

Impact of Mass Communication on the Residents of Etinan Local Government Area: Implications for Rural Development Programmes

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Abstract

The study focuses on the impact of mass communication on the residents of Etinan Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The survey method was adopted and a sample of 550 was selected for the study using a multi-sampling procedure. The questionnaire was the major instrument while interview schedule was used as support.

This study shows that the mass media do not have as much impact on the residents of Etinan Local government area when compared with the traditional media. Recall of development innovations by the respondents was higher for traditional media as sources than mass media. Men, more than women experienced greater impact of the mass media. And generally, men depended more on all sources of media for development information than their female counterparts. The study recommends a careful application of mass media along with traditional media for development purposes.

Introduction

One of the challenges facing developing countries is how to use the modern mass media effectively to promote rural development. The desire to conceptualize a better approach led to the formulation of several communication development paradigms (Yahaya, 2003:12) such as the Economic Modernization Approach, the Political Economy Approach and recently the Entertainment Education Strategy (EES). According to Yahaya, these strategies strive to “empower local audiences to social action and socio-political mobilization” (13).

These approaches recognise the vital roles modern communication media can play in improving rural development. That is because the media do not only educate, entertain, socialize and inform, they can also be used to promote health issues, transportation, security, empowerment, inter religious harmony, cultural socialization, etc (Wilson, 1997:38).

Despite the acknowledgement of the role communication media in rural development, there appears to be little attention given to the impact the media make on people in carrying out rural development goals. Williams (1978:110) pointed out the need to study the impact the media have on people in differing

local conditions. Similar calls were made at different communication conferences held at Nairobi – Kenya 1976; Dakar – Senegal 1978, Arusha – Tanzania 1981 and Abeokuta – Nigeria in 1989.

The Mass Media and Rural Development

One of the major reasons for government ownership of media entities in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa has been the need to effectively use the media for national development (Folarin, 1990:76). This justification is the main reason that governments at the state and federal levels invest huge resources to set up print and broadcast media outfits. However, Ugboajah and Jefkins (1986:58) reject this reasoning because these outfits have been used for the pursuit of narrow interest – that of the elites. They said, “At independence the new rulers embraced the propaganda roles of the mass media and forgot that they could be restructured for development purposes.”

Apart from the wrong use of the new communication media by the economic and political elites, there was the problem of lack of credibility which affected the effective use of the mass media for rural development. Dare (1990:9) says, this credibility problem arose from the use of the media by the political elites deceive the rural people. Accordingly, the author states,

Given decades of neglect and broken promises, the rural poor, perhaps even more so the general public, have come to develop a built-in bias against information from a government source. Media that have been used routinely to deceive or mislead the public: how can the same media now be employed to mobilize the same public for national development?

Sobowale (1989:306) has also pointed out the lack of communication infrastructure, local communication production companies and experienced personnel. He also identified the low-level of literacy, poverty and insufficient social infrastructures as problems that pose a huge challenge to the use of mass communication media for rural development. Despite these problems, communication policy planners seem to believe that the highly centralized and monopolized communication media are furthering development in the rural areas. And, in spite of the calls for the decentralization of the communication media, these planners along with government officials, still believe in the ability of the mass media to cause development.

While the role of the mass media in facilitating development may not be in doubt, the impact the media have made in the current effort at rural development has been given scanty attention. Efforts at rural development in the recent past have proved disappointing, in spite of the promises and expectations of mass communication in the process. Many communication scholars (Ugboajah, 1977; Wilson, 1981, 1987) have doubted the impact of

mass communication media in causing effective rural development in Nigeria. They complained of the over centralization of the modern mass media in the urban areas, the urban orientation of their contents and personnel. Dare (1990:9) laments that, “The new media themselves are victims of the bigger-is-better syndrome that has vitiated much of the thinking and planning for development in Nigeria.”

The Problem

In Nigeria, past rural development schemes failed because little attention was given to the role communication should play in such schemes. In many instances the impact that development communication messages had on the rural populace was hardly documented. No one knew for sure whether such development messages met the needs and aspirations of the rural populace. Against the background of lack of access to the media by the majority of our rural dwellers, the growing level of poverty and illiteracy and the general mistrust of the modern media messages, it becomes necessary to determine empirically the impact that modern mass media have on rural dwellers in communicating development messages. The key question then is, how much impact has mass communication media made on residents of Etinan LGA in creating awareness on development programmes?

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were to determine the impact of mass communication on the residents of Etinan Local government Area of Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria, and to find out how this affected rural development programmes in the area.

