

Audience Perception of Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Akure Coverage of Political News Programme in Ondo State

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Abstract

This paper attempts to evaluate how audience perceives Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Akure coverage of political news programmes of the ruling party and other opposition parties. NTA is a government – owned station and since studies have established a strong link between media ownership and editorial influence, this study intends to investigate whether the station show partisanship in support of incumbent government against other opponents. The study made use of survey research method and it was anchored on the ‘agenda setting theory.’ This paper found NTA, Akure coverage of political news programmes bias, unfair and incredible. This paper argues that for the citizens to develop and be informed, the media needs to be at the centre of civic education and enlightenment. To this end, the paper recommends that all legitimate measures and strategies should be exploited by media especially NTA, Akure to make it possible for the citizens of the state to be informed on political and controversial issues before making important political decisions and also boost Ondo State residence trust in them.

Keywords: NTA, Media, Politics, Audience, Perception, News, Programme

Background to the Study

In this era of digital technology and globalisation of communication, the media industries have crucial role to play in creating awareness and giving first class information to the populace on issues emanating from the administrations and governance of their elected leaders. The way and manner a society is governed directly or indirectly reflects on the behavioural pattern and perception of its citizens. In a democratic society, the media especially the television station is the major source of communication between the government and its citizen (Siljanovska and Ejupi, 2013). The media through the television stations disseminate information, news items, showcase political programmes, developmental projects and pitfalls of the various arms of government in a particular country.

Government owned television stations such as Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) has been known for promoting news and information related to politics and

major happenings in the political industries around the nation (Chukwuma et. al, 2015). Viewers not only listen to news, they also analyse, select, make comments, give opinions and share comments on how they perceive media effects on politics generally. The perception of audience regarding television news content has long been of interest to communication researchers. Perceptions of credibility have been found to be influenced by the content of the news reports and characteristics of the news anchor, suggesting that perceptions of credibility may be influenced by presentation variables. The biased, inaccurate and one – sided coverage of political news such as electioneering campaigns and projection of some candidates and political groups especially on government – owned media stations in a manner that exonerates them high above the opposition is capable of causing crisis. The audience accusation of unethical practices among mass media practitioners and allegation of credibility in the coverage of political news and programs levelled against government – owned media stations seem to find support in Orhewere (2003), when he argues that Nigeria media in the past did not show enough commitment to professional ethics in the build – up to the 1965 electoral crisis in western Nigeria.

Public perceptions could also be related to their attitudes, opinions, and believes on certain political news and political programmes; these sometimes influence their behavioural patterns and dispositions toward their political leaders and stakeholders. Public perceptions are also conditioned by three key elements: public, the message and the channel through which the message is passed. The television today represents a channel of information dissemination, such as the political happenings, events, quarrels and debates, the manner in which the television station package and transmit the information has an influence on the audience, since it is through the media the audience learn, judge, analyse, make contexts and make informed decisions about their political leaders. Politics cannot exist without the voice of the media, because only through it, the public get to know the plans, activities and agenda of the political parties (Siljanovska and Ejupi, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

One of the most common generalisations about politics is that today's citizens especially in term of election are less informed and less engaged than voters in prior generations (Iwokwagh, 2005). This perceived decline in political engagements, echoes a decline in both exposure to news and the quality of political news. The content of campaign coverage in news outlets has shifted away from policy to scandals, gaffes, and the horse race. It is no wonder, then, that citizens are viewed as less equipped to make electoral decisions today than they were years ago (Gilens, et al., 2009). Despite the efforts of the private electronic media to help in the growth and development of the country, by keeping audience informed about political activities in the country through their political news and programmes these media houses have short comings and these short comings have prevented them

Audience Perception of Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Akure Coverage of Political News Programme in Ondo State

from serving the audience effectively (Iwokwagh, 2005). It is in this context that this paper sought to determine the audience perceptions of Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Akure on political news programme coverage in Ondo State.

Research Questions

The study will proffer answers to the following research question:

1. What are the perceptions of audience on political news coverage on NTA, Akure?
2. How does the audience perceive the credibility of political news coverage on NTA, Akure?

Literature Review

Politics and the Role of Media

According to the Ace (2012), the electronic media play a major role in world information. Reports of events and people from different parts of the globe are carried everywhere and at great speed through television, radio and internet. Laura (2007) stated that in an age of timeliness and demand for information, the media plays a crucial role in informing the public about politics, campaigns and elections. She opined that there is a cyclical relationship between the media, the government and the public, while the media can occasionally shape public opinions, it also has a greater influence in communicating to voters' important issues and their opinions about it. Laura (2007) reiterated that the media works more effectively by placing a spotlight on certain issues they feel the public should be concerned with. Zahid (2012), reviewed that media have significant role to play in modern politics. He stated that many scholars have agreed to the fact that media coverage of political issues has made a difference in politics. He affirmed that media has provided a forum for candidates and political parties to debate their qualifications for office before the audience. The media monitors the acts of public officials, thus helping to deter them from violating the public trust. The mass media has been considered a powerful force in deciding the fate of decisive issues, they determine the fate of politicians, political effects and how they influence governments and the electorates. It is considered to be the main source of news and information for the public and the main channel of communication between politicians and citizens.

