his studies on "Perception of NTA and Channels TV reportage of the Chibok School Girls' Abduction Among Residents of South-East Nigeria" observes that NTA's reports on the Chibok School Girls were always in favour of the Federal Government while Channels TV news are always balanced. Thus the credibility level of NTA reports on the abduction was rated low while that of Channels TV was highly rated. However, some of those boycotting NTA news and programmes may be patronizing its subsidiaries earlier listed in this study and unwittingly be contributing to the financial well being of the Conglomerate. For instance, someone who subscribes to Star Times decoder to watch news and programmes on other channels other than NTA stations will have to do monthly subscription. The money goes to the Conglomerate at the end of the day. Such a subscriber might have unknowingly be contributing to the financial strength of NTA.

Media conglomeration is detrimental to democracy, and to progress in all its forms. The general public deserves the freedom to choose which companies to support, and to be able to trust that their news source won't sacrifice truth on the altar of capitalism. Several studies have established a strong link between ownership and editorial influence. Chukwuma, Ezeh and Umuze (2020), in their study on Audience Perception of NTA's coverage of the (2015) Presidential Campaign found NTA's coverage to be unfair, partisan and unprofessional.

NTA Conglomerate and Minority Voices

Izsak (2014) says Nigeria is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country, with over 350 ethnic groups. Vanguardngr.com (2017) put the ethnic groups at three hundred and seventy one while Wikipedia sums it up to three hundred and seventy. The deduction one can make from the above is that Nigeria is a country of multi-ethnic and sub-ethnic groups. The diversity of ethnic groups is also reflected in the languages spoken within its territory. *vanguardngr.com* put the languages spoken at around four hundred. Sasu (2022) enumerates the languages at over five hundred. Adoti (2020) statistically put the figure at five hundred and twenty and Reinsman, (2020) lifts the bar higher by putting the figure at five twenty eight adding that the number includes a few languages with no known native speakers and may also include dialects of the same language e.g. Ijesa, Ekiti, Igbomina and Ijebu dialects of the Yoruba language.

Going by the 2006 census, the population of Nigeria stood at one hundred and forty million people. Today, the population is estimated to be around two hundred million. The three largest ethnic groups in the country are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. These major three ethnic groups in Nigeria account for more than sixty percent of the population. The diversity also has religious dimensions. There are three religious groups in Nigeria. They are Christianity, Islam and traditional religion. Each of these religions has associations representing and speaking for them in critical situations before the government and expressing their views on the state of the nation or issues having to do with their Faith. The minority groups in Nigeria can be classified along these identified lines e.g. minority ethnic or sub-ethnic groups - as there are minorities of the minority, ethnic and tribal self determination groups, e.g. the Boko Haram, Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, Afenifere and those fighting for Self determination for the Yorubas; Still talking about groups, the Fulani herdsmen and their victims on the other hand and at the level of individuals, Sunday Igboho, Nnamdi Kanu and El ZakiZaki to mention but just a few. Those at the lowest ladder of the social, economic and political strata of the Nigerian Society also fall under the minority category forming the focus of this study. Falase in his study of Nigeria's Ethnic Minorities and Their Treatment by The Nigerian Television Authority focuses mainly on the treatment of the minorities in News broadcast. His conclusion hinges on the fact that the Minority Voices have muffled in the News Broadcast of the NTA and when at all the Minority is given representation in the News Broadcast it is always negatively one sided. Using the Niger Delta militants as a case study Falase, says just four of the thirty stories in the one hour NTA's News Broadcast of October 5 2009, representing about thirteen percentage of the bulletin, were given to Minority stories which were even negative ones.

Quoting Mustapha Abdul Raufu who also cited Okon Essien, Falase also establishes bias against the minorities in NTA's translation of national network news as such was being done

in the three most dominant local languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba thus leaving other ethnic groups not catered for. This study takes note of the fact that although NTA has gone beyond the translation of news into local languages into having dedicated stations, e.g. Hausa NTA, Igbo NTA and Yoruba NTA, running purely twenty four hours transmission in those local ethnic languages, it is still limited to the three main local languages. Even the Wazobia NTA, going by the name, is still largely tailored towards taken care of the interest of the major ethnic groups- the Yorubas, Hausas and the Igbos. "Wa" in Yoruba means come, "Zo" in Hausa means come and "bia" Igbo" also means come. These stations transmit news, specialized and general programmes in these three languages.

The question at this stage is what becomes of the other almost three hundred and fifty ethnic groups that can neither speak nor hear the three major Nigerian languages?

One would have expected that the various stations of NTA will readily fit in into the bill of giving the ethnic Minority the required Voices. As at today, no state is left out of the spread. For example Osun state has two; one in Osogbo and the other in Ile-Ife. There are States even having more than two. However, since these stations were set up primarily to serve the purpose of consolidating the monopolistic tendency of NTA which it lost partly to the establishment of state television stations which refused to relay commercial advertisements while linking up with the network news, the NTA sub stations have not been able to come up to fill the gap created by the mother station in the area of adequate representation for ethnic minority groups as they still tilt more towards transmission of network news and programmes as against their locally produced news and programmes due partly to lack of finance and inadequate staff that can handle news and programmes production and presentation in the various local languages or dialects in their areas of locations.

