



ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF BROADCAST MEDIA DECISION-MAKING DETERMINANTS ON NEWS CONTENT SELECTION AND PUBLIC OPINION FORMATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper assessed the influence of broadcast media decision-making determinants on news content selection and public opinion formation in Nigeria. This was aimed at ascertaining the salient factors that influence and shape broadcast news content in Nigeria besides the journalistic criteria, finding out the reasons permeating the influence of the factors during the news selection process, and how such influences affect Nigerians' perceptions of the broadcast media and opinion regarding issues reported as well as influence of such perception on public opinion formation and democratic participation in Nigeria. Survey was employed as the research methodology with questionnaire as the instrument. The findings show that ownership interest, organizational orientation, personal biases of the reporters, commercial interests of the stations, sensitivity to the culture of media audiences, relationship with news sources, and the event itself are the factors that influence news content selection decision-making other than the journalistic criteria. Further findings reveal that news selection, the broadcast media news content selection decision-making, is a complex process that takes into account an array of factors ranging from partisan affiliation of ownership, business interest of the media organisations, personal interests of reporters, poor remuneration and welfare amongst others. The study also found that as a result of the interplay of the determinants, the audiences have different views of public issues in Nigeria and their opinions regarding the state of affairs also differ. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the Nigerian broadcast media need re-orientation. As a result, enhanced monitoring and regulation by the NBC amongst others are recommended by the study.

INTRODUCTION

In the process of searching for profits through maximum utilization of the airwaves, broadcast stations as capitalist entities are continually forced to eliminate competing contents in order to reduce the expenses and risks generated by such competition. As a result, the broadcast media all over the world are seen

as strong forces in building public opinion because of their influence on the perception, attitude and behaviours of people in each given society. This explains why there has been a push and significant shift in the past few decades from a government monopolized broadcasting structure to a more democratic broadcasting industry in Nigeria through deregulation (Marsh, 2009: 71).

One of the main objectives of the establishment of private broadcasting in Nigeria, as Egbon (2001: 24) notes, was to provide the audience an alternative to the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). This was aimed at engendering competition that would reinforce standards and improve the quality of public interest broadcasting, as the two broadcast monopolies had come under severe scrutiny even from the government that owns them. However, almost two decades past, only a few would dispute that the overall 'quality' of broadcasting, in terms of news content pattern and public interest broadcasting has continued to decline in the country.

Like the print media, the Nigerian broadcasting industry continues to slip away from serious public interest-oriented journalism to a more and more sensational and entertainment-oriented broadcasting; implying that one of the major goals of broadcasting deregulation in Nigeria has hardly been achieved. Consequently, the broadcast media in Nigeria today are more than ever before under intense pressure and continued criticisms from various competing fronts including governments, businesses as well as cultural, political and social interests with varying implications for public opinion formation. The reoccurring question is why things haven't changed and who or what is culpable.

The broadcast content selection decision-making determinants which encompass culture, the event being covered, the issues involved, individual biases of reporters, ownership interests, commercial interests, audiences, professional ethics and organizational orientation amongst others, which Rodman (2006: 103) observes, sometimes lend the media to manipulative forces are often cited. Some blame the values or personal dispositions of journalists, others blame government interference and control; others cite ownership influence; and still others attribute the undercurrents to a complex of cultural, political, social, economic and institutional factors. As a result, in spite of the democratization of the Nigerian broadcast media landscape, and the multiplicity of

broadcast media outfits, the issues of public interest, news credibility and media integrity are increasingly becoming a daily challenge for both the broadcast media and audience members.

Statement of the Problem

Broadcasting by its very nature is generally constrained by time. As such, several items compete for attention and admittance into the limited airtime available, and the items that finally get featured are the result of a critical decision-making process. This has made broadcasting life generally, a perpetual decision-making routine, and critical decision-making capabilities have become the key innate competences required of those who ply the trade. Unlike other decision-making situations and circumstances where individuals have to make choices between two options or positions, broadcast media news content selection decision-making is not a one-shot approach. An array of factors interact to inform the choice of what goes on air on each day of broadcast news, making the broadcast media news content selection process complex and tasking.

