

MEDIA AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES TO GOOD GOVERNANCE: ADVOCACY FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

Countless theories exist to explain how phenomena work in real life situations including governance and development. Ipso facto, some mass communication theories attempt to explain the pride of place mass communication occupies at good governance and development. This opinion paper therefore made an analytical incursion into the substance of the Libertarian theory which in the mass communication parlance qualifies as a normative press theory. In the same vein, the study navigated the contours of the Agenda Setting theory of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw of 1972 which qualifies as an all powerful media effect theory. The paper also used the social responsibility theory as the theoretical frame hence positions the media within the wheel of good governance and development. The paper concluded that the mass media play an indispensable role at good governance and consequent development. This inter alia derives from the fact that the mass media reports the goings on in the society and bridges the information gap between the government and the governed. The paper however recommended that since good governance and consequent development qualify as characteristics of liberal societies, people should meaningfully advance the quality of their democracy to make for qualitative and quantitative participation in the affairs of the state through the instrumentality of free press.

Key words: Governance, Development, Theory.

Introduction

Virtually all fields of academic discipline have theories that attempt to explain how certain phenomena work in real life situation hence providing a human link between abstract and reality. In the field of communication generally and mass communication specifically, there are so many theories that provide meaningful explanations on how communication works in real life situations in different contexts. Ipso facto, there are mass communication theories that provide details and analytical insights on

how communication influences governance as well as development. This truism qualifies as the substance of this paper which pries into the concept of governance and sojourns into how effective communication could be used to actuate development via good governance within the context of relevant mass communication theories.

A theory is a set of ideas of varying status and origin which may explain or interpret some phenomena (McQuail, 1987. p. 4). It is an explanation, a kind of deconstruction of a puzzle

or an unscrambling of a confusing puzzle (Ojobor,2002.p.4). For Osuala (2005.p.20), a theory is an attempt at synthesizing and integrating empirical data for maximum clarification and unification. In the same vein, Learnportal (2016) defines a theory as a set of interrelated ideas, concepts, definitions and propositions and explain or predict events or situations by specifying relations among variables. Mass communication theories therefore provide explanation and understanding on how the people (audience) interact with the media and the effect of the media messages on them (Akakwandu, 2016.p.161). This underscores the existence and increasing relevance of mass communication theories that provide explanations on how media messages affect audience. Interestingly, most of these theories are products of research studies.

Inter alia, theories functionally provide general explanation for phenomena, guide empirical research, describe, explain and predict behaviour, stimulates and guide the further development of knowledge as well as provide for cumulative research which provides for the development of knowledge by building upon earlier research and by refining, reformulating and elaborating the theory (Akakwandu, 2016.p.163).

This paper shall therefore focus on the libertarian, Development Media, and Agenda Setting theories of mass communication as they hold meaningful relevance to the subject of the study.

Governance: A Conceptual Approach

The term governance and government are in

most cases interchangeably used as synonyms to denote the exercise of authority in an organization, institution or state. However, both terms signify the name given to the entity that exercise authority in a given state bearing in mind that authority simply is legitimate power (Akakwandu, 2016.p.193). Little wonder then that Heywood (1997) argued that to study government is to study the exercise of authority. Government is therefore usually associated with politics. Therefore, to study government is to study politics is to study government just as politics is the art of government (Heywood, 1997). The World Bank Handbook defines Governance as The way...power is exercised through a country's economic, political, and social institutions. In the same vein, The United Nations Development Programme defines it as the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes, and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. The Country Governance Assessment (2005) seems to be summative and apt when it emphasized that Governance is the sound exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a country's resources for development. It therefore suffices that the rationale for the management of resources is for the purpose of development. This underlines the inseparable relationship between governance and development. Governance therefore means the effective management of state resources for the purpose of development. This further underscores (The Institute on Governance,

2003) emphasised that Governance refers to the interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens and stakeholders have their say. It further emphasized that governance is about power, relationships and accountability. The key word is accountability. The institutions of governance must be accountable to the governed if development must be achieved. They must not only be accountable but must be so seen by the governed. The citizenry must have a say on how the state is administered. They must be effectively mobilized for development programmes and projects for the purpose of we-feeling and credible result. Herein therefore lies the imperative role of mass media practitioners at bridging the seeming yawning gap between the leaders and the led, the government and the governed. Such middleman's role at reporting the developmental efforts of the government to the governed and also reporting the expectations and aspirations of the governed as well as mobilizing support for such developmental programmes are encapsulated and expressed through some relevant theories of mass communication. Interestingly these mass communication theories which include Development Media Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, and Agenda Setting Theory have a perspectival focus on governance and development.