Research Questions

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

- i. What are the major sources of information on development programmes relied upon by residents of Etinan LGA?
- ii. What is the exposure pattern to the modern mass media as sources of development information for residents of Etinan LGA?
- iii. Is there any significant difference in exposure pattern in terms of gender, age and education?
- iv. How do the mass media compare with other traditional information sources in communicating development programmes to residents of Etinan LGA?
- v. How much do the residents of Etinan LGA learn from the information they receive from the mass media and other traditional sources?

Hypotheses

- H₀₁: Etinan Local Government Area residents do not rely more on traditional media sources than the mass media as sources of development information.
- H₀₂: Male residents of Etinan Local government Area do not rely more on mass media in particular and all other media sources of development information than their female counterparts.

Significance of the Study

Nigeria's national development policies have shifted in the last decade to focus on the rural areas. Various governments at the state and national levels have embarked on schemes to bring more development to the rural areas where majority of our people live.

Many of the schemes had specific goals which included communication component. However, despite the excellent conception of such schemes, and the expectations they raised, the rural areas remain substantially underdeveloped. The impact that communication media have made on rural people as vehicle for communicating development information appears to have been given scanty attention. This is why this study is significant because it is likely to yield data useful to planning future development schemes.

Scope of the Study

The study was limited to the impact of mass media on the residents of Etinan LGA. It did not concern itself with reporting the pattern of coverage of the LGA by the mass media.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was drawn from the *agenda setting theory* which postulates that the media can set the agenda for the public about rural development programmes through editorials, features news and documentary programmes. Such tendentious emphasis and media attention is bound to raise rural development issues to the front burner and contribute significantly to effort at solving the rural condition. The theory maintains that such emphasis will increase the salience of rural development issues at the public sphere.

Another relevant theoretical framework the study relied upon was the *uses and gratification theory* which proposes that audience (rural dwellers) selectively expose themselves to information which accord with their needs and aspirations. Accordingly, the study assumed that rural dwellers would selectively use the mass media to gratify their needs.

Method

The researcher surveyed 690 residents of Etinan LGA using the multi-stage sampling procedure. First, Etinan LGA was divided into three clans, where

forty six communities were further selected through systematic sampling. Afterwards 15 residents in each of the 46 communities were systematically selected. The researcher considered such factors as the size of the population, accessibility to residents and distribution of amenities, in arriving at the sample.

Study Instruments

The study had two instruments – the questionnaire and the interview schedule. The questionnaire had 23 items structured in the dichotomous and multiple response formats. The questionnaire tested respondents' social backgrounds, media exposure, media use and media influence.

The interview schedule was designed for the development programme initiators in the LGA as well as media personnel in the state. The items were exploratory (designed to complement the items in the questionnaire). The instruments were subjected to scrupulous face and content validity and pre-tested on a sample of respondents for reliability. Consequently, the questionnaire and interview schedule yielded 0.85 and 0.90 reliability coefficients, respectively.

Data Analysis

Out of the 690 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 550 (80%) were returned and found suitable for analysis. Sixty-two percent of the sample was male and 38 percent female. The age groups were 15-20 (20%), 20-30 (30%), 31-45(40%) and 45 and above (10%).

Regarding their educational background, 55 percent had primary or no education, 34 percent had secondary, 7 percent had post secondary education and 15 percent attended universities. With regard to occupation, 43 percent were farmers, 40 percent students, 10 teachers, and two percent clergymen. Traders accounted for 18 percent, while civil servants and business people accounted for 20 and 6 percent respectively.

Research question one: What are the major sources of information on development programmes relied upon by residents of Etinan LGA?

Table 1: Major Sources of Information Which Respondents Recalled Using

Information Sources	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Radio	167	30
Newspaper	27	5
Television	11	2
Magazine	10	2
Town crier	192	35
Town meeting	55	10
Church	48	9
Family member/friends	40	7
Total	550	100%

Table 1 shows that of the sources of information relied upon by residents of Etinan LGA, the local community newsman (town crier) comes tops (35%), followed by radio (30%) and town meeting (10%). The church attracted a preference rating of 9 percent. The least relied on sources were television and magazines. This is not surprising since access to these media is constrained by poverty, illiteracy and lack of electricity. It is noteworthy that the residents relied more on the time-tested traditional sources such as the town crier. It confirms the position that the traditional information is still more dominant and highly preferred.

Research question two: What is the exposure pattern to the modern mass media as sources of development information for residents of Etinan LGA?

Table 2: Exposure Pattern to Modern Media as Sources of Development Information

Modern Mass Media Sources	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Radio	167	78
Newspapers	27	13
Television	11	5
Magazine	10	4
Total	215	100%

Table 2 shows that of the modern mass media mentioned most people exposed themselves to radio and less to television and magazine. Thus, radio had more preference. This result confirms earlier findings that radio is more popular with rural dwellers than other mass media sources.

