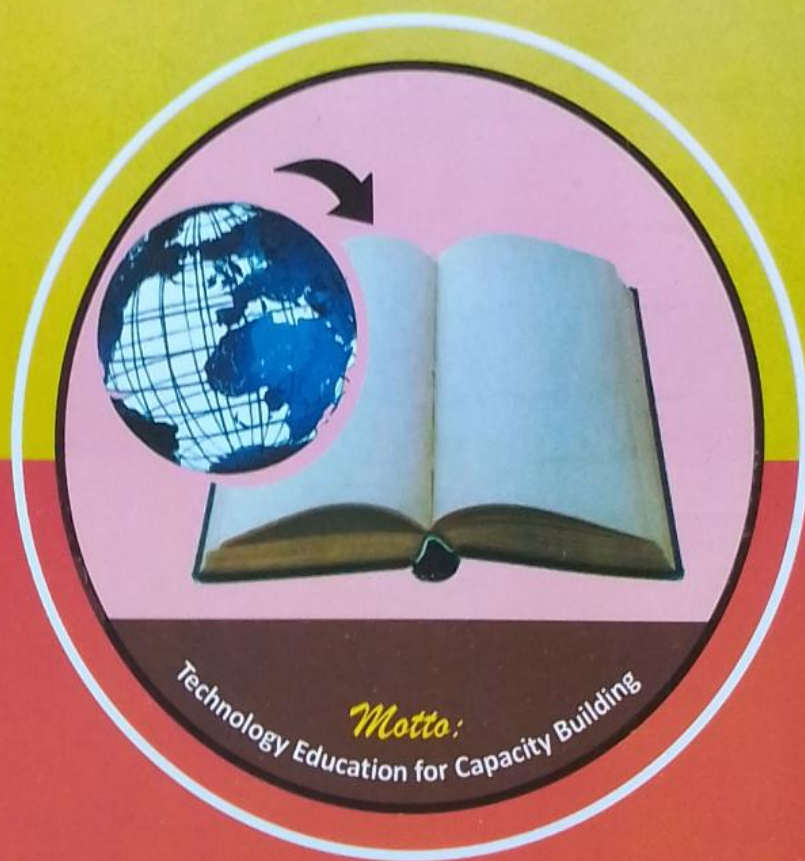


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All correspondences should be directed to :

Dr. Robert O. Okwori

Managing Editor

Journal of Information, Education, Science and Technology,
School of Technology Education, Federal University of Technology,
P.M.B. 65, Minna, Nigeria.

E-mail: jiest@futminna.edu.ng,

Website: www.futminna.edu.ng

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Dr Robert O. Okwori

Managing Editor,

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PMB 65, Minna, Niger State, Nigeria.

E-mail: jiest@futminna.edu.ng, www.futminna.edu.ng

GSM: 08140420994 & 08153051946

The Development Media Theory Option for the Nigerian Media in the Task of National Development

By

Dalhatu Bala Muhammad

Department of Communication Education,
Federal University of Technology, Minna.

Email: bala_yaman@yahoo.com

Mobile phone: +2348033838377

Abstract

The development media theory, one of the normative theories of the press, is a working theory used to explain how the mass media is a reflection of the socio-economic conditions in which it operates. This article reviews these normative theories, namely, the authoritarian media theory; the soviet-communist theory; the libertarian media theory (or the free press theory); social responsibility media theory, democratic participant media theory and the development media theory. Particularly, it examines one of these theories - the development media theory of the press, outlines its characteristics and looks at the role the press should play under this theory with a view to seeing if this theory is appropriate to the Nigerian situation and its press considering their level of development. The article concludes that the development media theory, with some modifications, is best for the Nigerian situation. It recommends that the Nigerian press should deliberately propagate, promote and protect democratic values and institutions, national economic development, Nigerian culture, and links with sister African nations and the developing world.

Introduction

The development media theory is one of the six normative theories of the press. Originally, four normative theories of the press were propounded by Siebert Peterson and Schramm (1956). These are the authoritarian media theory, soviet-communist media theory, libertarian media theory, (or free press theory) and social responsibility media theory. Their position is that "the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted" (Siebert, Peterson & Schram 1956: 1-2).

Four Original Normative Theories of the Press

First, there is the authoritarian media theory which states that the media whether public or private "existed to serve the government in power and were forbidden to criticize the government or its functionaries" (Folarin, 2002:27). The media are not allowed to criticize the government or its officials no matter how wrong they -the government or its officials- are. Instead the media are to support government at all times and be loyal to it.

The second normative theory of the press is the soviet-communist media theory which believes that the main task of the press was to serve the interest, and be under the control of the working class with no room for private ownership. (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso, 2008). The media are used to promote the soviet system and support development and change towards the attainment of the communist state. Media offer support and loyalty to the working class and its leaders and are committed to realizing a communist classless society.