The importance of television as the most mobilisation media of mass communication has been universally acknowledged. Since television has the advantage of audio and visual facilities, politicians and governments could exploit this avenue to pass across their political activities and agenda to the people, they also use it to promote their political ideologies and programmes. By so doing, would succeed in winning followers and supports. Many televisions news programmes present political issues to attract voters' attention. Hence, news content has been designed in form of live interview with resource persons to capture the attention of the public (Wardani et al., 2014). Ratnesh (2010) stated that for democracy in a complex society to work effectively, journalism is necessary.

Citizens need information about the political, economic, and cultural systems that structure their lives in order to act on them effectively.

Audience Perceptions of Political News Coverage on Media and Televisions in Nigeria

The mass media have always remained a key factor in the political sphere in democracy; during elections. The mass media, especially the broadcast media; provide a link between the political party/candidate and the electorate. The mass media serve as a platform for political parties/candidates to campaign for votes. Through coverage of electioneering campaigns and airing of political advertisements, the electronic media help in influencing voters' decision either in favour or against a given political party or candidate (Ottah, 2013).

However, all along the ownership, control and operation of broadcasting in Nigeria were preserved exclusively for the various governments – Federal, Regional, and State (Media Rights Agenda, MRA, 2001). In 1992, the Deregulation of Broadcasting Decree No.38 was promulgated by the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. Udoakah, N. (2006) the expression of that presidential *ipse dixit* which established the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, also created a new pattern of ownership and control as well as injected competition in the broadcast industry, this however created avenue for second categories of media organisation which is non-state media organisation. Enactment of this law increase efficiency in journalistic profession base on the fact that, base on the fact that government own media only serve the whips and caprice of the government. Corroborating, NBC (2009) submits that “as a result of the revolution in the Nigeria broadcast industry, the number of broadcasting stations in Nigeria has, at the last count, rise to 394, from less than 30 before deregulation”. Since the deregulation of broadcasting in Nigeria, there was a shift in political coverage has audience find more objectivity in political coverage of private own media (Umechukwu 2004).

In the recent time, political coverage has witnessed several development alongside journalistic professions (Obot 2013) stated the fact that, the non-state own media organisation upholds the principle of journalism which is serving as a gate-keeper, voice of the people as a watchdog on government activities against the government owned media organisation which always serve as a tool of propaganda especially in terms of political communication (Sumonu, 2019). For example the last year 2023 general election distinguish between the government owned and non-government own media organisation, whereas the government owned media basically serve as a tool for propaganda singing the praises of the ruling APC party while on the other ends, the non-governmental or private owned media organisation was busy dishing out the fact about the political system and the effect of government policies in the society thereby setting agenda for people to believe and understand the state of the nation.

Audience Perception of Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Akure Coverage of Political News Programme in Ondo State

Much is written about the effect that the mass media have upon the presentation and the outcome of political campaigns (Edegoh *et al* 2013). Frequently, critics charge that news reporting focuses on the superficial, personal characteristics of candidates and ignore the issues underlying elections. At the same time, it is suggested that the predominance of polling by news outlets turns elections into popularity contests and causes candidates to follow rather than lead voter opinion on contemporary issues (Gottlieb, 1992). However, Government exclusive ownership and excessive control of the media purely served political purposes and as dictated by the government in power. Broadcast contents showed outright propaganda in the service of the interests of the government and the party in power. Programme contents were designed, tailored and doctored to toe the line of the government, perception and characterisation of the so called “national building” and “national interest”, to avoid subversion (Shem, & Apuke (2018). This however has militated against the professionalism and objectivity in political coverage of government owned media organisation. These are so many adverse effects that inhibit the viability of government owned media in Nigeria. They include the following: bureaucracy, overstaffing, frequent changes of management staff: broadcast media require some level of consistency in staff, media dysfunction, equipment acquisition/maintenance, poor programming, indebtedness, government meddlesomeness.

Sumonu, (2019) affirmed that several studies carried out revealed that, the state owned media organisation in Nigeria only serve as propaganda tools especially during political activities as it always prevent the interest of the state instead of the interest of the general public which is the primary duty and social responsibility of the media as the fourth agents of the realm.

Television has been responsible for influencing the way people react to certain issues of life, views which tends to shape their beliefs and values in life are painstakingly thought of before they are carried out. Televisions’ political news is a source of social aspiration for the public; a strong instrument for social mobilisation; it has the ability to shape and influence people’s beliefs, opinions and feelings on various issues in life. Research has shown that audience attitude towards television viewing is dependent on the degree of media exposure (Akpoghiran and Otite, 2012). Another aspect of audience perception is in the media intensification of conflict reports in political news. The frequency and the degree of coverage given to political conflicts news on television can heighten tensions of the audience. For instance, while the Late President of Nigeria, Umaru Yar’adua was in Saudi Arabia hospital and late governor of Ondo State Arakunrin Rotimi Odunayo Akeredolu who died in a German hospital, the electronic news media like Channels television, TVC and foreign ones like British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were focusing on the intensity of the political conflict that was generated in the country and state due to it. Indeed, it generated a lot of controversies and conflicts of interest. When television news coverage on conflicts attracts public comments, criticisms, and observations; then tensions, anxieties,

