

Role of International Communication in Shaping Political Perception: a Study of Gombe Local Government

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Abstract. This paper examines the pivotal role of international communication in shaping political perception in an increasingly interconnected world. As global communication technologies evolve, they facilitate the dissemination of information across borders, impacting how political narratives are constructed and perceived. This study explores how international communication, social networks, and diplomatic communications influence public opinion and political behaviour. It highlights the dual nature of these interactions, where both state and non-state actors use communication strategies to promote their agendas. The analysis also considers the implications of misinformation and media bias, emphasising the responsibility of international communicators to foster informed political discourse. This paper argues that international communication is crucial in shaping political perception, with significant consequences for democratic engagement and global governance.

Keywords: International Communication; Media; Political Perception; Voting behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

International communication and media, such as BBC, VOA, MBC, CNN DW, and RFI, have become the major tools for advancing democratic ideals, promotion of liberal ideology and freedom of speech, especially those that have been under different forms of dictatorship, the flow of which mainly emanates from advanced nations to the developing nations. This explains why advanced Western nations like the United States, France, Germany, etc., invest heavily in international media in many languages for many communities across the globe.

In Nigeria, media, particularly international media, constitute the pillar of the democratic process. Foreign media aids the supply of political participation, allowing voters to make informed choices. The media serves as the societal watchdog, checking the lapses and shortcomings of those in power. In contemporary political structures, arguing about the media is challenging democratic processes. Over the years, international media has come to exercise a great measure of influence as a primary source of information and education on citizens in Nigeria, especially under this democratic dispensation or as a means of entertainment and as a catalyst for

mobilising public opinion for or against the government or any contemporary issue of public interest.

Ever since the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, the effect of political emancipation and political communication has been the subject of academic discourse by media scholars, experts, political scientists and other social scientists in studying media effect in shaping political thought, changing attitudes and mobilising people's into action, what can be termed as effective, cognitive and behavioural mass communication. The author [1] argues that with technological advances, "the international media play a dominant role in international politics. They tell us what is happening in places near and far."

In the Gombe state, BBC Hausa service, VOA, and FRCN are powerful entities that control the minds of the people and shape opinions, attitudes, thoughts, views and political ideas of the people through information sharing with the public, informing them on political outcomes and making their representatives accountable, questioning or challenging the policies and performance of their leaders, providing them with all the necessary information to assess their political leaders, express their views, opinions and keep their leaders focused on their objectives.

Statement of the research problem. Despite the proliferation of local media outlets in Nigeria, international communication media messages have received much attention among Nigerians. It is also observed that Nigerians dedicate so much of their time listening to foreign broadcasting media stations such as BBC and VOA, among others, as the main source of international news and other information, even though such information is usually politically inclined and is being transmitted from Indigenous broadcasting outlets like FRCN, and other local broadcast stations. It is perhaps no exaggeration to state that the impact of international media outlets on third-world nations today is so pervasive. There is hardly any hour daily when there is no one form of the political message being dished out from foreign broadcasting media outlets to any of their target audience across many international boundaries ranging from the radio, television or cable satellite and home ideas, news reports, information, entertainment and text message are being directed out for listeners.

It will be imperative to assess the use of such international media messages to determine the at-

tributes of international media outlets that are lacking or grossly inadequate in local broadcast programs' content, which makes Nigerians allocate much of their time to patronising international media stations.

Purpose of the research. The main objective of this study is to examine the role of international communication media such as FRCN, BBC and VOA Hausa service in shaping political perception and voting behaviour of electorates. The study is intended to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Understand the role of FRCN, BBC and VOA Hausa service programs in shaping political perceptions and voting behaviour of voters in Gombe local governments during;
- To examine the role of BBC and VOA Hausa service in creating awareness among voters in Gombe local government;
- What factors militate against the effective role of FRCN, VOA and BBC Hausa service in shaping political perception and voting behaviours in Gombe local government?

Definition of key terms and concepts

Political participation: It involves the willingness of people to participate and emancipate in the electoral process.