The third is the libertarian media theory or free press theory which "prescribes that an individual should be free to publish what he or she likes and to hold and express opinions freely" (Folarin, 2002: 30). This theory of the press believes in the unfettered freedom of the individual to hold any opinion whatsoever and express same without any restrictions or negative consequences. Ideas should be expressed freely and compete with other ideas in the market place of ideas, and may the best idea dominate and be freely adopted.

The fourth of the original four normative theories of the press is the social responsibility media theory. The positions of this theory is that the media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society; avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence, civil disorder; and should reflect the society's plurality giving access to various points of view. (Anaeto, Onabanjo, & Osifeso, 2008).

Two other Normative Theories

Apart from the aforementioned four normative theories, Folarin (2002:33) points out that "scholars like Denis McQuail have drawn attention to two emerging theories: Democratic Participant Media Theory and Development Media Theory". The Democratic Participant media theory according to McQuail (1983:98), reflects "public reaction against the commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media and against the centralism and bureaucratization of public broadcasting institutions, established according to the norms of social responsibility". The theory's position is that in addition to the existing bureaucracy, commercial and professional hegemony in media systems should be broken down so that all potential users and consumers would have equal access to the media (Folarin, 2002).

The Development Media Theory

The sixth normative theory of the press which is the central focus of this paper is the development media theory which sees the media as pivots for national development. McQuail (1983:131) states that the central thesis of the theory is that the mass media in developing nations should be used for "the primacy of the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy; support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries".

McQuail (1981), cited in Kadijat (2009:128), clarifies further:

Development media theory advocates media support for an existing political regime and its efforts to bring about national economic development.... By supporting government development efforts, media aid society at large. This theory argues that until a nation is well established and its economic development well underway, media must be supportive rather than critical of government. Journalist must not pick apart government efforts to promote development but, rather, assist government in implementing such policies.

Folarin (2002) explains that the development media theory was put forward because the other normative theories of the press could not be easily applied to developing countries due to certain characteristics that are peculiar to them. These include:

- (1) Absence or inadequate supply of requisite communication infrastructure;
- (2) Relatively limited supply of requisite professional skills;
- (3) Relative lack of cultural production resources;
- (4) Relatively limited availability of media-literate audiences;
- (5) Dependence on the developed world for technology, skill and cultural products.

The major tenets of development media theory according to McQuail (1987) in Folarin (2002) are as follows:

- (i) Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.
- (ii) Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.
- (iii) Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and languages.
- (iv) Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically.
- (v) Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.
- (vi) In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operation; and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.

The development media theory thus deals with the structure and performance of the media in developing countries and "encompasses a great variety of socio-cultural, economic and political conditions which, however, tend to converge in a primary concern to use the media for development purposes". (Folarin, 2002:38-39).

How do the tenets of the development media theory apply to Nigeria? In other words, of what relevance is the media development theory to the Nigerian press?

In the first place, the characteristics or circumstances that make it difficult to apply the other normative

theories to developing countries exist in Nigeria. These have been listed above to be the absence or inadequate supply of requisite communication infrastructure and professional skills; lack of cultural production resources and limited availability of media-literate audiences; and dependence on the developed world for technology, skills and cultural products. As a result of these peculiar circumstances, wholesale application of other theories of the press earlier sketched may not be appropriate. Development media theory, with modifications based on experience, seems to be the most appropriate theory to apply to the Nigerian Press. Let us consider each tenet or proposition of the development media theory and see how well it would apply to the Nigerian press.

- (A). Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.

It is a fact that Nigeria is facing a lot of development challenges in virtually all areas or segments of the polity. These challenges include the nurturing of democratic culture and institutions, development of basic infrastructure such as roads and power supply; economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment; social challenges especially in youth development and education among others. The press cannot divorce itself from the challenges in the society of which it is a part. It must contribute in solving these problems through education and mobilization. As noted by a onetime editor-in-chief of *New Nigerian* cited, in Domatob and Hall (1983:10), the mass media "should be an agent in mobilizing the society, ... educating the society, ... consolidating independence or, in one or two cases, revolution". Therefore the Nigerian press should consider it a duty to adopt the proposition of the media development theory stating that "media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy".

- (B). Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of society.

The Nigerian Press should not adopt wholesale the Libertarian philosophy of free press without modifications. Taking the development challenges of the nation into account, it should modify freedom of the press to suit the economic priorities and development needs of the nation. For instance, in promoting and exercising the free expression of opinions, the press should not encourage or glorify those ideas that would pit one section of the society against the other, ideas that glamorize or demonize an ethnic group or section; and generally, issues that would lead to social disharmony. It should partner with the government in arriving at and promoting economic policies and mobilizing the populace to adopt these policies with a view to achieving set economic goals or targets.

- (C). Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and language(s).

