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Influence of Voice of Biafra Pirate Radio Programmes on South-East Residents, Nigeria.

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Abstract

At the inception of the present administration led by President Muhammadu Buhari, a group of agitators formed the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) which is now proscribed. Their agitations centred on perceived marginalization of the Igbos in the South-East and South-South Nigeria; hence, the clamour for a sovereign state of Biafra. In the bid to sensitise the people on the reasons for the call for secession, the Internet-based Voice of Biafra was illegally established. This study examined the extent to which the Biafra pirate radio programmes have influenced the residents of South-Eastern Nigeria to form opinions about Biafra agitations. The survey research method was adopted to study a sample of residents in the major cities of the five South-Eastern States of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. It was found that there was a high level of exposure to Voice of Biafra among the residents. It was also found that the residents have accepted the illegal station and its programmes because they believed the programmes are informative and covered issues that are in line with their expectations and aspirations. It was concluded that messages from the illegal station influence South Easterners for actions and inactions such as sit-at-home directives. The researchers, therefore, recommend that government should tackle all issues that give rise to agitations such as the herdsmen-farmers clashes.

Keywords: *Influence, Biafra, Pirate Radio, Programme, South-East, Agitation*

1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of a radio programme is direct the minds of those exposed audiences to the product, service and idea. Therefore, radio programmes are information usually designed and persuasive in nature about idea or services. Broadcasting in particular and media in general is a form of communication with intentions to reach large number of people; each genre of media

has its own unique way of attracting the audience's attention, subconsciously, influencing anyone tuned, exposed and listening to it Nwosu (2003) cited in Amadi, (2017).

This efficacy of voice Biafra pirate programmes, the ability to influence cognitive change among individual South East residents, to structure their thinking; and mentally order and organize the socio-political environment within the region. Therefore, in this context, it is believed that the residents of South-East, Nigeria mostly formed their attitudes and behavior from the media contents they are exposed to in the first place. Thus, it is quite clear that voice of Biafra pirate radio programmes and contents can influence her audience. It is quite surprising how all of a sudden the pirate Radio Biafra reportedly being operated by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu leader of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) said to be resident in the United Kingdom, is increasingly becoming a source of serious concern to the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, and some Nigerian elements. The radio Biafra which went moribund after the 1967-1970 civil war, was discovered and reengineered again. New Radio Biafra started broadcasting from London on short wave band since 2009 with the help of the then MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra) members but commenced broadcast in Nigeria in 2013. It started broadcasting in Nigeria as a mobile station, on 88.2 FM. It is being received in rural and major cities in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria and not restricted to, Enugu, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Nnewi, Aba, Okigwe, Abakalike, Afikpo, Owerri, Orlu, Etc. According to the Director Radio Biafra, Mr. Nnamdi Kanu in an interview with Sun newspaper on April 24, 2013 titled "What we want to achieve with Radio Biafra": The Broadcast in Nigeria, on FM band, other than the initial shortwave band from London, is aimed at giving Igbo and other Nigerians the opportunity to receive the messages from the station without much difficulties.

We look forward to achieve the purpose of our agitation to liberate every Igbo sons and daughters from untold marginalization, hardship, failure of federal Character and nepotism of over four decades". Sun newspaper (2013).

Biafra agitators through her radio programmes believed that there is a reasonable disagreement regarding the consistency of the case for restructuring the nation's architecture of governance and the content of the sand restructuring, marginalization question, arguments, and agitations for the South East people and the region, referred to Nigeria state as a "Zoo country", President Muhammadu Buhari as terrorist-in-Chief and sundry other names, which are roundly deplorable. This, as a matter of fact is the fundamental question of concern to all, even as many opinion and views take a swipe at the general operations and content of the pirate radio station programmes for her agitations. *Vanquard*, (2017, p.14).