Voting Behavior: Refers to how the electorates vote and what determines how they vote.

Mass Media: Mass media is the channels of information to a heterogeneous, anonymous, large audience through print and broadcast media.

Political perceptions: political perception refers to how voters perceive and view political processes, the political institutions' operation, and the political system's function and dysfunction.

Literature review

The author [2] summated that Nigerians are greatly interested in listening to and viewing the international media they could hear or view from their local media. It is perhaps no exaggeration to state the impact of foreign media on Nigeria's electorates is pervasive. There is hardly a moment of a 24-hour day when no political message is being transmitted in the Hausa language from foreign media outlets to its audiences through radio, particularly political information to listeners.

The author [1] argued that with advancements in communication technology, the new media play a dominant role and vividly tell us what is happening in places near and far. It is, therefore, unexpected that the media have assumed a greater role in people's daily lives. He argued that media "defined what is important and not. They shape our thinking and view of the world".

According to [3] a recent BBC poll, different parts of the adult population regularly watch their programs. Depending on the sort of national language service transmitted, this audience can reach up to 30% in certain countries. Furthermore, BBC asserts that approximately 75 million adults watch external broadcasts at least once a week. In contrast, the total adult audience, which includes those who watch less frequently, is estimated to be around 130 million.

The major policy of international media organisations is to make access to the airwaves that is denied or restricted to some people at home available to them. Nigerian opposition politicians denied access to state-owned media are allowed access to international media outlets to share their views, usually on local and international matters. The author [4] submitted that foreign broadcast stations tend to fill the "deprivation gap" in the communication field of Third World Countries and Nigeria in general.

Gombe local government voters are well informed about international and national political matters and their exposure to foreign broadcasting media programs.

According to [2], information became essential to democracy in a variety of ways, including the processes by which the preferences of the populace are developed and combined, how citizens behave in formal representational procedures, how the government makes decisions, how laws and regulations are administered, and the mechanisms of accountability that maintain and revitalise democracy. Without the flow and interchange of information among them, none of the components of the democratic process could function.

In the local government area of Gombe, the effects of foreign broadcasting on the political perception and voting behaviour of electorates cannot be underestimated. Many voters hear and see the world through foreign broadcast stations and base their judgment on what they receive from these stations, whether correct or not. Political

propaganda, in the real sense of the word, always aims to change some people's political perceptions and win their political decisions to the side of the propagandists.

The issue of globalisation is another factor that has increased the habit of listening to and watching foreign media among the public. The world is becoming a 'global village'. Ideas and opinions are merging, and new ones are emerging. As communication gets more sophisticated, it holds that whoever controls communication will likely wield more influence in people's lives.

Agenda Setting Theory. The agenda-setting is one facet of mass communication that establishes the significance of news and what the general public should pay attention to for discourse. The agenda-setting theory argues that media institutions shape public perception by prioritising and featuring the most important issues in news coverage. The author [5] emphasises the media's role in telling us not only "what to think about" but also telling us "how to think about it. This theory's main goal is to discuss the presumption that the media prioritises some aspects through its gatekeeping and productive processes while underplaying equally important others.

METHODOLOGY

Desktop research methodology, also known as secondary research, involves collecting and analysing existing information from various sources rather than gathering new data directly from primary sources. This method often gathers background information, identifies trends, and informs decision-making. Desktop research methodology is valuable for gathering and analysing existing information to support decision-making and enhance understanding of a topic or issue.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Globalisation has increased the public's habit of listening to and watching foreign broadcast media. The world is becoming a "global village". Ideas and opinions are merging, and new ones are emerging. As communication gets more sophisticated, it holds that whoever controls communication will likely wield more influence in people's lives.

In the Gombe Local Government Area, the role of foreign broadcasting media, particularly BBC and VOA Hausa, in the electorates' voting behaviour and political perception during the 2015 general elections cannot be underestimated. However, most electorates often listen to and hear news about national and world politics through foreign broadcast stations. They tend to base their judgment on what they receive from these stations, whether correct or not, and the role of foreign media in educating and enlightening electorates about the need to exercise civic rights gently and peacefully.

