

APPRAISAL OF RHYTHM 93.7FM AND THE POLITICAL EDUCATION OF PORT HARCOURT RESIDENTS

By

Jesse,Okedi, Ph.D

Department of Development Communication Studies

Rivers State University, Port Harcourt.

jesse.okedi@ust.edu.ng

&

Onyinkepreye, Brisibe, Ph.D

Department of Cinematography and Broadcast Studies

Rivers State University

preye.brisibe@ust.edu.ng

Abstract

The study was aimed at investigating the role of Rhythm 93.7fm's political education of residents of Port Harcourt metropolis with a view to finding out its effect on the political consciousness of the people. The objectives of the study among other things were to examine how Rhythm 93.7fm designed political education programs in Port Harcourt, ascertain the extent to which such programmes have affected the political participation among residents and examine prevailing challenges affecting the radio in carrying out political education. The study utilized the agenda setting theory and adopted quota sampling methods where Port Harcourt metropolis was grouped into five zones according to their listening rate. The findings were that Rhythm 93.7FM designed news features and discussion programmes in order to educate the people politically, but such programmes had minimal effect on the political participation of the people. The study further found that the challenges facing the radio were competing programmes from other stations, time of airing the programmes and commercialization of political news. And the study therefore, recommended that the management of Rhythm 93.7Fm should seek out the right timing for political education programmes, repackage the programmes for maximum impact and that radio stations should collaborate in educating the people instead of dividing the audience.

Key Words: Radio, Political Education, Port Harcourt, Residents, Appraisal.

Introduction

The effects of political decisions from a few privileged elites have made political education inevitable. This is especially true of the Nigerian experience where a few people who have taken the toga of politicians rule, reign and ruin the future of the country with reckless decisions without recourse to the feelings of the generality of the people. The media, being the credible source of societal information is therefore called to action to lead the political education mantra of the society by spearheading more participation by the people by providing the needed information that will guide their decisions. Electronic broadcast media system on political discourse in society significantly influences the audience participation in politics (Idiong 2008).

Radio broadcast is a major tool for educating the populace because of its wide coverage. Both urban and rural areas receive messages simultaneously without fear of power interruption since it can equally be powered by a battery. Radio can be listened to from anywhere even on the way, in the farm, school children and teenagers listen to radio through their headsets because of technological innovations. It is also impossible to separate politics from education since politics involves informing and enlightening the masses on the issues that affect them (Anyaku, 2012).

Okedi (2024) avers that the radio is one of the most ubiquitous, effective and cheapest media of mass communication available to a man. It provides an opportunity for man to understand both his immediate and distant environment. This is because programmes on radio are carefully packaged to address the issues in the society. Recently, radio stations now operate call in programmes that enable members of the audience to share their thoughts and seek clarifications on issues affecting the society. This has given effect to greater participation and indeed the democratization of the contents of radio broadcasting. The ability of the radio waves to travel far and wide with contents received through portable electronic devices simultaneously by the audience with minimal interference makes it a better choice within the broadcast industry. It is the portability of the electronic devices that creates convenience in the manner of reception of radio programmes by the audience members (Okedi, 2024).

The place of the media in informing, educating, correlating the society and transmission of cultural heritage from generation is no longer an issue for debate among academics (Okon, 2012; Hallin and Mancini,

2014). The media have remained in the forefront of reporting happenings in the society, defending society's ideals and highlighting possible problems plaguing society with a view to seeking lasting solutions to them from the members of the society. This is the reason some scholars aver that the media reflect the society within which they operates naturally. In fact, Okon (2012) avers that "the media do not operate in a vacuum but is subject to the sociological, religious, cultural, political and economic conditions cum configurations of the society", p. 31. This is because the happenings in the society form the basis for media reportage and operations, the media do not operate on conjectures but realism. The media cannot manufacture its content abstract from what is real and verifiable in the society. It is the reality, connectivity and verifiability of media content in synchronism with societal issues that determine media relevance as to how the people perceive or avail themselves to be exposed to the content of the media. This way, the media can be said to be setting societal agenda for the people to deliberate and inspire possible action from the societal standpoint.

