

TELEVISION AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING
NIGERIAN CULTURE

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Abstract

The need for cultural preservation and cultural identity among nations has become an important consideration in this age of globalization. Today, the world has not only become a global village, but a global bedroom. With the tremendous development of the communication and information sectors, particular attention has been paid in recent years to the need for cultural diversity in the media as a way of preserving and promoting cultures. It is, therefore, imperative for a people to have some certain characteristic features that can easily distinguish them from others. There is no doubting the fact that the mass media is responsible for the dissemination of values, ideas, and developmental information in many ways and this goes a long way in elevating cultures and cultural identity. The way and manner the morals and cultures of the typical Nigerian community is promoted depend solely on its mass media. This article, therefore, focused on the television as a mass medium with a view to examining its role and effectiveness in promoting Nigerian indigenous culture, as well as its continued relevance to the preservation and sustenance of Nigeria's cultural identity.

Keywords: Television, Cultural preservation, National identity, Global village, Nigeria

Introduction

Defining culture depends largely on who is offering the definition. Many scholars have looked at culture from different perspectives and prisms. Arriving at a single definition of culture is somewhat difficult. This means you cannot import a fixed definition into any and every context and expect it to make sense. What you have to do is to identify the discursive

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context itself. However, we shall look at a few definitions of culture that may be germane to this discourse, particularly in relation to the geo-cultural context of Nigeria. Culture is fundamental to human existence and human civilization, embodying in its dynamism, the totality of a people's response to the challenges of life, and living, in a (any) living environment. Culture offers meaning, purpose and value to the socio-economic, political and aesthetic ethos of society (Olu Obafemi 37-38). In the same vein, Tade Aina claims that culture is the totality of the past and ongoing experience, material and ideational of a group, that is, their whole way of life. Whilst for others, culture refers to that sector of human activity concerned with leisure, the arts and crafts, religion, ceremonies, festivals, customs and valuations (32).

In the Nigerian society, cultures are very important and they are held in great reverence (Femi Onabajo 93). Eugene Nida posits that culture is all learned behaviour, which is acquired socially, that is, the material and non-material traits, which are passed on from one generation to another (25). Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing them as a people from their neighbours (H.B. Harunah 32). It is in this connection that Onabajo argues that:

People and culture cannot be separated. Culture stands for the aggregate values and concepts which characterize a community. It then follows that people who lack culture or are ignorant of their past experience either written or unwritten are themselves not in full existence. Culture is the product of ecology and is greatly influenced by the environment. Hence, it encompasses all the material and non-material expressions of a people, as well as the processes with which these expressions are communicated. These consist of our literature, music, arts, customs, social institutions and other intellectual expressions of the society. (94)

In other words, culture refers to the customs, practices, languages, values and worldviews that define social groups such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, region or common interests. Culture is the way of life and the belief system of a particular group of people at a particular time. Culture is a complex concept that refers to

the common values, beliefs, social practices, rules, and assumptions that bind a group of people together (Joseph Dominick 45). People have always been a product of their cultures and that explains why they are so attached to it. The issue of culture is so pervasive and critical in human lives that it has been described as a way of life of the people. In reality, everything about human life is influenced by its cultural environment. As human societies continue to expand, they became more complex and certain trends emerge. Today, culture has become a veritable means of determining the direction a society should go if it wants to grow and develop. Different aspects of culture have been developed to become the determinants of the survival of societies (Obafemi 9-10).

In an interview with this researcher, the Onogie of Igueben, HRH Eluojior Ehizoje I, stressed the importance of culture, saying that "any people without a culture are doomed." In essence, to understand a people's culture, one must survey the whole gamut of the people's way of life. Such characteristics to be considered include the physical as well as the abstract. In other words, the concept examines the material and non-material aspects in the people's way of life. From the foregoing, it is safe to deduce that culture is an ambiguous aspect of nature with ambivalent characteristics, that is, both physical and abstract. While some aspects of culture cannot be pointed at in real physical terms (such as beliefs), other aspects, such as painting and carving in which there is the marriage of aesthetics and functionalism, are actually physical manifestations of culture. Culture performs certain functions and a brief mention of them would enable us to evaluate how it affects and influences the television medium. We list these functions as follows:

1. culture provides a people with a way of looking at reality;
2. culture provides standards of evaluation;
3. it conditions motivations;
4. it is a medium of communication; and
5. it defines the people's identity.