There is usually excessive competition and pressure from the various elements in the news content selection matrix which are known as the broadcast decision-making determinants (Marsh, 2009: 72). As an integral part of broadcasting decision making takes place in all functions performed by broadcasters (assigning of reporters to beats, deciding on the events to cover, covering the events, line of story, production, editing, etcetera), there are salient factors that serve as motivation for such decisions. While the market-driven and manipulative models seem to underpin news content selection decision-making in both public and private broadcast outfits in Nigeria, certain interests appear to exert control over what goes on air. This has made the Nigerian broadcast media to often come under public criticisms and scrutiny on allegations and accusations of tilting more towards commercial and ownership interests as well as organizational orientation at the expense of public interest which both the market-driven and manipulative models seek to protect.

Studies regarding factors that undermine public interest in the Nigerian broadcast industry (Egbon, 2001, Popoola, 2003, Odumu, 2006) reveal that ownership influence and commercial interests are the key features influencing news content selection process in most broadcast organizations. However, the studies suggest that other salient factors also exert varying influence. This interplay has led to several questions in the public domain regarding news credibility, media integrity, and sustenance or commitment to public interest by the Nigerian broadcast media. Against this backdrop, how the public perceive broadcast news, as well as how such content influences individual opinion culminating into public opinion regarding state of affairs in Nigeria becomes contestable.

Also, how such opinion regarding broadcast media news content permeates and facilitates citizens' participation in the democratic process, which is a fundamental responsibility of the Nigerian broadcast media as enshrined in the 1999 constitution is increasingly coming under public scrutiny. It is against this backdrop that the study is assessing the influence of broadcast media decision-making determinants on news content and its implications for public opinion formation in Nigeria.

Research Objectives and Questions

The broad objective of this study is to assess the influence of broadcast media news decision-making determinants on news content and its implications for public opinion formation in Nigeria. Specifically, however, the study seeks to:

1. Ascertain the salient factors that influence and shape broadcast news content in Nigeria besides the journalistic criteria.
2. Find out how such factors exercise influence during the news selection process.
3. Assess how such influences affect Nigerian audience members' perceptions of the broadcast media and opinion regarding issues reported.

4. Determine the influence such perception on public opinion formation and democratic participation in Nigeria.

In the light of these objectives, the following research questions have been provided to guide the inquiry:

1. What are the salient factors that influence and shape broadcast news content in Nigeria besides the journalistic criteria?
2. How do such factors exercise influence during the news selection process?
3. How do such influences affect Nigerian audience members' perceptions of the broadcast media and opinion regarding issues reported?
4. What are the implications of the influence of such perception on public opinion formation and democratic participation in Nigeria?

Scope and Significance of the Study

The conceptual scope of this work is the broadcast media news content selection decision-making process in public and private broadcast stations in Nigeria. However, only two public broadcast stations Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), and two private broadcast stations Africa Independent Television (AIT) and Cool FM are covered by the study. The stations are chosen because they are the key competitors in terms of news, information, education and entertainment programming in Abuja the federal Capital Territory which is the geographical scope of the study.

This study is significant because it seeks to substantiate the claim by McChesney, (2000: 7) that broadcast media decision-making determinants impose a perpetual censorship on the broadcast media. According to McChesney, through the content selection decision-making process, "unpopular ideas are silenced, and inconvenient facts kept down, without any need for official ban because of factors such as ownership interest, commercial interest and a host of others. The allegations against the Nigerian broadcast media are also often

anchored on this premise, therefore. An assessment of the motives behind such actions becomes significant.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Market-Driven and Manipulative models of news selection. The two models provide explanations on the factors or motives behind media contents in both broadcast and print media. According to Napoli (2003: 17), the Market-Driven Model is believed to be the very determinant of media contents selection, posits that public interest is a paramount criteria in news selection because market forces ensure freedom which guarantees that the mass media select their content from what will be in public interest. The Market-Driven Model is both a variant of the Social Responsibility school of thought and the Libertarian preposition. As a variant of Social Responsibility, the model sees the roles of the mass media and journalists alike as public educators; while as an adjunct of the liberation perspective, the model sees the mass media and journalists as 'libertarians' who would give the public what they would want (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991: 48).