Observably, members of society respond favourably to those forms of communication they can identify with. The attention span given to any media and by extension, its content, is largely dependent on the ability of the media to satisfy the cravings, wishes and aspirations of the affected members of the society. It is therefore trite that what forms the bulk of media content is the current realities of the society re-enacted and highlighted for the attention of the members of the society. This is done through the aid of technology. It is technology that enables man to transmit messages in digestible forms to a large, widely dispersed and heterogeneous audience with simultaneity in reception in terms of timing. The media are therefore vehicles of for the conveyance of messages to a large audience as a way of informing, educating or correlating society (Asemah, 2011). According to Asemah (2011), "it is through the technological devices that mass communication takes place. And for a medium to be classified as a mass medium, it must be able to disseminate messages through mechanical devices thereby leading to an impersonal relationship between the communicator and the audience", p.18.

Statement of the Problem

Politics in Nigeria is currently run by people with violent tendencies and as such, political activities are characterized with bloodshed and other forms of violent acts. The political actors have adopted a do-or-die attitude in their quest for power and political relevance, making those

with peaceful disposition shy away from participation. This has led to a deep-seated political apathy among citizens who have attributed their alienation to marginalization from politicians, politics of violence and aberration from democratic values and tenets. This study intends to see how electronic media mostly radio can help in re-orientating the minds and political culture of both the electorates and politicians in Nigeria in order to eliminate political violence, bloodshed, marginalization and also political tyranny.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study include to:

1. identify Rhythm 93.7FM Port Harcourt programmes on political education of residents.
2. Find out how Rhythm 93.7FM's political platform have affected political participation among residents.
3. examine possible challenges facing Rhythm 93.7FM political platform in eradicating political violence.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-setting theory

The theory was developed and popularized by Shaw (1968). Shaw holds the view that, the more salient issues are being beamed by the electronic media in the form of news and other issues for public debate or discussions. The media may not successfully tell us what to think on, but may succinctly tell us what to think about.

In essence, the media, especially the radio, set the agenda for public discussion on sensitive issues that affect public interest and for the good of the society. The media inform, educate and carry out sensitization programmes and campaigns at national and grassroots levels, to re-orient the minds and behaviours of the citizens as well as telling them their rights and legitimate responsibilities to ensure a hitch-free election and to choose capable and responsible leaders who will be accountable to the people.

The choice of this theory hinges on the cardinal functions of the media to the society in ensuring that through its programmes, the members of the society stay abreast of happenings that affect their welfare. Nwokeocha (2012) opines that Nigeria has not fared well in her democratic and political experience since she gained independence in 1960. He further stated that the country ranks among the weakest forms of democracies in the world. He attributed this to lack of proper and adequate political education and enlightenment in the country through the instrumentality of political communication.

Nwokeoacha (2012) identified the media as agents of political communication, conveyors of political information that should saturate the environment with healthy messages that is capable of taking the country's democracy to the next level. His words:

The media should entrench political debate as part of media culture, this should be done without fear or favour. Adequate space of time should be dedicated to political education by all media outfits owing to its importance to society. The media should also make the elected officers accountable to the people by initiating programmes that will bring them closer to the people to explain their stewardship. Political parties should also device means of carrying the people along in their programmes and activities, p.345.

Press and Elections in Nigeria

The media in Nigeria is still grappling with the political grip of 'complacent ideologues' and does not seem to be prepared to tackle the issues challenging our collective humanity. Instead, media houses are busy trying to numb the people with their 'Eldorado' type of programmes suggesting that all is well when indeed all is far from being well, (Amadi, 2003).

Election, according to Yalaju (2006), involves the act of choosing or selecting one or more from a greater number of persons, things, courses or rights. In this way, it typifies the exercise of the 'supreme power' to lead the people through a process of representation. Power can then be said to have been conferred on the elected officer by the people. Also, the exercise of power on behalf of the people becomes legitimate because the people conferred such right on the elected official willingly. This scenario often plays out in democracy.