2. Statement of the Problem

The abundance of evidence from researchers shows that people do learn from mass communication media. Consequently, apostles of the agenda setting theory believe strongly that, not only do people learn factual information about public affairs and what is happening in the world, they also learn to assign much importance to the issue being mass communicated, judging from the emphasis being placed on it by the news media. Radio Biafra to a considerable extent determine issues, values and beliefs. In other words the radio set agenda for the residents of South East, Nigeria. The mass media, particularly the radio is the most important medium for

creating awareness on so many issues such as education (Moemeka, 1981). Radio therefore is an indispensable medium for agitations. Some of the obvious advantages of radio over other medium of information exchange are that it is portable, cheap, and accessible and the signals can be transmitted over a long distance. In this instance therefore, agitator in the field are beginning to realise this advantages and are beginning to utilise them. Radio is a useful medium especially in creating awareness about agitation and other socio-political issues. The populace no longer relies on information from individuals and leaders to satisfy their information cravings, but they seek information from the media on issues relating to their agitations. People seek information on so many other issues as politics, economy, security, etc.

The radio is the most accessed medium of mass communication in Africa, and at least one set is found in every household irrespective of how remote it is (Best 1997). The radio is therefore the medium of choice in campaigns that seek to create, promote, influence, and sustain awareness. What is worrisome is if Biafra pirate radio programmes has been a useful tool in influencing the South East residents on her ideas and agitation considering the level of successes achieved by the various secessionist groups affiliated to the call for a referendum in the south east Nigeria through pirate radio Biafra programmes. Therefore this study is set to examine whether the residents of South East Nigeria listen to radio Biafra; and thus: To what extent do the pirate radio programmes influence the South East residents' perceptions about the Biafra agitations?

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. ascertain the extent South East residents listen to Biafra pirate radio programmes;
- ii. determine the perceptions of South East residents about the programmes of the Biafra pirate radio; and
- iii. determine the level of the influence Biafra pirate radio programmes have on South East residents.

4. Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

- i. To what extent do South East residents listen to Biafra pirate radio programmes?
- ii. What are the perceptions South East residents about the programmes on Biafra pirate radio?
- iii. What is the level of influence that Biafra pirate radio programmes have on South East residents?

5. Literature

Radio as a Mass Medium of Influence and Mediatisation of Audience Attitudes

Nwosu (2003, p. 70) in Ariye (2010) stated that mass media is organised, technical and psychological process of communication designed to reach, and influence large number of people

without the necessity of personal contact. These channels include; radio, television, films, newspapers, magazines among others. All these channels of information dissemination have been recognised as the most popular agents in stimulating political development in any given society. He also believes that the mass media are regarded as the guardian of public that examine the political politics and programmes, educate the masses, motive, mobilize and manipulate them into active participation. Nwosu (2003) in Amadi (2017) believes that a large segment of the world's population see the media as portraying reality.

No doubt, the broadcast media play key roles in shaping socio-political attitudes. However, knowledge of the media's role in the socio-political reformation, transformation, and socialisation process is remarkably thin. This work addresses the fundamental question of how civilians develop into agitating citizens in a society influenced by radio attitudes and values and civil engagement by focusing on the current changes in the political, media and family environment and their consequences for people's participation in political democracy. The role of the conventional media like radio and television as providers of information on Biafra agitation and stimulants of participation has changed. Today radio programmes has become more infotainment-oriented (Amadi, 2017).

Radio and the Society

The media through the radio as an institution and structure of the society contribute to the consequence of events in our society (McQueen, 1998 in Baran and Davis, 2010). This concept says that the extent and kind of influence that the media have and how these effects occur; further explains the perceived effectiveness of the mass media. Campaigns in the First World War (through the radio) to the end of Second World War led to a widespread belief in power of the media to control the men and women against their will. Some other functions of the media added by Baran and Davis (2010) include persuasion, interpretation, and linkage function. Religious organisations, political or social groups, and ethnic nationalities often use media platforms to persuade citizens to buy into convictions and persuasions.

Radio, Influence and Mobilisation

Onabajo (2000), averred that radio is a vehicle for socio-political projection which it attracts and hold an audience. Radio is an effective instrument for getting a message to a heterogeneous audience at the same time in different locations. Radio is also a powerful instrument in the area of public enlightenment and mobilisation.