The Manipulative Model on the other hand, referred to as conspiracy by Shoemaker and Reese (1991: 86) sees the mass media and journalists acting in the interest of media owners and powerful interest groups in the society. Operating under this influence, the mass media and journalists often skew news bound to such interests to promote their cause. Examining the model, Golden and Middleton (1982: 112) observes that the mass media conspire with their owners and some powerful interest groups or key figures in society to manipulate public opinion in pursuit of certain agenda that are not in public interest. They liken the model to the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky, stressing that both journalists and the mass media often have their own agenda devoid of public interest.

In relation to this study, the Market-Driven Model implies that broadcast media content selection decision-making is overwhelmed by public interest and the

integrity of the mass media outfit. The Manipulative Model on the other hand implies that broadcast media content selection decision-making is a manipulative process through which the mass media and journalists botch to external factors in conspiracy with powerful interest groups to manipulate public opinion, set the premise for public debate(s) and sometimes using propaganda to coerce people into joining causes they do not fully understand. It is this manipulative approach that has always brought the media under public denigrations for fuelling and unnecessarily escalating avoidable crises and conflicts in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The mass media as today's main information sources, as Rossler and Schenk (2000: 29) note, undoubtedly have the power to influence agenda-setting and public opinion formation in every society. They do this by deciding which topics and issues are covered and how they are reported. Still, in many cases, those decisions are not primarily determined by journalistic criteria, but affected by several other factors. These external factors ranging from culture, the event been covered, the issues involved, individual biases of reporters, ownership interests, commercial interests, audiences, professional ethics and organizational orientation amongst others, have led to the evolution of the market-driven and manipulative models of mass media sociology upon which the study is anchored.

Evidence from discourses surrounding the models suggests that they seek to strike a balance between public interest and economic sustainability of the mass media (Cohen and Young, 1983: 17). Critics, however, blame the Market-Driven and Manipulative models in turn for subjecting the broadcast media to excessive pressure and influence from several competing interests in society. Although competition is regarded as the defining element of democratic institutions, the competition in broadcast content selection decision-making as heightened by the Market-Driven and Manipulative models raises concerns over news credibility, the broadcast media integrity, and

their commitment to public interest in most countries of the world and particularly developing nations, Nigeria inclusive.

The mass media, in modern times have become an integral part of human life. In today's world, where one's social circle is mostly just work-related, based on some or the other selfish motives, we tend to believe and depend more on the media for every type of information. The mass media have become more powerful by disseminating information. Both the governments and the people depend on the mass media for not only on the disseminating information but also in setting agenda for the development. This crucial role, as Horrocks (2009: 7) notes, has made the mass media to be tagged the interlocutor of the world and humanity. According to Horrocks (2009) journalism works into society just like fluid in the body, the mass media in all its forms print or electronic are a mirror of the times and the society we live in.

In Nigeria, the mass media (particularly the print) inspired and ignited the freedom struggles, leading to independence (Media Rights Agenda, 2001: 4). The broadcast media, nonetheless, played a crucial role towards national consciousness and patriotism. After the advent of independence, it also inspired and coaxed the citizens to come out and vote for the democratic governments. The mass media were also at the forefront and are regarded as champions of the struggles that restored Nigeria to democratic rule after 19 years of military interregnum. However, the mass media in Nigeria today, particularly the broadcast seems to be held in contempt by majority of Nigerians (Mboho and Nwabueze, 2008: 73). As such, the mass media are no longer attached with the great words of patriotism or service in the public interest as was previously the case. Although the mass media heads, at the top still claim they uphold public interest in their broadcast, their much catalytic watchdog role for which they were revered has come under significant public criticisms.