As noted by Ogah (2007:190), the development media theory "is for the positive use of the media for national development and for autonomy of cultural identity of a particular nation". The Nigerian press should as a matter of deliberate policy adopt this tenet of the development media theory. The Nigerian content policy of the Nigerian Broadcasting Board of Control is thus a policy in the right direction. The situation where our airwaves are filled with foreign music and other programmes is not the best. The programmes that are broadcast on our television are largely foreign. Nigerian languages and culture should be protected and promoted to halt and possibly reverse the cultural imperialism that is currently going on. Nigerian dresses, dances, languages and social values should be actively encouraged and celebrated. The Nigerian press should thus be an active promoter, and reflector of this tenet of the media development theory. It should take advantage of current advances in ICTs which has made production of high quality programmes inexpensive. It should also take advantage of the internet which has provided a ready global audience and master it.

- (D). Media should give priority in news and information to links we share with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally and politically.

What currently obtains in the Nigerian press can be said to be contrary to this tenet or proposition. We get more news of the United States of America and of Europe than we do of West Africa or even Africa generally. As a result of the West dominating the media and its technology, we get news of happenings there almost instantly. We get news about the United States or United Kingdom quicker than we do that of Ghana or even Cameroon. Even when we get news of our neighbours or developing countries like us, it is reported by the West from their perspective. The development media theory seeks a change. There should be a conscious and deliberate effort by

the Nigerian press to report more news about our neighbors, about West Africa, about Africa and about the developing nations than about Americans and Europeans. This is for the simple reason that we have more in common with our neighbours, with Africans, with the developing nations than we have with Americans or Europeans.

- (E). Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks. Although Folarin (2002:37) suggests that this principle is "much too vague to be useful as a working guideline", it could still be argued that the principle or tenet is emphasizing the complementary roles of freedom and responsibility in the gathering and dissemination of information. The press should therefore always be conscious of its developmental role even while protecting its freedom in news gathering and dissemination. For example, reporting stereo-types about other groups which are not based on facts and all mono-directional news should be discouraged.
- (F). In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operation; and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified. This principle of development media theory is rightly controversial. According to Anaeto et al (2008:64) scholars have argued that "it goes against the workings of press freedom and makes nonsense of the idea of development". It is the opinion of Folarin (2002) that the press should fulfill its obligations and defend its rights. On the other hand, the state should ensure that if the press contravenes the law, it should face prosecution expecting a fair and speedy trial. He concludes that "nothing in the origin, basis and principles of development media theory should be interpreted as shielding media and journalists from social responsibility or ousting the concept of press freedom" (Folarin, 2002:38). This paper fully adopts this position.

Conclusion

This paper reviewed the normative theories of the press which are: the authoritarian media theory; the soviet-communist theory; the social responsibility media theory; the libertarian media theory (or the free press theory); democratic participant media theory and the development media theory. In particular, the development media theory was extensively examined as this paper sees it as very relevant to the Nigerian situation considering the country's present level of development and what its long-term goals should be.

This article concludes by proposing the adoption- with some modifications- of the development media theory by the Nigerian press. This is because, as we have tried to show, it is appropriate to the development challenges that Nigeria is currently facing. The central plank of the modification is that the press should promote development as outlined earlier while retaining its freedom within the ambit of the law.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Nigerian press should adopt the following principles based on the modified development media theory as a matter of urgency:

1. Promote the nurturing and sustenance of democratic culture and institutions. This entails, among others, the promotion and protection of individual and group rights and freedoms including that of thought and association within the ambit of the law; and the exposure and condemnation of impunity by government and its top officials.
2. Promote and propagate the principle of economic development through self sufficiency by encouraging the production and consumption of goods and services by Nigerians for Nigerians in the first instance and the world thereafter. The press should be at the forefront of a campaign against the unwholesome and indiscriminate importation of goods and services. No nation develops without producing as much as possible of what it needs. Thus, the establishment and protection of small, medium and large scale industrial enterprises should be promoted by the press.

3. A deliberate policy of canvassing for the development of the human resources of the country should be adopted. Our educational system, from primary to tertiary, should be overhauled with a view to making it at par with any other in the world but grounded in Nigerian local realities. In this respect there is a need to develop a national ideology espousing a Nigerian dream and a vision of our place in Africa and the world. In the short-term all policies, politics and politicians that align with these should be encouraged, and those that undermine education should be condemned and blacklisted by the press.
4. The Nigerian press should actively promote our indigenous culture and traditions so long as they do not conflict with the overall development of the society. Local dresses should be adopted as national dresses. The use of English wears should be discouraged- in our banks and courts, for example. In a similar manner, local indigenous dishes and drinks should be promoted and even glamorized by the media.
5. More content should be devoted in the Nigerian media to news from neighbouring countries, other African countries, the developing world of Asia and Latin America in that order than those on north America and Europe.
The Nigerian media stakeholders including the Nigerian Union of Journalists, the Nigerian Guild of Editors, the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria and the Newspapers Proprietors of Nigeria should key into these principles, modifying them if found necessary, adopt them and actively implement them.

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