An examination of these functions of culture would obviously reveal that they affect television as much as the functions of television affect culture. The functions of culture above revealed that culture is a medium of communication, just as it defines the people's identity. It can therefore be inferred that television can define the people's identity since it is medium of communication. To buttress this position, we may take a look at the statement of Obafemi Awolowo in 1959 during the inauguration of the first television (TV) station in Nigeria. He stated that:

Culture is a symbol of identity. A strong cultural or national identity can strengthen the economy and improve standards of living of the Nigerian people. It can be argued that lack of cultural synergy made it impossible for the country to form national cultural symbols which every citizen of the country can proudly and voluntarily subscribe to. As a 'historical reservoir', culture is an important factor in shaping identity. It is the soul of a people that fosters unity, builds character and encourages communal harmony and peace. This, to a very large extent, can go a long way to mitigate some of the problems facing the country and help forge a pan-Nigerian cultural consensus upon which a national identity can then be built. (180)

The Role of Television in Promoting Culture

TV is a telecommunication system widely used for transmitting and receiving moving pictures that can be monochrome (black-and-white) or coloured, with or without accompanying sound over a distance. The term may also refer specifically to a television set, television programming, or television transmission. The word is derived from mixed Latin and Greek roots, meaning 'far sight': Greek *tele*, far, and Latin *vision*, sight (Smith Anthony 191). Television as a medium of communication has contributed to the overall development of Nigeria in several ways. When any developing country opts for television, it definitely must be because, among other things, TV has an important role to play in advancing the process of national development. It has and is still making a lot of impact on the economic, political, social, cultural and educational advancement of the nation. It is the most effective modern means of mass communication now available to mankind (Emmanuel Akpan 13).

It is essentially an audiovisual medium whose primary aim is to use the symbols it communicates to influence the task and behaviour of the people who receive such symbols. It plays the role of entertaining, educating, informing and impacting knowledge across the world. It can be used to mass-mobilize people and create awareness on topical issues of for commercial and non-commercial organizations. It is in view of this that we argue that TV can be used to revive, preserve and promote Nigeria's dying cultural heritage. The enormous powers usually ascribed to this medium stems from its audiovisual properties,

which command instant believability (Onabajo 95). This position was further affirmed by Scott Cowdell when he argued that:

Television can also make or mar the career of an individual or the image of a society or nation. Recently, Transparency International (a non-governmental agency) sponsored a documentary on Cable News Network (CNN), which highlighted the despicable state of corruption in Nigeria. The recordings were done with very sophisticated equipment and the entire package was like a typical espionage. Policemen and custom officials in Nigeria were seen actually negotiating for bribes, which ranged from mere pittances to huge amounts of money. If the documentary had been a publication in a magazine it would not have generated the heated reaction it did. Many people, especially those in government, would have dismissed it as a mere fabrication of foreign detractors. But the audiovisual mode of television compelled respect and believability more than any other communication medium. (178-179)

TV uses programmes as tools to repackage and disseminate (i.e. preserving, promoting and projecting) Nigeria's rich cultural heritage in form of dramas, movies, documentaries, animated television commercials and alternative indigenous educational technology resources. As the most effective modern means of mass communication, its effectiveness in aiding development, according to Onabajo, derives from the following attributes:

- (a) television can present things as they really are (realism achieved through sight and hearing);
- (b) events can be shown as they are happening;
- (c) it can address the whole person, since its range of subjects is both comprehensive and flexible;
- (d) it can also address both the literate and the illiterate with equal success and effectiveness;
- (e) it can speak to the individual intimately, but also lends itself to group reception; and
- (f) it has both intellectual and emotional appeal.

Another positive consequence, according to Cowdell, is that TV enhances cultural growth and this is through the process of acculturation. This is best achieved through such characteristics explained as "indigenizing what is foreign, idealizing what is indigenous (and) nationalizing what is sectional (176). One should also consider the fact that television, as a mass medium, affects and influences many people at the same time, thus showing the vitality of its role in the society. There is, therefore, no gainsaying the fact that television is a good tool for inculcation of socio-political and cultural values. Socio-political and cultural values of any country can be defined, sharpened and promoted through different programmes. These programmes can in no small measure help to foster the sense of brotherhood among the people of different class, creed and sex. Changing social systems, cultural and political issues are also brought for discussion and debate and exhibition on cultural exchange and political reviews are necessary for preservation of cultural values. The television also has the ability not only to reflect but also shape opinion, and to play a part in forming attitudes, which affect morality. The Nigerian television has not lagged behind in revitalizing the nation's cultural heritage and promoting the musical and dramatic talents (Onabajo 95).