Development: A Conceptual Approach

Development is a process. Even the highly developed states are still going through developmental challenges. Development in human society is therefore a continuum

(Akakwandu, 2015.p.122). However this process of development must aim at and must bring about positive change. The change must result in the improved well being of members of the society. It is however imperative to note that development are viewed from different perspectives deriving from the angle the search light is beamed. From the economic sphere, Alozie (2012.p.58) explained development as an attempt to enhance social well being of a society through planned and participatory efforts and, socio economic and cultural values. It therefore implies that developmental efforts should aim at the overall well being of a people who must be actively involved in the developmental process. This is importantly so because majority of the Nigerian population live in the rural areas and must not be isolated in the process of development. This majority must therefore not only be involved in the process but also have to experience an improvement in their social, economic and political well being (Akakwandu, 2015.p.124). This truism underscores Rodney (1972:9) position that development is a many sided process which at the individual level implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and well being. The majority residing in the rural areas must be free enough to participate and contribute meaningfully to the developmental process and programmes. Lending credence to this, Sen (1996,p.10) described development as a process that enhances the freedom of those involved to pursue whatever objective they value. Development therefore qualifies as the need of

the people, not the want of a few. Development has much to do with capacity building that is sustained and measurable. On this note, Ngwainmbi (1995, p.20) explained development as:

Having a mind free to think and operate toward the betterment of the individual and his or her immediate environment. Its paradigms include more and better health care activities, a reduction of disease opportunities, growing more food to curb hunger and changing personal attitudes, opinion, values and beliefs to encompass the feelings and expectations of others.

The above stance acknowledges the measurability of development efforts. There must be a measurable increase in health care delivery as well as measurable improvement in the people's standard of living. People in this context do not mean the politicians or government agencies but the rural majority of the Nigerian state. They are the ones who need capacity building, they are the ones who need to benefit from health care delivery since they do not have the economic and political resources to fly themselves abroad for medical treatments like the politician.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Responsibility theory provides the theoretical frame for this study in view of its relatedness and relevance to the topic of study. Social responsibility theory is one of the political theories of mass communication popularly referred to as normative press

theories. These normative press theories include the authoritarian, communist, social responsibility, democratic participant and development theories. The theories provide explanations on the prevailing relationship between the government and the press in a defined political system. The Social Responsibility theory came to be in the 1947 in the United States of America when a committee headed by Robert Hutchins was formed and detailed to investigate the press abuse that characterizes the freedom of the press. Such abuse ranged from sycophancy, Afghanistanism, character assassination, brown enveloping and moonlighting among others. After the investigation, the committee came up with the social responsibility theory which inter alia posits that the press should not only be free to discharge its duties but should also be socially responsible to the society within which it operates. This means that the press should be responsive and responsible if it must achieve desired objectives. McQuail (1987) explained the substance of this theory thus:

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society.
- Media can meet these obligations by setting high standards of professionalism, truth, accuracy, and objectivity.
- Media should be self-regulating within the framework of the law.
- Media should avoid disseminating materials that might lead to crime, violence, or civil disorder or that might offend minority groups.
- The media as a whole should be pluralistic,

reflect the diversity of the culture in which they operate, and give access to various points of view and rights of reply.

The social responsibility theory therefore calls for responsible and ethical behaviour from journalists in the performance of their duties hence provided the basis for the emergence of several codes of ethics to regulate the practice of journalism in particular and mass communication in general (Akakwandu, 2013.p.71).

The press should not just be responsible but must be so seen by the people. The press must enjoy a high credibility rate in the minds of the people so as to effectively mobilize them to effectively bridge the yawning information gap between it and the people. The press should be seen as a partner for development and not an agent of the oppressors.

Libertarian theory, Governance and Development: A Synergic Approach

Libertarian press theory resulted from the 18th century revolution in Europe. It is hinged on liberty that characterized the renaissance era. It characterized the era of reawakening and self awareness. The theory was advertized by the works of people like Jean-Jacque Rousseau 'Social Contract and Thomas Paine's Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death' which meaningfully contributed to the success of the American Revolution of 1776 with 13 countries declaring their freedom; recognized officially by Britain in 1783 as United States of America. The libertarian theory is hinged on freedom:

freedom of people to express their views on critical issues of governance and development without fear of intimidation or molestation. It therefore suffices that development can only hold sway in environment where the people are free to voice out their opinions on issues of collective interest. It means that the people must have a say on how the state is governed. It also means that the press as the voice of the people must be free to report the government to the people and the people to the government. Libertarian press theory represents the freedom of the press to carry out its operations without intimidation, molestation and harassment (Akakwandu, 202.p.62). The basic substance of the theory therefore:

- Guarantees natural and individual human right including the freedom of expression.
- Makes for majority participation in governance through public opinion expression on topical issues of national interest.
- Makes for cross fertilization of ideas for the purpose of policy formulation and implementation.
- Recognizes the independence of the press from government monopoly and control.

No doubt, a society where the citizens are free to make meaningful inputs on relevant issues of national development will provide direction towards actuating the aspirations of the people. Such no doubt will tailor all efforts at governance towards good governance and development; which translates to a measureable

improvement to the well being of the people.