Democracy is one of the world's most recognised and accepted forms of government because of its premium for the choice of the majority as against the minority strings. The Mariam Webster's dictionary defines democracy as a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held 'free' elections. This makes democracy more of people-participatory government than autocracy and possibly totalitarianism. And according to the definition, the election must be held periodically in an environment free of 'manipulated interest' for the government to be term as democracy.

The electoral process is central to the sustenance and perpetuation of democracy. This is because, for a democracy to bear the hallmark of legitimacy and sovereignty, there is need for frequent check on some 'entrenched interests' in the form of periodic change in leadership of a country and avoid alienating certain set of people in the society. Galadima (2012) writes that in Nigeria, legitimate authority normally derives from the general elections where the President is elected for the country and to do that, political parties are normally formed to canvass for votes. It is based on the candidates presented for election by the participating political parties that the electorates will choose who will lead the country.

The role of media in sustaining democratic tenets and, shaping societal discourse through its Agenda-setting function, have been documented by several scholars. Oso (2012) notes that the wave of democratization sweeping through various parts of the world have been accompanied by changes in other spheres including the economy which has seen the ascendancy of neo-liberal economic ideology. According to Oso, "the mass media in many countries have been liberalized, privatized and commercialized with the hope of deepening their democratic role as the main institution of the public sphere. It is now generally assumed that the mass media are essential in the process of building a democratic polity", p. 271.

Hallin & Mancini's proposition had earlier been noted by Okon (2012) who argued that the media cannot operate in a vacuum but are subject to the socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-political, socio-religious and linguistic configuration of society. This makes the media a focal point in any society because of its functions. McQuail (2010) sums it up this way: the key to the unusual character of the media institution is that its activities are inextricably both economic and political as well as being very dependent on continually changing technologies...the public character of the media derives mainly from the political function of the media in a democracy, but also from the fact that information, culture and ideas are considered as the collective property of all, p. 218.

Pate (2011) notes that General Mohammadu Buhari's regime of December 1984 to August 1985, tried to gag the press by restricting its powers. In his words:

The relationship between the press and the short-lived regime of General Buhari regime was harsh and unfriendly...the regime adopted draconian measures that undermined the freedom of individuals and that of

the press. In the process, the freedom of the press to professionally gather and disseminate information was threatened by physical attacks, arrests of media professionals, restrictions to the importation of raw materials for the production of newspapers and magazines, denial of access to information and cooperation from key government officials and other crude tactics combined to emasculate the vibrancy of the press and lead to the enthroneing of a (negative) climate on the whole society, p. 100.

With this antecedent, the rebranding and subsequent metamorphoses of General MohammaduBuhari by the APC into a civilian President in 2015, through the same media he victimized and oppressed tells more of the effect of public relations than of media content. The supposed love-hate relationship between the press and government in Nigeria is precipitated by what Amadi (2017) describes as the ‘do-or-die attitude of politicians’, which according to him is ‘bane of political development of developing societies like Nigeria...by 2003, the wide political misconception that was incapable of transiting from one civilian government to another was broken’, p. 21.

The media has been part of the electoral process in Nigeria. Amadi (2017) agrees that aside the educative, informative, and entertainment roles of television (media) to her varied audience, it has been involved in changing lives in all areas of human endeavours...the mass media introduced standardised roles, norms, behaviour, trends, codes as well as attitudes in society. This attitude is being sponsored by the broadcast media for a virile society like Nigeria.

Political Communication

Political communication is a compendium of activities centred on the polity of a country. Alemoh and Gambo (2016) described it as a purposeful communication about politics; it has a goal to achieve and is not usually engaged in haphazardly...it is communication targeted at a defined audience to achieve a specified objective, p.197. Also, Udoakah (2003) cited in Alemoh and Gambo (2016) sees political communication as a process whereby political information is passed on to whom it may concern by those assigned to/or who assume the responsibility. This may be carried out by a political party, political campaign organisations, civil society organizations, Non-Governmental Organization, Electoral Bodies, and the media etc.