However, we cannot deny that local media, such as FRCN, have contributed immensely to educating and sensitising electorates through various political advertisements and programs. The Hausa service of Radio Kaduna has been broadcasting a series of political messages with varying forms and characters in terms of content, style and intent. On its own, the station came up with political programmes such as: "A Fada a Cika", "Siyasa Rigar Yanci", "Domokradiyya Adon Kasa", "Ra'ayi Riga", "Zaben Nagari", Kasar Gado Nigeria", "A Gani a Kasa", "Gaskiya Dokin Karfe" and Aiki Ga Mai Yinka".

Moreover, out of the thirty sponsored programmes on the Hausa service of Radio Kaduna, 16 are political, seven are religious, 6 are agriculture, and 2 are others. Political programmes occupy more than 50% of all sponsored programmes. Despite the role of local media, the value of local broadcasting media can be eroded by foreign media largely because of the types of programs produced and equipment used. The major problems with Local media are inadequate skilled personnel and technical equipment, politicisation of the radio programs and government ownership and control.

This study, therefore, shows a need for local broadcast media outlets to set up the value-free and quality programs they broadcast to embrace their diverse audiences with different opinions.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has used a desktop research methodology to examine how the media on a global scale shapes the voting behaviour of electorates. It is, therefore, possible to conclude from this research, especially concerning foreign media outlets, that the media is a very potent tool that can be used to influence voters' behaviour both be-

fore and during elections. Hausa Broadcasting Media stations have gained considerable influence in disseminating campaign messages, including party preference for candidates. Countless political rallies where voters are given political information to win their support are a common feature of the media coverage of these campaigns.

According to this study's findings, the important characteristic of a notable media is reporting newsworthy stories objectively and without inflating their profile to draw in the unsuspecting public or boost their ranking. In democratic elections, the media's ability to influence public opinion in favour of one candidate over another makes influencing voters' opinions during the campaign imperative. In Nigeria today, even when their coverage demonstrates a lack of partiality, the local broadcasting media has entirely turned biased in favour of one political party or candidate.

The media landscape in Nigeria has always consisted of commercial jingles, slogans, or bumper sticker slogans like "change we can believe in". "You can make it, too, if I can become President of Nigeria." "I didn't have shoes when I was a young student." People are moved by these catchphrases or slogans, which help them relate to and sympathise with the candidate. As soon as this slogan becomes the standard for what people should and ultimately do think, the media seizes upon it and sometimes uses it for commercial jingles that play as frequently as possible.

The following recommendations are being made to stakeholders in Nigeria's broadcasting industry if local broadcasts are to remain relevant in the audience's minds. It will also facilitate a better appreciation of local broadcasting media as a tool for shaping and influencing voters' decisions and political perceptions.

1. Local broadcasting stations need to be improved by using highly digitalised equipment that can give clear sound to meet international standards regarding technical output.
2. Broadcast content must adhere to the highest levels of professionalism and ethics, particularly regarding political coverage. This requires deliberate and coordinated efforts. The higher objectives of media objectivity, fair and accurate coverage, reporting, and transmission of political issues should not be compromised by ownership,

proprietary influence, or commercialisation drives.

3. The electorates in Nigeria prefer foreign broadcast messages for political information partly because of foreign media's perceived objectivity and professionalism. Therefore, this study can be seen as a wake-up call to the local broadcast media station - hence the need to train and retrain journalists and be more objective in their reportage.

4. Since the electorates rely so much on and believe in the content they receive from foreign media, they tend to influence, promote, and provoke during elections and politics. Therefore, local media outlets need to make changes and im-

provements to their programming content that will make them win over listeners from foreign media.

5. Mass media is generally a product of technology. A crucial requirement for the effective functioning and operations of local broadcasting media outlets, which could, in turn, reduce costs and enhance access exposure, is electricity.

Local media organisations should be involved in periodic audience research better to understand the audience's composition and media needs. This will provide the required information for programming and scheduling.

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