Radios inability of being constrained by barriers of time, space, electricity supply and illiteracy makes it the most ideal means of mass communication any day and any time. In its mobilizing roles or functions, radio acts as the secondary agents of mobilisation. Radio facilitates and enhances the process by which individuals partake in collective decision making within a given society, organisations, sects, associations or groups. This role is one, the radio adopts through political agitation programmes in mobilising audiences and agitators.

Getting members of the society to be adequately informed and carried along by any given group, organization or the government means closing the information gap that exist between parties, this gap is one which can be bridged by the radio medium: it is also pertinent to note that no group, organisation or government can excel if the populace are not being carried along in its mobilisation programmes. The people needs to be informed, not just passively but actively engaged by getting detailed information of their plans and activities (Opara, 2007). Thus, it was

easier for Biafra agitators to mobilise her followers for a sit-at-home programme through the use of radio.

Biafra Ideology, Culture and the Influence of Liberalisation on pirate Radio Programme

Ideology can so structure a person's thought and life that it becomes an essential part of them, even if false. Sorel in Lyman (2009) also argued that mass movements develop visions of the future in which their members do not quite believe but are an essential part of what motivates them, and that ideology can keep a group from understanding their true place in the society. Thus, the Biafran agitators share a group of thought with argument for a cultural movement for liberation, independence, freedom from oppression and marginalisation. Therefore, they are engulfed in total conception and particular conception of Biafra ideology with the instrumentation of pirate radio programmes.

The major influence of the liberalisation of pirate broadcasting of Biafra radio is more visible on programmes content. These changes are towards creativity, attraction and non-revenue generation. For example the programmes schedule of Radio Biafra discussion shows three hour of special English programmes anchored by very versatile presenters and another two hours or more for Igbo programmes; while musical presentations come with varieties of high life, reggae, and rock genres of music that emphasise on freedom, liberation and agitation. All programmes are presented with higher skill for interactivity and elocution (Ariye,2010).

Biafra Pirate Radio, Broadcasting Standard and Programme Code

Many strongly believe that the Biafra pirate radio is doing well especially in propagating Biafran ideology and question of regional marginalization by the Nigeria's government. However, the purpose of universal standard of broadcasting with specific application to Nigeria through National Broadcasting Commission's (NBC) code of broadcasting standard and operations is to assist the public to uphold the benchmark for their right to quality broadcasting.

The NBC code which recognizes that broadcasting and freedom of expression are intrinsically linked. However, the broadcaster shall exercise as much freedom as possible in programming with preaching societal values, considering what is beneficial to the audience, in terms of cultural, moral, economic, social and political values of the Nigeria society. Thus, the pirate Biafra radio have never respected this standard code of programming and operation. NBC, (2016).

The NBC programming standard Code went further to explain that:
"No broadcast shall encourage or incite, to lead public disorder or rate, be repugnant to public feeling or contain offensive reference to any person or organization, alive or dead or generally be disrespectful to human dignity".

This is because broadcasting and broadcasters are recognized as agents of society, therefore, it shall not use the medium for any personal or sectional rights, privileges and needs of its own, relatives, friends or supporters (NBC, 2016).

6. Theoretical Framework

The theories underlying this study are the social category theory, social relation theory and the agenda setting theory.

Social Category Theory

The theory which was propounded by Melvin De Fleur in 1970 states that mass media audience consists of different sub-groups. Members of a particular social category have identical values, interest and attitudes which will be different from those of members of other social categories. A person's social category determines the media of mass communication he uses and how he uses them. It is assumed that members of a given social category (determined by age, sex, socio-economic status, etcetera.), often seek out similar communication messages which they will also respond to similarly. For example, most adolescents seek after hip-hop music as compared to the old folks.

Although we still recognize the heterogeneity of the modern society, yet people with similar location in the social structure will have similar folkways. Likewise, a member of a particular category will select more or less the same communication content and will respond to it in almost the same way (Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008). Therefore, the audience of pirate radio Biafra within a given social category will respond and embrace radio programmes with appeals on the need to agitate.

Social Relationship Theory

Members of the mass media audience belonging to the same social category interact or relate with each other. The interactions and relationships among members of the same social categories determine the effect of mass media messages on them. The social relations theory is more like the social categories theory but its emphasis is on the relationship or interaction between members of the same social theory. The theory is anchored on the findings that people's reaction to a mass media message and their action upon it is modified by their informal social relationships with friends, social groups, etc.