Wilson (2005) points out that political communication comprises all forms of communication by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives; communication by non-politicians such as voters, newspaper columnists, etc. addressed to political actors and; communication about these actors and their activities as reported in the media or featured in other forms of public discussions of politics. Political communication therefore is a strategic communication with specified deliverables/derivable, aimed at influencing the attitude of its recipients and/or finding out their perception on the content of the message. This makes political communication akin to Public Relations kind of message that is deliberate, sustainable and purpose driven.

Communication in this wise is not a goal in itself but an on-going process that is co-terminus. In terms of electoral campaigns, political communication is employed to win votes but after the elections, the paradigm shifts to performance and dividends and continues but the process of communication never ends. Nwokeocha (2012) notes that political communication is premised on the inalienable rights of humans to inform and to be informed ...the political actors and syndicates as well as the media have the right to communicate their different messages to the people. On the other hand, the people have the right to be informed about goings-on in their environment.

Nwokeocha (2012) also explains that political communication is not only essential for the people who need to sell their political messages for predetermined end, it is also essential for the people who need it for enlightenment. He argued that if the people were not politically informed, they would not be able to make informed political decision. 'political communication is essentially meant to bring about sustainable democratic and political development. It is meant to engender political maturity', p. 343. According to Ani (2004) cited in Nwokeocha (2012), political communication entails issues, ideas, policies, personnel, structures, organs, channels, problems, people, messages and even feedback involved in political activities or matters. This indicates that political communication engenders political participation in a state.

Methodology

This study adopted survey design. The population of study consists of 1,377,990 residents Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas. The accidental sampling technique was adopted to reach a sample of 365 respondents determined through the Krejcie and Morgan Table, using a structured questionnaire. Data were presented on

frequency tables and analysed using the Weighted Mean Scores on a Four-Point Likert Scale and a 2.5 decision rule.

Data Presentation

Identifying Rhythm 93.7FM Port Harcourt programmes on political education.

S / N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	To tal	Mea n \bar{X}	Decisio n
	The Viewpoint	61	167	43	94	365	2.51	Agreed
	Rhythm News	12	76	17	106	365	1.98	Disagreed
	Rhythm Unplugged	-	64	21	88	365	1.93	Disagreed
	Advertorials	53	172	54	86	365	2.52	Agreed
	Area Parliament	82	161	56	66	365	2.70	Agreed

The table above shows that the View point, Area Parliament and advertorials constitute some of the political programmes of Rhythm 93.7.fm for the listening pleasure of residents of Port Harcourt.

Effect of Rhythm 93.7FM Political Programmes on Political Participation among Residents.

S / N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Tot al	Mea n \bar{X}	De cis io n
	I have been exposed to Rhythm 93.7 fm political programmes	61	167	43	94	365	2.51	Agreed
	Rhythm 93.7 fm political programmes does not affect my political decision	12	76	17	106	365	1.98	Disagreed

Rhythm 93.7 fm political programmes are politically biased	-	64	213	88	365	1.93	Disagreed
Rhythm 93.7 fm political programmes have affected me positively	53	172	54	86	365	2.52	Agreed
Rhythm 93.7 fm political programmes are very educative	82	161	56	66	365	2.70	Agreed

The table above shows that Rhythm 93.7fm’s political programmes were very educative and also have effect on the political decisions of the residents in terms of identifying candidates in an election.

Challenges facing Rhythm 93.7FM political platform in eradicating political violence.

S/ N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean \bar{X}	Decision
1	Youth preference for entertainment programmes like music on radio	61	167	43	94	365	2.51	Agreed
2	Programme competition from sister stations	12	76	171	106	365	1.98	Disagreed
3	Lack of access to radio devices by the youths	-	64	213	88	365	1.93	Disagreed
4	Preference for social media handles and gratifications	53	172	54	86	365	2.52	Agreed
5	Time variation in schedule of programme airing by	82	161	56	66	365	2.70	Agreed

the radio stations

The table above shows that some of the challenges of using the radio as a tool for political education lie in the fact that some youths prefer social media contents such as entertainment (music on radio) as against the discussion session laden with political matters. Most critically, the time for airing the political contents most times conflicts with the free time of the youths to listen to them.

