

Perception of Social and Behaviour Change Communication Media in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

In the wake of increased interventions into health and social problems arising from various behaviours in Cross River State, this paper is set to ascertain the most effective media that can be utilized for effective communication. The mass media of communication, including television, radio, newspapers and magazines, bill boards, hand bills, posters, theatre and many other social and interpersonal media of communication are available for patronage by interventionists targeting change in any society. The question however is which of the media is the most viable? To determine this, a survey was conducted to sample the opinions of 140 media students from two higher institutions: the University of Calabar and the Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), all in Cross River State. The population of the study comprised both undergraduates and graduate students of Theatre and Media Studies and Mass Communication in both institutions. Findings reveal that out of the fourteen (14) media tools brought into limelight, radio, television, and billboards are the most patronized tools for change communication. The paper concludes and recommends that non-governmental organizations and the government can utilize radio, television, billboards and the church as the most effective media for change.

Key words: Social, Behaviour, Change, Communication, Media

Introduction

One of the latest health interventions in Cross River State was the operational plan for elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV between 2013 and 2015. The project was undertaken by the FHi 360 with the support of the Cross River State Government (Bayelsa State Ministry of Health FHi 360 and UNAIDS 4). The media used for reaching out to pregnant mothers included handbills containing guidelines on Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT), group meetings with stake holders and community education through community theatres and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Another intervention was the malaria Prevention and Treatment in Cross River State undertaken by DreamBoat Theatre for Development Foundations (Yta 167). The health related intervention utilized meetings and community theatre performances. In addition, radio and community theatre have been the main carriers of the campaign against deforestation in Cross River State.

This implies that the media have been very instrumental to the success of any social and behaviour change communication. It also brings to fore the question of the most effective communication media for SBCC interventions in Cross River State. The significance of determining the most effective communication media for change is for non-governmental organizations, private organizations and the Cross River State Government to identify the most viable media for reaching out to the urban and rural people for social and behaviour change in the state. From the foregoing, it is clear that the problem of blind uses of communication media for interventions in Cross River State, whether they are effective or not, exists. Interventionists have utilized community theatres, television and radio without. The question is: what are the determinant factors in the interventionists' choice of media?

The term "media" comprises traditional means of communication including the mass media (radio, television, billboard, newspaper, magazines, the internet etc), group media (meetings, churches, associations, and clubs), performing media (theatre/drama) and interpersonal media (telephones, language). Communication media refers to the means of delivering and receiving data or information. In telecommunication, they are means for also storing information. The choice of media for intervention in change communication is however dependent on the target audience. Again, there are media of

communication that are less relevant in change communication owing to their nature and the nature of the message.

The thrust of this paper is to identify the most effective media of social and behaviour change communication in Cross River State and to ascertain the above objective, three research questions for this study are:

- i. To what extent is each of the media for social and behaviour change communication used in Cross River State?
- ii. Which of the media of social and behaviour change communication are effective in Cross River State?

Theoretical Background to Media Effectiveness

The use of media as part of interventions in social and behaviour change communication is paramount but the efficacy thereof is dependent on existing theoretical constructs. This assertion can be substantiated by the fact that first, the media are effective tools of communication, second, they bring about social and behaviour change in a desired direction and third, the resultant change is an off shoot of the interplay among social agents (the family, the peer group, the media, the religious group, the school or the community). However, the media have been programmed in the social order to bring about positive change right from the advent of modern civilization.

In Europe, social and cultural conditions created a strong demand for the products of print technology which resulted to a reciprocal, reinforcing relationship between technological changes on the one hand and social change on the other (Volti, 186). With the invention of Gutenberg's moveable metal type in 1447, the first newspaper advertisement in 1704, a portable movie camera in 1895; with the first radio advert in 1922 and coloured television in 1938 (Ike 255), the stage was set for a social and behavioural revolution.

The first theory that supports the effectiveness of the media in this light is the *social reform theory* which sees broadcasting as an immense popular medium of communication with a potentially vast influence and therefore an irresistible opportunity to achieve a variety of social goals and ideals (Nwagbara 91). In other words, this theory implies that the effectiveness of the media is based on the fact that the media are

agents of social reform through which attitude could be formed or changed.

Second, the *sense extension theory*, propounded by McLuhan, explains media efficacy and sees the media as having personal and social consequences which are an extension of us (Nwagbara, 92). The theory sees media effectiveness as dependent on the medium as the message because of their unique qualities enable to shape and control the scale and the form of human association and action. This implies also, that the media messages have very vital personal and social consequences and that the media are an extension of the sense in which we see ourselves. The media messages are accepted or rejected on the basis of what we as the consumers of message know about us and our society.