It therefore implies that the quality of prevailing democracy meaningfully determines the quality of press freedom hence the quality of good governance and development. This means that the quality of democracy differs from country to country. For instance, the quality of democracy operational in the United States of America meaningfully differs from what obtains in Nigeria hence the glittering difference in the quality of governance and development. However, the mass media supposedly perform the following functions for good governance and development in line with the postulate of this theory:

- The media is expected to adequately inform the society. It is expected to perform the surveillance function and meaningfully inform the society of happenings within and without.
- The media qualify as a forum for debate and cross fertilization of ideas for general good.
- The media correlates the activities of civil liberty organizations with the activities of the government and the aspirations of the people.
- The media again upholds the accountability of the government.

Agenda Setting theory, Governance and Development: A Synergic Approach

The Agenda setting theory is a mass media effect theory that eulogizes the power of the mass media at determining what is topical for public debate. The theory was postulated in 1972 by

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in Chapel Hill, USA. The research study that produced the theory focused on the 1968 presidential election and sought to find out the impact of media political messages on the voting pattern of the electorates. The research therefore summarized its finding thus:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue. From the amount of information in a news story and its position the mass media may well determine the important issues, that is, the media may set the 'agenda' of the campaign.

The stance of the theory seems to have derived from the idea of Cohen (1963.p.13) that:

The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion... It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think about, but it is stunningly successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think about.

It therefore implies that the mass media significantly topicalize issues, and meaningfully set them as agenda for public discussion and debate. The mass media dictate issues that qualify as topical. The topicality of an issue derives from the quality and quantity of media coverage. The theory therefore postulates

that:

- The mass media filters and shapes what we see rather than just reflecting stories to the audience.
- The more attention the media gives an issue, the more likely the public will consider that issue to be important.
- There is a psychological and scientific merit to the agenda setting theory. The more a story is publicized in the mass media, the more it becomes prominently stored in the individual's memory.

Even in this social media age, the mass media do set agenda for public debate because people still depend of the mainstream media for credible messages. This derives from the gate-keeping functional advantage of the mainstream media which is absent in the social media context. Gate-keeping is the process through which information is filtered for dissemination from the media to the public. It positions the media personnel as gate-keepers whose actions and inactions meaningfully determine whether a story would be published nor not (Akakwandu, 2020.p.136).

The agenda setting theory therefore positions the mass media as indispensable for good governance and development. It positions the mass media as partner in the wheel of good governance and development. It behooves the mass media therefore to topicalize developmental ideas, issues, policies, and programmes to make for maximal debate. Such discussion and debate will no doubt raise issues of concern and interest towards the intended

objective. Such discussions and debate will also provide relevant perspectives and angulations towards the achievement of the desired and deserved objectives.

The agenda power of the mass media positions the public as catalysts for good governance and development. This is because it provides the opportunity for the public to meaningfully contribute the opinions on the state of the nation, their problems and aspirations and their expectations. This makes for meaningful cross fertilization of ideas that will enable the government machinery to fathom such aspirations and expectations into prevailing or future programmes for the purpose of good governance and development.

Since good governance and development is all about majority participation in the affairs of the day and effective management of the available resources for improving the well being of the people, the substance of the theory provides such opportunity by its power at mobilization.

Opposed to these theories is such theory as the **Authoritarian theory** which negates the power and function of the mass media to criticize government activities when necessary. This theory defines the mass media as more propaganda tools for the men in power hence postulates that:

- The monarch is the state personified.
- The monarch is divinely ordained to rule and is accountable only to God.
- The monarch applies force to ensure his orders are executed.
- The media exists for the purpose of the state

(monarch).

- Media message contents are determined by the state (Monarch)
- The media is a machinery of the state.
- The media has no right to criticize government activities (Akakwandu, 2020).

The Authoritarian theory depicts a Totalitarian state where the rulers enjoy absolute freedom while the people remain robotic. The people or rather the ruled have no right to question the activities of the authoritarian government or criticize their activities. They are totally subservient hence good governance and development are as defined and dictated by the powers that be.

It therefore suffices that the mass media functional power at agenda setting is constrained by authoritarian regimes. Authoritarianism is opposed to freedom of expression and freedom of the press. It is opposed to public debate of government's policies, programmes and activities.

Conclusion

No doubt good governance and consequent development make for an egalitarian society. In such society, the well being of the citizens is guaranteed. It is the responsibility of the media to inform the society of itself hence report the government to the people and the people to the government. In conclusion therefore, no meaningful development would derive from an authoritarian regime. The mass media qualify as a catalyst for good governance and development, hence the freedom of the press must prevail as otherwise will be counter-productive. Any society that expects good governance and development must first and foremost assert their freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Recommendation

The paper recommends that since good governance and consequent development qualify as characteristics of liberal societies, the people should meaningfully advance the quality of their democracy to make for qualitative and

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