Discussion of Findings

The first task was to identify the programmes by Rhythm 93.7fm and Viewpoint, area parliament and advertorials were listed from the data available. These programmes are specifically designed and popularized to keep the audience abreast of happenings within the society. Okon (2021) refers to such approach to political matters as the albatross of journalistic inertia because politics requires depth in programing. Amadi (2016) refers to it as atomisation journalism where the reporters only bless the mess, hence, creating a spiral of silence and learned helplessness on the part of the members of the society.

On the contrary, Sika (2017) argues that the evolution of media has decreased the significance of physical presence in the experience of people and event. This implies that radio technology is driving virtual communications in ways hitherto impossible. One can now be an audience member to a social performance without being physically present. One can communicate directly with others without meeting in the same place. As a result the physical structure that once divided our society into many distinct spatial settings for interaction has been greatly reduced in social significance. The walls of the family home for example are no longer effective barriers that will isolate the family from the larger community and society. To include mediated encounters in the study of situations, we need abandon, the notion that social situation are only encounters that occur face to face in set times and places.

The second task was to show the effect of the political programmes on the political participation of the residents. Data showed that the programmes had a positive effect on the political participation of the people. Overtime, the media have continued to watch over society as part of its surveillance function, alerting them at any point when things are going wrong. The media would have failed in their social responsibility if salient issues like political enlightenment are not being highlighted in the interest of the growth and development of the society. Through the media, and indeed the radio, it is easy to create awareness about the political implications of our choices in the society. The media is primed to inform society about the various social injustices that go on

in the society. The media is an instrument for social change in the way the public behaves through the various means by which they address the issues in the society especially political participation among members of the society (Mulugeta, 2014).

The goal of public enlightenment by the media is to bring about attitude change in the society through persuasion. It is believed that the media through its advocacy mandate should design persuasive messages cum programmes that will help in bringing down the scourge of political apathy which is fast becoming a norm in the society. The continued exposure of the audience to such persuasive messages, it is believed, will bring about positive attitudinal change for the good of the society. And when this happens, the joy of the researcher will be fulfilled.

The challenges of using radio as a political tool was showed to be in youth preference for social media handles and entertainment contents. This finding points to the social media as a game changer in the broadcast and indeed the entire spectrum of media operations globally. As Okon (2021) reports:

The glamour and the splendour of the new media have further shrunk the world into a weblet (hamlet) devoid of cultural/religious leanings and cleavages. The new media (social media), by their unique configuration, provide a platform for concentric transactions and rapid transfer. Such transactions may include outright purchases, bids, as well as other forms of ideological interface (p.9).

The world today has become fast paced. Alvin Toffler's "future shock" concept finds expression here. Interestingly, Rodman (2012) notes that the "internet is changing the way people communicate around the world and is changing the way the world does business. Therefore, to understand the Internet is to understand the media of the future" (p.28). No doubt the media landscape has changed considerably with more pervasive propensities. The speed at which information is being processed and transferred via the internet is still a marvel to the world and more innovations are unsettling already existing media, diminishing known lines of distinctions and creating a seamless merger that makes the media all-encompassing.

Nkajima (2020) sees new media as the mix between existing cultural conventions and the conventions of software – New media today can be understood as the mix between older cultural conventions for data representation, access, and manipulation and newer conventions of data

representation, access, and manipulation. The "old" data are representations of visual reality and human experience, and the "new" data is numerical data. The computer is kept out of the key "creative" decisions, and is delegated to the position of a technician. e.g. In film, software is used in some areas of production, in others are created using computer animation.

Recommendations

1. Rhythm 93.7fm should create more politically stimulating programmes to drive the political processes in Port Harcourt metropolis.
2. Political parties in the Port Harcourt metropolis should carry out aggressive grassroots political awareness campaigns to check the upsurge of political apathy in the area.
3. The media should be more creative and proactive in engaging the people politically instead of merely churning out political reports.

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