Third, the *play theory*, developed by Williams Stevenson, describes the essence of play in a medium like theatre which results to the effectiveness of drama. The play theory differentiates between play and work and holds that the communication of meanings, symbols and ideas for change using mediums like dramatization (with pleasure) or newspaper cartoons projects self identification of the individual in a rather soft mode.

Finally, the *social judgment theory*, propounded by M. Sherif, (Sherif and Nebergall, posits that attitude change or persuasion is a two stage process where individuals evaluate their position on an issue against that of others, and attitude changes result in relation to an individual's personal involvement with the issue and their latitudes of acceptance or reflection towards the issue (Ike 210).

Summarily, the effectiveness of media in social and behaviour change communication is situated within the tenets of four media and social theories. Categorically, the named theories are favourable to media nature and programming and individual exposure within the society. Thus, the reliance of social and behaviour change in a society is not the work of the media alone, but other social factors or agents surrounding the individual. However, the influence of media efficacy is a great significance in change communication.

Social and Behaviour Change Communication

Communication is a process that involves sending and receiving messages, through spoken or written words or through non-verbal means such as facial expression, gestures and voice qualities (Ober 5).

Change communication assumes verbal or non-verbal modes or a combination of both. Change is the state of adjustment, modification or transformation. Behaviour change is therefore a reconstruction of one's attitudes or habits. Change communication in any society is targeted at reversing negative behaviour of people, especially deviants (prostitutes, criminals, drug abusers and social miscreants).

The negative behaviour of deviants, especially the youths, is called juvenile delinquency. Youths especially in Nigeria, including Cross River State are associated with criminality, cultism, and drug abuse and examination malpractices. Other unwanted or anti-social behaviour of the youths are prostitution or sexual promiscuity, thuggery and corruption. The issue of anti-social behaviour involves not only the youths but also adults, including public office holders, company workers, artisans and students. The collection of anti-social behaviours from dwellers in a society constitutes a societal menace that warrants total reversal for the growth, development and peace of that society.

Social and behaviour change communication is one method of intervention in societal challenges involving behaviour. Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) is the systematic application of interactive theory based and research driven communication process and strategies to address tipping social levels (USAID 2). This implies that SBCC is a planned communication that is designed to tackle specific objectives of target stake-holders or audience. It is also a communication made towards attitudinal modification among the youth and or adult of a given society. Above all, SBCC aims at balancing life in the society and discouraging people from illegal and negative actions (Iyorza 16).

SBCC strives through three approaches namely advocacy, social mobilization and behaviour change communication (Nsa 61). Advocacy creates supportive policy, raises awareness and canvasses for good social conditions for the citizens' wellbeing. Social mobilization brings together all feasible and practical inter-sectoral social partners and allies to determine felt-need and demand for a particular programme to assist in the delivery of resources and services to strengthen community participation for sustainability and self-reliance. Behaviour change communication is a research based consultative process of addressing knowledge, attitude and practice by identifying,

analyzing and segmenting audiences and participants in programmes (Change Learning Package for SBCC, A Practitioner's Handbook).

Methodology

The method for determining which media are most effective for social and behaviour change communication in interventions in Cross River is the survey method. The survey method was employed using the stratified sampling techniques which include a group of persons with similar status or occupation. Media students, both undergraduate and graduate students from the Departments of theatre and Media Unical, and Mass Communication Crutech, a sample of 140 respondents were drawn to respond to the questions of the research.

The research instrument was a questionnaire on the media students' perception of selected SBCC media in Cross River State. The questionnaires were distributed to the students in their classrooms amidst lecture breaks. The choice of media students was justified because they are experienced with studies in media arts. The students submitted their filled questionnaires to the researcher after filling them. The questionnaires justified the research as a quantitative approach based study anchored on the frequency of opinions of the media students. Cross River State is one of the South South States in Nigeria bounded by Benue State in the North, Ebonyi State on the West, Cameroon on the East and Akwa Ibom State in the South. The state is reputable for the sudden rise in anti-social behaviour such as prostitution and sexual promiscuity, criminality and juvenile delinquency in the efforts of the state government's attention to tourism development.