Television network programming and satellite transmission have further 'compressed' the world from a global village into a global bedroom. We may not, therefore, be too far from the truth to conclude that the relationship between television and culture is unique and vital to the existence of culture. Culture is the way that a particular people communicate and the media they use. The popular culture is the media most widely used in the society. In essence, therefore, it could be argued that: to know a people's culture, the media of communication of the people should be examined (Femi Adeseye 172-173).

On their part, Patrick Williams and Joan Pearce contend that "culture is the communication system that enables human beings to act, adapt and transmit survival resources" (ix). As a development agent, TV has done much and can do more in activating human intentions and cultural development through serious educational programmes which matter-of-factly are now regular features of Nigerian television (Onabajo 95). The media, particularly TV provide information and entertainment and, at the same time, have persuasive powers that are capable of effecting radical changes (Francis Voelker 22). For this reason, the role of television in the promotion of our culture cannot be overestimated. However, in trying to showcase programmes that have the ability of promoting Nigeria's diverse cultures, the unity of the Nigerian peoples should be taken into consideration. This may explain why Onabajo advised that:

In our efforts to promote indigenous culture, we should accentuate those things that bind us together as a nation and not those that tend to dichotomize us into fragmented states. The TV station must ensure that only the right virtues are transmitted to the viewers. For viewers, a station is justified by the quality of programmes that emanate there from. People are more interested in watching plays and drama, which deal directly with their culture. (95)

Onabajo's advice is very apt here given the fact that the spread or acceptance, for instance, of some fads is usually accelerated and made more universal by television. The dress patterns of most television stars, especially musicians and artistes are easily copied by the youth. In Nigeria today, one of the commonest sights is that teenage girls parade university campuses wearing mono-strap body-hug outfits while the guys wear baggy trousers that they keep pulling up as they sway along the streets. These are examples of fads copied from television programmes. In spite of its enormous role, the TV still has some challenges. For instance, there are still villages in Nigeria where owners of TV sets can easily be counted. Oftentimes, watching television programmes is somewhat difficult in the face of epileptic or 'blink-blink' electricity supply. Onabajo also observed that:

The television medium has not been perfect and needs to guide against telecasting bizarre culture and social activities. African culture has been indicated in the past as being savage and ferocious. It should therefore ensure that barbaric entertainments are removed. The presence of too much Western culture in telecasts should also be checked, as it could lead to cultural imperialism rather than cultural transformation. (95)

Above all, parents should guide their children on the type of programmes to watch on TV. This is because TV, to a large extent, can influence the character and lifestyle of our children and youths, as the spread or acceptance, for instance, of some fads is usually accelerated and made more universal by it.

Recommendation

In order for Nigerian culture to be meaningfully promoted by TV, the culture of a particular ethnic group or region of the country should not be promoted at the detriment of others. The point being made here is that the cultures of the regional tripods (Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba) and the other ethnicities that make up the Nigerian nation should be promoted equally. It is, however, worthy of note to state that the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) has been trying in this regard. Nigerian television should put emphasis on those things that bind us together as a nation and not those that tend to divide us into fragmented states. NTA and other television channels must ensure that only the right virtues are transmitted to the viewing Nigerian populace (Onabajo 95).

The federal government of Nigeria (FGN) must be able to garner the political and economic will power to tackle the problem of electricity supply across the country. However well-packaged TV programmes might be, viewers can only watch them when there is regular electricity supply. Nigerian television managers and operator should ensure that negative entertainment contents are removed from their programming while emphasis should be on local content as against Western culture oriented ones. Nigerian television stations should be more culturally oriented in their programming and contents. Government should create enabling environment for the establishment of more television stations in the country. That education is key to the dissemination of information and development of any society cannot be over-emphasized. Education is very vital to every aspect of mass communication. To this end, government at all levels should encourage formal basic education. This will enhance television's primary function of informing, entertaining and educating.

Conclusion

Since October 31, 1959 when television broadcasting was launched in Nigeria by the first Western Region premier, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, it has tried its best to live up to its objective of promoting cultural awareness throughout the Nigerian federation. It has been performing its primary function of informing, entertaining and educating the Nigerian people. However, emphasis should be shifted from the projection of Western cultures to the promotion of our indigenous culture. Nigerian television needs to guide against telecasting of obscene and disgusting lifestyles and social activities. Nigerian culture detests them. Thus, the future of the television must be seen as very significant in the overall social, cultural, moral, economic goals of the nation. According to Onabajo, whatever the pre-occupations of the

Nigerian television, be they programmes in drama, sports, situation comedy, tele-film or news, they must continue to promote an integrative indigenous culture, moral and value system in our search for nationhood, identity and national prosperity (98).

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