Research question three : Is there a significant difference in the exposure pattern in terms of gender, age and education of residents of Etinan LGA?

Table 3: Pattern of Media Exposure on the Basis of Gender

Information Sources	Male	Female
Radio	117 (70.1%)	50 (29.9%)
Newspaper	25 (92.6%)	2 (7.4%)
Television	9 (81.8%)	2 (18.2%)
Magazine	8 (80.0%)	2 (20.0%)
Town crier	106 (55.2%)	86 (44.8%)
Town meeting	50 (90.9%)	5 (9.1%)
Church	16 (33.33%)	32 (66.7%)
Family Friends	10 (25%)	30 (75%)
TOTAL	N = 341	N = 209

As Table 3 indicates, male respondents showed more exposure to the information sources except in the case of the church and family/friend where female respondents exposed themselves more than men. The table also shows that men exposed themselves more to radio than women, read more newspaper than women and relied on the town crier more than women. One explanation for is the differences in gender roles. Edelsterin (1977) states that gender roles define what men and women are expected to do in work and social settings.

Table 4: Pattern of Media Exposure on the Basis of Age

Information Sources	<i>Exposure Pattern by Age of Respondents</i>			
	15-20	21-30	31-40	45 above
Radio	45 (42%)	76 (46%)	35 (16%)	11 (20%)
Newspapers	4 (3.4%)	7 (4.2%)	10 (4.5%)	6 (11%)
Television	2(1.8%)	3(1.8%)	4(1.8%)	2(3.6%)
Magazine	1(0.9%)	3(1.8%)	4(1.8%)	2(3.6%)
Town crier	46(41.8%)	35(21.2%)	101(46%)	10 (18%)
Town meeting	2(1.8%)	21(12.7%)	19(8.6%)	13 (23.6%)
Church	8(7.2%)	18(11%)	19(8.6%)	3 (5.4%)
Family /Friends	2(1.8%)	2(1.2%)	28(12.7%)	8. (14.5%)
	N = 110	N = 165	N - 220	N = 55

Table 4 shows that radio and the town crier were the most popular media sources for those in the 15-20 age bracket. Radio also was the leading media source of information for those in the 21-30 age group followed by the town crier, town meeting and the church. The least media source for this group was family members/friends. Among those in the 31-40 age group, the town crier was the most popular media source, followed by radio and family members and friends. For those who are 45 years and above, town meetings and family members and friends were the popular sources of information.

Table 5: Pattern of Media Exposure on the Basis of Education

Information Sources	Primary Or No Education	Secondary Education	Post Sec Education	University
Radio	36 (11.6%)	113(60.4%)	14 (35%)	4 (26.6%)
Newspapers	-	17 (9.1%)	7(17.5%)	3 (20%)
Television	-	3(1.6%)	3(7.5%)	5(33.3%)
Magazine	-	6(3.2%)	2(5%)	12(13.3%)
Town crier	156(50.6%)	30(16%)	6(15%)	-
Town meeting	42(13.6%)	7(3.7%)	5(12.5%)	1 (6.6%)
Church	39(12.6%)	6(3.2%)	3(7.5%)	
Family /Friends	35(11.4%)	5(2.6%)	-	
	N = 308	N = 187	N - 40	N = 15
GRAND TOTAL				550

Table 5 shows that radio was relied upon by more respondents who had secondary education, followed by those with primary or no education. Newspapers were relied upon by those who had secondary and post secondary education. The town crier was relied upon by those who had primary or no education followed by those with secondary education. The town meeting, the church and family/friends were sources of information relied upon more by those who had little or no education.

Research question four : How do mass media compare with other traditional sources in communicating development programmes to residents of Etinan LGA ?

Table 6: Respondent's Reliance on Mass Media and Traditional Sources.

Modern mass media	No. of respondents	%	Traditional media sources	No. of respondents	%
Radio	167	30	Town crier	192	35
Newspaper	27	5	Town meeting	55	10
Television	11	2	Church	48	9
Magazine	10	2	Family/Friends	40	7
Total	215	39		335	61

N= 550

The overall picture presented in Table 6 shows that residents of Etinan LGA relied more on traditional media sources than the mass media in receiving information on development programmes.

Research question five: How much do residents of Etinan LGA learn from the information they receive from the mass media and other traditional sources?

To answer this question respondents were asked to recall specific radio and television programmes and newspaper and magazine columns that taught them something about rural development which they never knew before. They were also requested to recall the innovations they knew through other traditional media sources. The finding is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents According to the Number of Innovations Recalled.