According to Ciboh (2004: 2), the Nigerian mass media, especially broadcasting, notwithstanding, has undergone significant transformations, particularly as a result of the

deregulation policy of 1992, from voicing people's feelings against military rule to not being aggressive against obnoxious policies of the civilian regime. This situation has polarized the Nigerian broadcast media industry with significant implications on public opinion formation and democratic participation. Best and Kombol (2009: 3) note that under this scenario, news selection has become "highly subjective ... reliant on value-judgments based on the 'gate keeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations rather than the journalistic norms which are based on public interest".

Consequently, *news coverage has become either sensationalized or commercialized*. Slowly, the broadcast media in Nigeria are sliding from their social accountability by giving 'abnormal' coverage to 'abnormal' events and issues. This explains why Robert McChesney in his book, *Media Rich, Democracy Poor: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (2001), claims that through content selection decision-making process, "unpopular ideas are silenced, and inconvenient facts kept down, without any need for official ban because of factors such as ownership interest, commercial interest and a host of others (McChesney, 2001:7).

As Shmykova (2007: 3) observes, integrity and public interest though often neglected or down-played in the news selection process, constitute the key matrix of broadcast media content selection decision-making. According to him, both integrity and public interest are subject to three levels of definitional meaning- conceptual, operational and application. Explaining further, Shmykova (2007) notes that conceptual level is the broadcast, and deals with how the public interest is defined in general. On the operational level, specific principles are defined to constitute what is now referred to as public interest (media integrity); while on the application level, the principles of the operational level are transformed into actions and regulations – entailing the broadcast media decision-making determinants. A combination of these determinants, however, portends significant challenges regarding content

selection for broadcast media organizations with varying implications for public opinion formation.

The expression "public opinion" according to Shmykova (2007: 5) is used nowadays to refer, on one hand, to controversial and ephemeral themes or phenomena which the general public takes up intensely, and on the other hand, the watchful and critical state or attitude held by different sectors of the population on matters of public interest and to which the appropriate authority has provided no response or solution; this is called "climate of opinion".

Understood in one way or another, public opinion according to Napoli (2006: 278) is expressed as a moral and critical force towards power, particularly in democratic societies, and is a basic element of political communication to explain the (vertical) relationships between those governing and those governed, and with the underlying horizontal communication relationships which are established between the members, groups or social institutions.

Understood from a systemic perspective as postulated by Napoli (2006: 279), "public opinion" is related to the psychological, social, ideological, cultural, political and communication systems, and social representations are an essential part of it. Social representations which, on one hand, include more recently acquired knowledge, and on the other hand, according to some recent studies of cultural psychology which brought some light to the relationships between cultural and social representations, they are seen as a product with a long tradition, cultural representations, deeply embedded in people's thought and behaviour, and are hegemonic in large groups. In this sense, it approaches what Bourdieu (1989) in Eltringham (2009: 51) called *habitus* of cultural groups. Here, public opinions are far from being mental constructions. They are asserted by individuals, collectively contemplated, and weeded out in conversations among citizens. Habermas (1991) in Starkey (2002:46) builds on Tarde's notion by defining public sphere as:

...a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. When a public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere.

From this conception, public opinion results from rational deliberations, not limited by power relationships that would constrain free expression. Implying that the credibility of information, media integrity and how the audience members perceive broadcast news content has implications on public opinion formation on issues.