This means that, there exists informal social relationship among members of the audience, and that these "informal social relationships will modify the manner in which given individuals will react to a message that comes to their attention via the mass media." Thus, radio audience with high believe of Biafra ideologies and agitation will influence others as a result of interactions and relationship.

Agenda-Setting Theory

The theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), arose as an end- point of the 1968 study of American Presidential election. It concentrates on ascertaining "how" the mass media can influence political process, health concerns and other issues. "Agenda setting" describes a very powerful influence of the media – the ability to tell us what issues are important. In the research done in 1968 they focused on two elements: awareness and information.

The agenda-setting theory of media postulates that mass media determine the issues that concern the public rather than the public's views. Under this theory, the issues that receive the most attention from media become the issues that the public discusses, debates, and demands action on. This means that the media is determining what issues and stories the public thinks about. Therefore, when the media fails to address a particular issue, it becomes marginalised in the minds of the public.

Therefore, as South East residents get exposed to the projections of Voice of Biafra, which usually focuses on how marginalised they have been and why they should fight for their rights,

they are usually influenced to think in the direction of the contents of the programmes from the pirate station.

7. Methodology

The population of this study comprised all the adults in the five states in South east Nigeria. Since there is no existing record demarcating the age brackets of Nigerian citizens, the population was considered non-finite. In order words, the population could not be determined in figure.

The online Sample Size Calculator for non-finite populations at surveysystems.com was used to arrive at a sample size of 400 (Confidence Level = 95%; Confidence Interval = 4.9). The cluster sampling technique was used to divide the geopolitical zone into five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The sample size was equally divided among the five states (80 each). Thereafter, the simple random sampling technique was used to select one major city from each of the states, thereby arriving at the following: Aba, Onitsha, Enugu, Abakiliki and Owerri.

The purposive sampling technique was used to choose streets that are strategically located and populated by people of diverse backgrounds. Finally, the accidental sampling technique was used to select the sample elements using the questionnaire as instrument of data collection.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

RQ1: *To what extent do South East residents listen to Biafra pirate radio programmes?*

Table 1: Level of exposure to Radio Biafra Programmes

RATING	SCORE (X)	FREQUENCY(F)	(FX)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very high	5	120	600	30
High	4	200	800	50
Average	3	40	120	10
Low	2	40	80	10
Very low	1	0	0	0
Total		400	1600	100

$$\text{Average score} = \sum fx/f = 1600/400 = 4.0 = 80\%$$

The data in Table 1 above show that the respondents submitted that there is 80% exposure to Radio Biafra by the residents of South East Nigeria. This emanated from the fact that on a scale of five, the average rating 4.0 is an indication that the majority of the residents get exposed to Radio Biafra. As a follow-up, the respondents were asked to state their motivation for exposure. To the question, they expressed their desire to have a country they can control; and that it was only on Radio Biafra that they get information that matches their expectations.

It is believed that the results are prompted by the presumed neglect of the South east zone by the Buhari Administration. Also, the reports of the lopsided appointments at the federal level which excludes South Easterners is a pointer to why the agitation on the pirate radio is getting high exposure. Moreover, the incessant invasion of different communities in the region

by herdsmen, which hitherto, did not attract government condemnation, is a contributory factor to the popularity of the station.

This finding is in line with the submission of Lyman (2009) that agitations get support when they are enveloped by ideologies that carry the people along. Thus, since the governments at different levels seem adamant to the plight of the masses, they find solace in any group that seem to think for them.

The social category theory supports the finding because, when mass mediated information concerns a particular group, members of that group gear their thinking towards accepting the communication and the source. Also, the finding tallies with the postulation of social relationship theory because, discussions that take place among groups of individuals help to fortify the predisposition of the audience towards a particular course.