The lack of adequate representation, if any representation at all, might have contributed a great deal to the springing up of ethnic agitators that have been on the increase today in Nigeria. Falase cited the case of Niger Delta militants in 2009. After that there have been Boko Haram, Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, uncountable groups in Yorubaland all fighting for either independence or self determination. Prominent among the leadership of these groups are NnamdiKanu and Sunday Igboho both presently incarcerated in Nigeria and Benin Republic's prisons. It is a known fact that the doors of the national broadcaster, NTA, are closed to these groups in expressing their views which the Nigerian Government sees as not just seditious but treasonable. Like it was in the dark years of the struggle for the return to democracy in Nigeria with the National Democartic coalition- NADECO- leading the way with the setting up and operation of the then outlawed KUDIRAT RADIO coupled with State Governments and privately owned television houses distancing themselves from the agitators for fear of sanctions from the Federal Government owned National Broadcasting Corporation- NBC-, these people have been resorting to guerrilla approaches to get their own sides of the face-off with the Government across to the people at home and in the international community. As pointed out earlier, Minority Voices in Nigeria are not limited to ethnic groups and related organizations. They also include religious bodies and associated organizations. Boko Haram is a perfect example in this regard. A lot of people believe that if at the initial stage of the Boko Haram crisis, the agitators had been given opportunities to express their grievances, the situations would not have degenerated to this frightening level. Even, while

Sheikh Gumi who emerged as the unofficial negotiator between the Boko Haram and the Government was given access to the national broadcaster's channels, the reverse has been the case for El-ZakiZaki, known globally to be critical of the Government. However, the network and its subsidiaries have been fair to the three religions in the coverage of their major festivals e.g. Christmas and Easter for Christians, Ramadan and Eid-Adha for Muslims. The same is extended to the traditional religion in the coverage of traditional festivals of national and international relevance such as Osun Osogbo, Argungu Fishing Festival, Olojo Festival, New Yam and Ekpe Festivals. As indicated earlier, there are also economic and political Minority Voices. The Nigerian Society is Sharply stratified along economic and political lines. Economically, the society now has the rich and the affluent, the neither rich nor poor which is classified as the middle class that is gradually fading out in Nigeria, the poor and the poor of the poor. While the rich and the affluent has all it takes to access the NTA's channels via all available cable TV facilities, DSTV, GOTV, STAR TIMES and so on and can afford to subscribe and watch the stations, the reverse is the case for the poor and the poor of the poor. Even for the neither rich nor poor, there is a limit to the luxury enjoyed the rich and affluent in terms of accessibility. Another dimension is that it is only the rich who can afford to have their events covered and used in the highly commercialized News, News Magazine or programme Broadcasts of the station. The other classes are out of the range in such. Those on the lower rung of the social ladder are also shut out. Except when they are reported for negative reasons, the national broadcaster is not well known for giving them opportunities of telling their own stories.

Politically, the space given to the Government in power and by extension the ruling political party is limitless. This is more so in the kind of democracy we practise in Nigeria where the winner takes all including the control of the Public Media. This is where the ownership issue comes in Media Conglomeration and Minority Voices. Here, the cliché of "He who plays the piper dictates the tune" is hugely apt. Some media administrators have been finding reasons to justify why this is so. Farounbi (2020) while featuring on OSBC's Current Affairs programme "Let's Discuss" said the fact that the Public Media would have to cover the day to day activities of the whole gamuts of the executive - including but not limited to the President, Vice-President, Ministers, head of non-ministerial bodies, legislature and the Judiciary as well as those of the ruling party where such have to do with the Government in power, has tilted the scale in favour of the ruling party and Government against the opposition. However, it must be pointed out that this is often over done to the extent of blacking out the opposition political parties, most especially the main opposition political party. This is the area where Media Conglomeration has been detrimental to Nigeria as an evolving democratic nation.

Conclusion

It is clear from the submissions above that those classified as Minority Voices in this study are not giving equal access to not just the news but the various programmes on NTA stations at network, zonal, state or local level as a result of the Conglomerate status of NTA. Although a number of reasons have been adduced for the development, it is clear that with concerted efforts by the NTA management and the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the challenges can be surmounted.

Recommendations

Based on the above study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. The Government should reduce its control over NTA in order to truly make it a public station not just in name but in its programmes contents and accessibility to all segments of the society no matter the tribe, ethnic, religious and political leanings as well as social and economic status.
2. The various local stations across the country should be given semi autonomous status, if not made fully autonomous, in their operations and less dependent on the headquarters in the areas of news and programmes production and transmission.
3. The various local stations should be made to embrace the promotion of local contents in their news and programmes in their different localities. This should involve having news and programmes in different local dialects spoken in areas where they are located.
4. While NTA should be commended for establishing special stations for Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba audience, it is high time that other ethnic groups should be considered for the same gesture in the spirit of equity, if not equality, since whatever is good for the goose should be good for the gander.
5. Consideration should be given to indigenes of the community where NTA stations are located. This will help in driving local contents which are expected to be largely in the local major languages spoken by the people of the community.
6. With the digitized nature of NTA and knowing fully well that it is practically not possible for all to procure Star Times decoder and do monthly subscription because of the poverty level in the country, most especially at the grassroots, provisions should be made for community viewing centres where people can gather at their conveniences to view news and programmes of their choices.

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