Methodology

Survey research design was employed for the study with questionnaire as research instrument. The Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is the study area with its residents as the population of study. Although the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is too small to be used as representative of the country, its saturation with people from all over the country and cosmopolitan nature makes it a miniature Nigeria (Ende and Udende, 2011: 57). Using the judgmental sampling procedure, the population was first segmented into two categories to include all the news and current affairs staff of Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Headquarters, Radio House, Area 10, Abuja; Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Headquarters, Area 11, Abuja; African Independent Television (AIT) Asokoro, Abuja; Cool FM, Airport Road, Central Business District, Abuja; and audience members in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). The stations were chosen based on the fact that FRCN and NTA are public broadcast media outfits, while AIT and Cool FM are private broadcast media outfits, and the audience concentration of the chosen stations is within AMAC. Two sets of

questionnaire were designed and administered separately to the staff of the four broadcast stations and the audience members.

A sample of 10 staff cutting across the news and current affairs departments of the four stations were sampled, resulting in a sample size of 40 journalists; while 20 respondents each were sampled from the four districts of AMAC - Asokoro, Garki, Maitama and Wuse Districts resulting in a sample size of 120 respondents. The simple random sampling procedure was carried out using the balloting technique to select respondents. This was done by obtaining the staff list of the two departments in each of the four organisations through assistance of the administrative departments. The serial numbers on the lists were separately copied out on pieces of papers and the papers shuffled in separate baskets and 5 numbers picked at random from each list. The staff whose names appeared beside the picked numbers were identified and administered with the questionnaire. For the four districts, four streets were selected at random, and the house numbers of the streets copied out on separate pieces of papers and shuffled separately and 5 numbers picked at random. The first adult met in each of the houses selected was administered with a copy of the questionnaire.

Results

The data presented and analysed is based on 37 copies of the questionnaire out of the 40 copies administered and retrieved from staff of the four broadcast stations; and 78 copies of the questionnaire out of the 80 copies administered to audience members in AMAC. There was a mortality rate of 3 copies of the questionnaire from staff of the four station, and 2 copies from the audience members which were filled half way, rendering them useless for the purpose of data analysis. As such the data presented represents 92.5% return rate of the instrument administered to staff of the four stations and 97.5% return rate of the instrument administered to audience members. The first table contains demographic data of respondents, while the second and the third tables contain data obtained from staff of the four stations. Table 4 and 5 contain data on

responses from audience members. This was done in line with the study objectives.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Staff	Frequency	Percentage
Television Staff	18	48.6
Radio Staff	19	51.4
News Staff	15	40.5
Current Affairs Staff	22	59.5
Audience members	78	78.5
Female Respondents	47	40.9
Male Respondents	68	59.1

Data contained in Table 1 shows that 48.6% staff sampled were drawn the two television stations studied (NTA and AIT), while 51.4% of the respondents were drawn from the radio stations (FRCN and Cool FM). The data show too that 40.5% of the respondents were drawn from the news departments of the four stations; while 59.5% of the respondents were drawn from the current affairs departments. Information contained in the table also shows that 40.9% of the respondents were female, and 59.1% of the respondents were male.

Significance of the data to the study is that in spite of the mortality rate, all the four stations were fairly covered in terms of response. Also, staff of the two departments studied across the four stations was also fairly represented while there was also a relative gender balance represented in the sample in spite of the random selection of respondents; implying that the entire study sample comprises a high level of gender parity in composition.

RQ1: What are the salient factors that influences and shapes broadcast news content in Nigeria besides the journalistic criteria? This research question was answered by the data contained in Table 2.