RQ2: *What are the perceptions South East residents about the programmes on Biafra pirate radio?*

Table 2: Perceptions about Radio Biafra Programmes

PERCEPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Informative	208	52
Fact-based	112	28
Rumour-based	32	8
Unprofessional	48	12
Total	400	100

Table 2 above shows that a majority of the respondents (52%) submitted that the public's feeling towards Radio Biafra is that the station is informative. Others believed the programmes are based on facts. However, there were feelings that the stations programmes are based on rumours and that they are not professionally handled. From the above finding, it could be said that the residents of South East Nigeria accept the transmissions from Radio Biafra and that they believe the information from the programmes.

This result is not unconnected to the earlier finding about reasons for exposure. Since they ideological inclination of the station encompasses the cultural and ethnic orientations of the residents; and with the assumptions that there is no other way out except self determinism, accepting the programmes becomes a better option. This is particularly through especially when a medium performs the functions according to Baran and Davies (2010) of persuading, interpreting, linking, etc. obviously, the Radio Biafra seem to play these roles by giving information that are muted by both national and state media organisations. Thus, the information so received give strength to the agitations for a sovereign state. This could explain why there was always high level of compliance to the sit-at-home calls by the agitators.

RQ3: *What is the level of influence that Biafra pirate radio programmes have on South East residents?*

Table 3: Influence of Radio Biafra Programmes on South East Residents

RATING	SCORE (X)	FREQUENCY	FX	PERCENTAGE
Very high	5	60	300	15
High	4	100	400	25
Average	3	200	600	50
Low	2	20	40	5
Very low	1	20	20	5
Total		400	1360	100

Average score = $\sum fx/f = 1360/400 = 3.4 = 68\%$

On a 5-point scale, Table 3 shows that there was an average score of 3.4 which shows that Radio Biafra programmes influence the listeners. By implication, the station has 68% on the audience's perceptions and decisions about the polity; and this is well above average. This finding is an indication that Radio Biafra's programmes spur the residents of South East Nigeria to action and inaction. By extension, the residents believe in the agitation and, overtly or covertly support the movement.

This finding buttresses the postulation of social category theory because the messages from the pirate radio station are targeted at a group that shares common politico-cultural attributes. Thus, the messages are slanted to buy into the aspirations of the people by stressing issues that touch them such as marginalisation, neglect, hatred, and estrangement. When this happens, sympathy is attracted for the agitators thereby making the populace act the way the message producers intended. Moreover, as people discuss the issues in private settings (social relationship), they assimilate the views of others and consequently, beef up the already existing perception.

This finding is also in line with the postulation of agenda setting theory, because, as the station gives prominence to the issues that bother on the wellbeing of the easterners, such issues become the focal points of discourse amongst the people. In the end, they enhance opinion formation which could lead to taking or not taking certain actions, depending on the motive of each message disseminated.

8. Conclusion

At the inception of Buhari's administration, the now proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) started the agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra. That clamour led to various activities including demonstrations, peaceful walks, social media engagement as well as the establishment of a pirate radio outfit, Radio Biafra. Despite the declaration of the station as illegal by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the station has continued to transmit

programmes targeted at the purported people of Biafra, mainly from South East and South South Nigeria.

Surprisingly, the station has continued to enjoy high level of listenership because the people believe it gives them information that focuses on their expectations and aspirations. This high level of exposure and acceptance could be attributed to the presumed negligence on the part of government as a result of its inability to nip issues that stir the polity, such as Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen-farmers clashes in North Central and southern parts of the country.

In the absence of proactive and preventive measures, agitations rear their heads and engender unity and national cohesion. That is why Radio Biafra has garnered acceptance among the target audience. From the foregoing, it would be apt to conclude this study by saying that South East residents are well exposed to the programmes on Radio Biafra pirate station perceiving it as informative and fact-based. As a result, the messages from the station influence the decision making of the audience by moderating their actions and inactions in relation to the Biafra agitations.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that:

- i. Government should endeavour to tackle all issues that jeopardise the peace, unity and national inclusiveness in the country. This would make it impossible for the agitators to have strongholds to influence the target groups.
- ii. There should be opportunity for dialogue between the agitators and government; after which favourable positions of government would be communicated to the people to help them understand the other side of the story.
- iii. Government should avoid the use of force on the region where there is agitation because, such actions would in turn, empower the pirate station. Thus, they would make the people believe that such actions are further means of wiping them out.

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