fears begin to increase. However, some television organisations believe in telling conflict the way it happens. For example, CNN believe in reporting from the war front, so that they can tell it as it is for instance, the Niger Delta crises especially the side of kidnapping and hostage taking, the bombings, killings of innocent people and attacking of churches by terrorists, intensively carried and reported by the CNN and BBC. The news media thrive on conflict despite the negative impact it has on the society (Akpoghiran and Otite, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Social Responsibility Theory. This theory posits that much as press should be free to operate in any society, that freedom should carry certain obligations. Simply put, the press should operate in recognition of societal needs and aspirations (Nwabueze, 2012). The media play surveillance role by reporting developments in the society to the audience. News media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant (Nwabueze, 2015).

In relation to this study, this theory suggests that television stations owe the society a duty to be objective and professional in their report. They must be unbiased either it is owned by the government or private owned station. This in turn will go a long way to calm audience perception on various political news they listen to on television stations (Church & Onyebuchi, 2012).

Method of Study

The survey research method was used to address the research objectives and questions raised for this paper. The population of the study is adults living in Akure metropolis who view NTA. The total population amounted is 76,312. The population was obtained from National Population Census (2006). It was from this population that the study sample of 400 was drawn using Taro Yamani's formula. The purposive sampling technique was used because the respondents needed to be selected based on the certain criteria (the respondents watch NTA and are exposed to their political news programmes). The questionnaire contained close-ended questions and was administered. Out of the 400 copies administered 385 copies were returned which form the basis upon which data was analysed and research questions answered

Data presentation

Responses from the fully completed copies of questionnaire administered are used to answer the research questions and discussed the implication of the findings. How did Ondo audiences perceive political news programme coverage on NTA?

Audience Perception of Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Akure Coverage of Political News Programme in Ondo State

Table 1: Viewer’s opinion on how they perceive political news programme coverage on NTA

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Averagely satisfactory	85	22.1
Very satisfactory	45	11.7
Undecided	15	3.9
Satisfied	40	10.4
Unsatisfied	200	51.9
Total	385	100

The first research question sought to determine how the Ondo residents perceive NTA, Akure political news coverage. Data gathered from the respondents show that more than 50% of the respondents were unsatisfied with the way NTA, Akure covers political news. Respondents frowned at the way NTA supports the government, to the disadvantage of the citizens.

Research question 2

How does the audience perceive the credibility of political news coverage on NTA?

Table 2: Audience reaction to credibility of NTA, Akure coverage of political News programme

Reaction to coverage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lacking balance and fairness	138	35.8
Partial and partisan	185	48.1
Impartial	17	4.4
Bias	15	3.9
All of the above	30	8.6
Total	385	100

The second research question sought to find out whether there is credibility in the coverage of political news programmes on NTA. Data gathered showed that over 80% of the respondents were convinced NTA, Akure was unfair, bias, partial and partisan in its coverage of political news programmes in Ondo State, details in table 2

Discussion

The implication of the data presented is that majority of the respondents who participated in the study considered NTA, Akure coverage of political news programme to be unfair, bias, partisan and generally unsatisfactory, because they always take side and promote government in power. This is in line with Abati (2006) position that government - owned broadcast stations are notorious for unprofessional conduct in support of a government in power in their coverage of

political or controversial issues. This situation is common in underdeveloped nations, however, media, in all situation and circumstances, should be fair, professional and incorruptible, especially in political reporting (Ekeanyanwu, 2007).

Notwithstanding, one cannot easily discard the pivotal role media play in the political setting of a developing nation, like Nigeria. This may have informed McNair (2002) assertion that “in democratic political systems, media function both as transmitters of political communication which originates outside the media organisation itself, and as senders of political messages constructed by journalists” (Chukwuma et. al, 2015).

Suggestion of possible ways to mitigate the influence of state-owned media

Conclusion

In conclusion, to develop an involved, well informed and rational citizen, the media especially NTA, Akure must be at the centre of civic education and enlightenment on political and controversial issues. Therefore, all legitimate measures and strategies should be exploited to make it possible for citizens to have required information about government and politics and also boost Ondo state residence trust in them.

Recommendations

- i. Media organisations and press bodies should organise seminars and workshops to sensitize and educate journalists on the significance and effects of news content especially when covering political and conflict news programmes in order to improve their skills and professionalism.
- ii. If the primary purpose of the media is to inform the public then media houses should ensure that contents of their news are absolutely free from bias, factual and relevant to the larger society.
- iii. The media should expose corruption, to exert pressure on the government for fair and transparent accountability. The media should also indicate areas that will bring transparency in government actions. The media through awareness campaign should help in building public consensus to condemn corruption and to promote culture of good governance.

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**Audience Perception of Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Akure
Coverage of Political News Programme in Ondo State**

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