Table 2: Broadcast News Selection Determinants

News Selection Determinants	Frequency	Percentage
Ownership Interest	7	18.9
Organizational Orientation	5	13.5
Sales of Reporters	5	13.5
Commercial Interest	4	10.8
Sensitivity to Audience Culture	2	5.5
Professional Ethics	5	13.5
Relationship with sources	6	16.2
The Event itself	3	8.1
Total	37	100%

Data contained in table 2 show the news selection decision-making determinants other than the news values across the four stations studied. According to the data, ownership interest exercises 18.9% influence over news content selection decision-making in the four stations; organizational orientation accounts for 13.5% influence over news content selection decision-making in the four stations; and the personal biases of the reporters also exercises 13.5% influence. Commercial interests of the stations accounts for 10.8% of influence over news content selection decision-making in the four stations; sensitivity to the culture of audience members accounts for 5.5% influence; while professional ethics exercises 13.5% influence over news content selection decision-making in the four stations. The table shows too that relationship with news sources exercises 16.2% influence over news content selection decision-making in the four stations; and the event itself accounts for 8.1% influence over news content selection decision-making in the four stations.

This shows that beyond news values, a variety of other factors serve as news content selection decision-making determinants in the four stations, and exercises varying degrees of influence over what eventually gets broadcast to the audience as news. Significance of the data to

the study is that, it provides evidence regarding the orientation of the Nigerian broadcast media and what informs their conceptualization of news and public interest beyond the journalistic norms. The data collectively answer research question one to the effect that it showcases the salient factors that influence and shape broadcast news content in Nigeria besides the journalistic criteria of news selection (ownership interest, organizational orientation, personal biases of the reporters, commercial interests of the stations, sensitivity to the culture of audience members, professional ethics, relationship with news sources, and the event itself).

RQ2: How do such factors exercise influence during the news selection process?

Data contained in table 3 answers this research question.

How the Factors Influence	Frequency	Percentage
Partisan affiliations of Ownership	4	10.8
Business Interest of Organization	6	16.2
Reporters' Personal Interest	4	10.8
Threat from Sources	5	16.2
Poor Remuneration and Welfare	4	10.8
Coercion from Regulatory Agencies	5	13.5
Government Interest/ National Security	6	16.2
Public Order/Peace	2	5.5
Total	37	100%

Table 3 contains data on the reasons that permeates the factors contained in table 2 to exercises influence on broadcast media news content selection decision-making aside the journalistic criteria of news selection. The data show that partisan affiliation of ownership of the stations accounts for 10.8% of the reasons that permeate the factors to influence news content selection decision-making; business interest of the media organisations is 16.2% responsible for the reasons that permeate the factors to influence news content selection

decision-making; reporters' personal interests account for 10.8% of the reasons that permeate the factors which influence news content selection decision-making; while threats from news sources is responsible for 16.2% of the reasons; that permeate the factors which influence news content selection decision-making. The table shows too that, poor remuneration and welfare accounts for 10.8% of the reasons; and coercion from regulatory agencies account for 13.5% of the reasons that permeate the factors which influence news content selection decision-making; government interest/national security concerns account for 16.2% of the reasons; and the need to preserve public order/peace is responsible for 5.5% of the reasons that permeate the factors which influence news content selection decision-making.

This implies that besides the journalistic criteria for news selection, broadcast media news content selection decision-making is a complex process that takes into account an array of factors. Notwithstanding, the percentages of the reasons outlined show that public interest is the least consideration given to broadcast news content selection decision-making across the four stations studied. This further implies that the business and commercial interests of ownership, interests of news sources and reporters as well as the government in power takes precedence over public interest as far as the stations studied are concerned in news content selection decision-making.

RQ3: How do such influences affect Nigerian audience members' perceptions of the broadcast media and opinion regarding issues reported? Research question 3 was answered by data contained in Table 3.

Effects on Perception and Opinion	Public	Percentage
Perceived Bias and Nonchalance	18	23.0
Broadcast Media Outlet Selectivity	12	15.3
Apathy and News Content Selectivity	10	12.8
Perceived Politicization and Cynicism	13	16.6
Disenchanted and Uninterested	11	14.4
Hostility towards Certain Stations	14	17.9
Total	78	100