Analysis and Findings

Table I: Perception on most commonly used SBCC media in Cross River State

Media under study in Cross River state	Frequency of media student's response	Percentage
Radio	47	33.6%
Television	41	29.3%
Billboards	21	15%
Theatre/drama	15	10.7%
Posters	5	3.6%
Handbills	4	2.9%
Church	3	2.1%

Newspaper	1	0.7%
Magazine	0	0%
Film/cinema	1	0.7%
Village/Town hall meetings	1	0.7%
Association/Tribal meetings	1	0.7%
Total	140	100%

Media students believe that social and behaviour change communication is carried out in various forms using drama, straight, talk, publicity or discussion programmes in the media in Cross River State but from table 1 above, they perceive that SBCC messages are executed mostly on the radio stations followed by television stations and billboards respectively.

The table above also indicates that community theatres are fairly used for campaigns in support of behaviour change. Table 1 also indicates that there is a wide gap between the use of radio, television, billboards and theatre and the use of other media, including posters, handbills, the church, film and town hall or association meetings for the execution of SBCC messages in Cross River State.

Table II: Media students’ perception of the most effective SBCC tools

Choice of most effective media	Frequency of response	multiple Percentage
Radio	91	22.1%
Television	87	21.2%
Bill boards	41	10%
Theatre/drama	42	10.2%
Posters	20	4.9%
Handbills	17	4.1%
Church	40	9.7%
Newspapers	19	4.6%
Magazines	2	0.5%
Film/cinema	9	2.2%
Village/town hall meeting	12	2.9%
Association/tribal meetings	7	1.7%
Total	411	100%

Media students were asked to identify three most effective SBCC tools in their opinion in order of priority. Table II above represents media students’ perception that the most effective SBCC tool of

communication generally includes radio, television, theatre/drama, billboards and the church or religious institutions respectively. According to table, there is a significant difference between the perceived most effective SBCC tools and others such as posters, handbills and village/town hall and association meetings. Reasons for choice of effective media include the fact that radio is easily accessible, faster with messages, has wide coverage and can appeal to both the literate and the illiterate. Radio enjoys a wide audience due to technological advancement that has accommodated the medium on almost every platform. Television, apart from its visual and audio capacities, enjoys wide popularity. Billboards are attractive while the church enhances more believability.

Findings

From the analysis, radio, television, billboards and community theatre are the most commonly used SBCC media in Cross River State. Non-governmental organizations, the state government and international organizations such as UNICEF and WHO have thus utilized these media as tools for intervention to tackle behaviour related issues for change on social and health matters. The preference for radio as supported by media scholars is due to the medium's cheapness and flexibility, including advantages of universal coverage, portability, production ease and the advantage of partial participation (Iyorza, journalism 30).

Television on the other hand enjoys the advantage of audio, visual and motion qualities, demonstrability, localization and high prestige (Belch and Belch 310). Bill boards and community theatres are preferred too because of their ability to attract road users and convey issues to the target audience respectively. Community theatre, in addition to reaching out to target audiences, presents messages for change in a light or soft mode (Nwagbara 91). On another interesting note, the church has been figured out as another viable medium for behaviour change communication, though not as significant as radio and television. The church is an institution that promotes morals and positive behaviour. However, most religious organizations have ignored the use of this viable medium for communicating behaviour change. Findings also imply that tribal associations and town hall meetings are not viable avenues for communicating change. Magazines, films and handbills are equally ruled out of been effective in communicating behaviour change.

Conclusion

Perceptions are views of people. In this study, the views of media students at the undergraduate and graduate levels were surveyed. Basically, the significance of the survey relies in the significance of the available medium of communication in our globalized world, to re-affirm their viability and to recommend them for use to Non-Governmental Organizations, Governments and other international agencies intending to intervene in health and social issues that are determined by individual behaviours in Cross River State, Nigeria.

This study concludes that the most commonly used media for SBCC in Cross River State are radio, television, billboards and the church respectively. These media are also considered from the media students' point of view as the most effective SBCC tools. This put to rest any speculation that other media such as newspapers, magazines, films or association meeting can be used for behaviour change communication. However, they can be used maximally for information transmission, education and entertainment.

Each choice of the media of SBCC is dependent on factors such as accessibility, cheapness in production and audio and visual capacities. Other factors such as sense of participation and attractiveness can make community drama and billboards very viable. In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, the medium is the message (Marhsal McLuhan 7).

Consequently, this study recommend the use of radio stations, television stations, billboards and community theatres as an integrated approach for communicating behaviour change in Cross River State. Non-governmental organizations and governments (both state and national) can find them most appealing to the communication needs of the audience. Private individuals should acquire the license to operate radio and television stations while theatre groups should reposition themselves for patronage in Cross River State.

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