Types of Information Sources	No. of Innovations Recalled	Distribution of Respondents	%	
Mass media sources	Four (4)	55	10	
	Three (3)	105	19	
	Two (2)	235	43	
	One (1)	120	22	

	Nil (0)	35	6	N=550
Traditional media sources	Four (4)	125	23	N=550
	Three (3)	110	20	
	Two (2)	240	43	
	One (1)	70	13	
	Nil (0)	5	1	

Table 7 shows that respondents recalled innovations communicated through traditional media sources more than those through the mass media. It further confirms that respondents relied more on the traditional media as sources of information on development programmes than the mass media.

Hypothesis one: H_{01} : Etinan residents do not rely significantly on traditional media sources for development information as they do with mass media sources.

Table 8: Dependence on Media Sources for Development Information

Mass media sources	No of respondents	%	Traditional media sources	No of respondents	%
Radio	167	30	Town crier	192	35
Newspaper	27	5	Town meeting	55	10
Television	11	2	Church	48	9
Magazine	10	2	Family/Friends	40	7
N =	215	39	N=	335	61

X^2 cal. = 27.60, $\alpha = 0.05$, $df = 1$, X^2 tab. = 7.815

The result of the Chi-square computation for hypothesis one (Table 8) yielded a value of 27.60 at 0.05 level of significance which is far greater than the critical value of 7.815. This means that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted. Thus, residents of Etinan LGA rely significantly more on traditional media sources for development information than they rely on the mass media.

Hypothesis two: H_{02} : Male residents of Etinan Local Government Area do not rely more on mass media in particular and all other media sources of development information than their female counter -parts.

Table 9: Exposure Pattern to Development Communication Sources by Gender.

	Male	Female	Total
Radio	117	50	167
Newspaper	25	2	27
Television	9	2	11
Magazine	8	2	10
Town crier	106	86	192

Town meeting	50	5	55
Church	16	32	48
Family/friends	10	30	40
	N=341	209	550

X^2 cal. = 81.71, α = 0.05, df = 1, X^2 tab. = 14.067

The result of the chi-square computation (Table 9) yielded a value of 81.71 as against the critical value of 14.067 at .05 level of significance. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. Thus, males in Etinan Local Government Area relied significantly more on mass media and indeed all sources of information than their female counterparts.

Discussion

The study has established the dominance of traditional media as sources of development information in Etinan LGA. The town crier had the highest frequency of mention, followed by radio and town meeting respectively. This finding confirms the earlier position of Wilson (1987) and Ugboajah (1986:11). Wilson had reported in his "Survey of Traditional – Modern Communication Systems in Old Calabar Province", that, traditional media and channels were more reliable and easily available than mass media.

Regarding the attitude which residents of Etinan LGA have towards the sources of information, radio attracted a credibility rating of 36 percent far above traditional sources such as the town crier (22%) and town meeting (9%). The highest rating which radio received appears to be as a result of the level of contact residents had with the medium. For instance, television had more respondents who rated it as credible (16) whereas fewer respondents had direct exposure to it.

Furthermore, radio maintains its popularity by being the mass medium which the respondents had exposed themselves more. Radio attracted an exposure rating of 78 percent as against Newspapers with 13 percent. The popularity of radio with people in the rural areas is not in doubt - a fact which this study has confirmed. Hachten (1974:99) acknowledged the unique position of radio when he said:

In Africa...the first contact the ordinary man has with any means of mass communication is the radio. It is the transistor, which is bringing the people of remote villages and lonely settlements into contact with the flow of modern life.

The second research question has also established that men exposed themselves more to the information sources than women and that the radio and the town crier were the most popular sources of information preferred by young people. This contrasts with the preference shown by those in the 45 and

above age category for town meetings as a source of information. On the basis of education, radio, town meeting and the traditional newsmen were preferred by those with primary or no education while radio and the town crier were most preferred by those with some kind of education. Again, those with post secondary education showed more preference for radio. When the modern and traditional media sources were compared, the residents showed a preference for the traditional media. Again, the possible explanation has to do with accessibility to the traditional media sources. Many rural dwellers are severely constrained by poverty, illiteracy and lack of social amenities like electricity, which affect access to modern mass media.

Majority of residents of Etinan L.G.A. learn more about development programmes from the traditional media than mass media sources. There is need therefore to promote the use of these channels of communication in the dissemination of development programmes.

On the whole, this study has established the importance of traditional media as sources of development information. With regard to the modern mass media, radio is more popular and its messages are more believable than other sources. It is however important to note that radio programmes are most effective in comparison with other mass media channels, not only because of the level of penetration of the medium but also as a result of the confidence radio has built up in the past.

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