Data contained in table 3 was obtained from audience members sampled. The table shows that the perceptions and opinions of audience members are significantly affected by the broadcast decision-making determinants in a number of ways. Data in the table shows that perceived bias and nonchalance is one of the effects and accounts for 23.0% of how audience members are affected by the influences of the broadcast news content selection decision-making determinants; broadcast media outlet selectivity is another effect and accounts for 15.3% of how audience members are affected by the influences of the broadcast news content selection decision-making determinants; while apathy and news content selectivity is yet identified as another effect and accounts for 12.8% of how audience members are affected by the influences of the broadcast news content selection decision-making determinants. Also, perceived politicization and cynicism is another effect identified, and accounts for 16.6% of how audience members are affected by the influences of the broadcast news content selection decision-making determinants; and disenchantment and uninterested audience is another effect, and accounts for 14.4% of the effects, while hostility towards certain broadcast stations is also one of the effects and accounts for 17.9% of how audience members are affected by the influences of the broadcast news content selection decision-making determinants.

Import of this data to the study is that it illustrates the extent to which the perception and opinion of audience members regarding the Nigerian broadcast media industry and issues reported are affected by the broadcast media news content selection decision-making factors. Although there is no rating regarding how the perception and opinion of Nigerian broadcast media audience is generally affected by broadcast media news content selection decision-making, this study provides an insight, and the divergence is evident and suggests that the different determinants have different effects on the audience members perception and opinion regarding reality of the issues reported.

RQ4: What are the implications of the influence of such perception on public opinion formation and democratic participation in Nigeria? Data contained in table 4 answered this research question.

Implications	Frequency	Percentage
Apathy and Insensitivity	12	15.3
Detachment from Public Discourse	10	12.8
Plying of Ethnic/Religious Sentiments	16	20.5
Expression of Partisan Sentiments on Public Policy	10	12.8
Lukewarmness to Governance Issues	13	16.6
Hostility towards Certain Stations	17	22.0
Total	78	100%

Table 4 shows that effects of the broadcast media news content selection decision-making factors on the perception and opinion of the audience members have varying implications on public opinion formation in Nigeria. The data show that apathy and insensitivity to broadcast media news content is one of the implications of the broadcast media news content selection decision-making factors, and accounts for 15.3%; detachment from public discourse by audience members is another implication of the broadcast media news content selection decision-making factors and accounts for 12.8%; while, plying of ethnic/religious sentiments by Nigerians in the discourse of national issues is another implication of the broadcast media news content selection decision-making factors, accounting for 20.5%. Expression of partisan sentiments on public policy which accounts for 12.8% is another implication of the broadcast media news content selection decision-making factors on public opinion formation. Also, lukewarm attitudes towards governance issues which accounts for 16.6% is another identified implication of the broadcast media news content selection decision-making factors on public opinion formation. Hostility towards governance and policy issues is yet another implication of the broadcast media news

content selection decision-making factors on public opinion formation identified by the data collected.

The findings illustrates that as are result of the interplay of the determinants, the audiences have different views of public issues in Nigeria, and their opinions regarding the state of affairs also differ. The significance of the findings to the lies in the evidence provided to indicate that the broadcast news content selection decision-making determinants have significant implications on public opinion formation in Nigeria. This evident in the varying degrees of factors and attitudes of the audience members, expressed as the implications which range from apathy and insensitivity to broadcast media news content, detachment from public discourse by audience members, to the plying of ethnic/religious sentiments by Nigerians in the discourse of national issues, as well as expression of partisan sentiments on public policy issues, lukewarm attitudes towards governance issues, and hostility towards governance and policy issues.

Discussion

Decades of intense rhetoric regarding bias in the media and its influence on public opinion formation have taken their toll on the mass public. Nigerians are suspicious of trusting the broadcast media, particularly the public media, and evidence presented in this analysis indicates that different broadcast news audiences have different attitudes toward the media and the political world. Although the private broadcast media outlets offer alternative choices for audience members in the modern broadcast media environment, both the public and private broadcast media in Nigeria are influenced to a great extent by factors other than the journalistic criteria for news selection.

This is certainly the case for the stations studied. The Nigerian audience members and indeed the public sphere are at the receiving end of this development. However, as negative feelings toward the broadcast media persist as a result of this development, individuals continue to take advantage of the fragmented broadcast media environment and find sources of news that fit better with their own political views. The

findings support the assumptions of the manipulative model and contradict the market-driven model which posits that public interest is paramount in new selections because market forces ensure freedom which guarantees that the mass media select their content from what will be in public interest. The manipulative model, which contends that the mass media and journalists acting in the interest of media owners and powerful interests groups in society often skew news bound to such interest to promote their case is corroborated by findings of this study.

The study shows that a major factor behind the hostile attitude of the Nigerian audience members towards the broadcast media is as a result of the effects of the factors determining news content selection. This shows that opinion building is strongly connected to the process of shaping human society, and reputation, credibility and integrity of the media play a key role in this process. It shows too that opinion is a result of cultural, political, ideological, and social beliefs and desires and public opinion is the aggregate of dominant opinions within a society, communicated in public sphere.

The findings from this analysis do not address content, nor do they empirically prove that exposure to the four stations causes an individual's political perspectives to be altered. The findings in this article do, however, suggest that the perception and opinion of the Nigerian broadcast media news audience members is indeed affected by the non-journalistic broadcast news content selection decision-making factors. As a result there is a growing hostility toward the Nigerian broadcast media. Also of interest is the finding that, the Nigerian public has become more politically divided in recent years as a result of the determinants as evident in the apathy and insensitivity to broadcast media news content, detachment from public discourse by audience members, plying of ethnic/religious sentiments by Nigerians in the discourse of national issues, as well as expression of partisan sentiments on public policy issues.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study illustrates that different news audiences have different perceptions of the media, with varying degrees of implications on public opinion formation. This implies that as the audience members become selective and pursue news that are more tailored to their own political beliefs, the probability of exposure to divergent points of view decreases. Thus, it is the conclusion of this study that Nigerians are getting disenchanted by the broadcast media due to their non-adherence to professional values in news selection decision making. Consequently, Nigerians are fed with trivial issues that have less national significance as important news, and the audience members are getting different versions of the same issues and events, which may hinder the chances of political moderation and compromise among the mass public. This phenomenon exposes a possible irony of the fragmented media era: as the number of available news sources increases, the likelihood that the public is exposed to counter attitudinal perspectives might actually decrease. Future research should explore this possibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings of the study, and the conclusion reached, it thus recommended that the Nigerian broadcast media needs a re-orientation that would enable them retract their misguided steps which are also contributing to the heating up of the Nigerian polity due to the influence of their news content on public opinion formation. Consequently:

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should step up its monitoring roles to ensure that the universally acknowledged journalistic norms of news selection decision-making criteria are adhered to by stations to ensure that public interest takes precedence over other interests. This is because as a social integration and socialization institution, the broadcast media represent possible effects on society; as such the question of the ability of broadcast media with the different ownership structures to form strong national identities should be examined.

The politicization of the broadcast media as it seems to be the case in the country should be discouraged by Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors and others stakeholders in the sensitive industry by putting in place modalities that will reduce the undue interference of owners, particularly government, which often times come in the form of abuse and assault on journalists. If the government needs to make sure that individuals get certain types of information, it should allow the professionals to use their expertise in packaging the information; this can be ensured through different content policies. This is because for now, news content seems to be a function of situation and demand on the market

of content (not a function of the dominant ideology as posited by the market-driven model), policies are needed to make sure that imperfections of the market are being addressed and corrected.

Politicization of news contents should be discouraged through definite policies that will serve as checks for media organisation and stiffer adherence to professionalism, and the code of conduct and social responsibility of the two fields of journalism and broadcasting. This is based on the evident implications of such trend on the stability of Nigeria, as a result of the implication of public opinion on the socio-political and economic orderings of Nigeria.

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