

**THE DEVELOPMENT MEDIA THEORY:
HOW RELEVANT TO THE NIGERIAN PRESS
AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Development media Theory is one of the six normative theories of the press. Originally, four normative theories of the press were propounded by Siebert Peterson and Schramm (1956). These original four were the Authoritarian Media Theory, Soviet-Communist Media Theory, Libertarian Media Theory, (or Free Press Theory) and Social Responsibility Media Theory. Their position is that "the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially if reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted" (Siebert *et al* 1956: 1-2).

Briefly, the Authoritarian media theory believes that the media whether public or private "existed to serve the government in power and were forbidden to criticize the government or its functionaries" (Folarin, 2002:27).The media are forbidden to criticize the government or its officials. The Soviet-Communist media theory believes the main task of the press was to serve the interest, and be under the control of the working class giving no room for private ownership. (Anaefo, Onabajo and Osifeso, 2008). The media are used to promote the soviet system and support development and change towards the attainment of the communist state.

The Libertarian media theory or Free Press theory prescribes that an individual should be free to publish what he or she likes and to hold and express opinions freely" (Folarin, 2002: 30). The fourth of the original four normative theories of the press is the Social Responsibility media theory.

The position of this theory is that the media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to society; should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence, civil disorder; and should reflect the society's plurality giving access to various points of view. (Anaeto et al, 2008).

Apart from these four normative theories, Folarin (2002:33) has pointed out that "scholars like Denis McQuail have drawn attention to two emerging theories: Democratic Participant Media Theory and Development Media Theory".

The Democratic Participant media theory according to McQuail (1983:98), reflects "public reaction against the commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media and against the centralism and bureaucratisation of public broadcasting institutions, established according to the norms of social responsibility". The theory's position is that the existing bureaucracy, and commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down so that all potential users and consumers would have access to the media (Folarin, 2002).

The sixth normative theory of the Press which is the central focus of this seminar paper is the Development modern theory.

The media are seen as pivots for national development under the development media theory. McQuail (1983:131) states that the central thesis of the theory is that the mass media in developing nations should be used for "the primacy of the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy, support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries".

McQuail (1981) as cited in Barar and Davis, (2000), cited in Kadijat (2009:128) clarifies further:

Development media theory advocates media support for an existing political regime and its efforts to bring about national economic development... By supporting government development efforts, media aid society at large. This theory argues that until a nation is well established and its economic development well underway, media must be supportive rather than critical of government. Journalist must not pick apart government efforts to promote development but, rather, assist government in implementing such policies.

Folarin (2002) explains that the media development theory was developed because certain characteristics of developing countries make it difficult to apply the other normative theories of the press to them. These include:

- (1) Absence or inadequate supply of requisite communication infrastructure.
- (2) Relatively limited supply of requisite professional skills;
- (3) Relative lack of cultural production resources;
- (4) Relatively limited availability of media-literate audiences.
- (5) Dependence on the developed world for technology, skill and cultural products.

The major tenets of development media theory according to McQuail (1987) as cited by Folarin (2002) are as follows:

- (i) Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.
- (ii) Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.
- (iii) Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and languages).
- (iv) Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically.
- (v) Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.
- (vi) In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operation; and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.

The development media theory thus deals with the structure and performance of the media in developing countries and "encompasses a great variety of socio-cultural, economic and political conditions which, however, tend to converge in a primary concern to use the media for development purposes. (Folarin, 2002:38-39).

How do the tenets of the development media theory apply to Nigeria? In other words of what relevance is the media development theory to the Nigerian press?

In the first place, the characteristics or circumstances that make it difficult to apply the other normative theories to developing countries exist in Nigeria. These have been listed earlier to be the absence or inadequate supply of requisite communication infrastructure and professional skills; lack of cultural production resources and limited availability of media-literate audiences; and dependence on the developed world for technology, skills and cultural products.

As a result of these peculiar circumstances, wholesale application of other theories of the press earlier sketched may not be appropriate. Development media theory seems to be the most appropriate theory to apply to the Nigerian Press. We shall now take each tenet or proposition of the development media theory and see how well it would apply to the Nigerian press.

A. Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.

It is a fact that Nigeria is facing a lot of development challenges in virtually all areas or segments of the polity. These challenges include basic infrastructure such as roads and power supply; economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment; social challenges especially in youth development and education among others. The press cannot divorce itself from these challenges in the society of which it is a part. It must contribute

in solving these problems by education and mobilization. As noted by a one time editor-in-chief of *New Nigerian* cited, in Domatob and Hall (1983:10) the mass media "should be an agent in mobilizing the society, in educating society, in consolidating independence or, in one or two cases, revolution". Therefore the Nigerian press should consider it a duty to adopt the proposition of the media development theory stating that "media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy".

B. Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of society.

The Nigerian Press should not adopt wholesale the Libertarian philosophy of free press without modifications. Taking the development challenges of the nation into account, it should modify freedom of the press to suit the economic priorities and development needs of the nation. The press should partner with the government in arriving at and promoting economic policies and mobilizing the populace to adopt these policies with a view to achieving set economic goals or targets.

C. Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and language(s).

As Ogah note (2007:190) the development media theory "is for the positive use of the media for national development and for autonomy of cultural identity of a particular nation". The Nigerian press should as a matter of deliberate policy adopt this tenet of the development media theory. The Nigerian content policy of the Nigerian Broadcasting Board of Control is thus a policy in the right direction. The situation where our airwaves are filled with foreign music and foreign programs is not the best. The programs that are broadcast on our television are largely foreign. Nigerian languages and culture should be protected and promoted to halt and possibly reverse the cultural imperialism that is currently going on. Nigerian dresses, dances,

languages and social values should be actively encouraged and celebrated. The Nigerian press should thus be an active promoter, and reflector of this tenet of the media development theory.

D. Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally and politically.

What currently obtains in the Nigerian press can be said to be contrary to this tenet or proposition. We get more news of the United States of America and of Europe than we do of West Africa or even Africa generally. As a result of the West dominating the media and its technology, we get news of happenings there almost instantly. We get news about the United States or United Kingdom quicker than we do that of Ghana or even Cameroon. Even when we get news of our neighbours or developing countries like us, it is reported by the West from their perspective. The development media theory seeks a change. There should be a conscious and deliberate effort by the Nigerian press to report more news about our neighbours, about West Africa, about Africa and about the developing nations like us in that order than about Americans and Europeans. This is for the simple reason that we have more in common with our neighbours, with Africans, with the developing nations than we have with Americans or Europeans.

E. Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

Although Folarin (2002:37) suggests that this principle "is much too vague to be useful as a working guideline", it could still be argued that the principle or tenet is emphasizing the complementary roles of freedom and responsibility in the gathering and dissemination of information. The press should therefore always be conscious of its development role even while protecting its freedom in news gathering and dissemination.

F. In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operation; and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.

This principle of development media theory is rightly controversial. According to Anaeto et al (2008:64) scholars have argued that "it goes against the workings of press freedom and makes nonsense of the idea of development". It is the opinion of Folarin (2002) that the press should fulfill its obligations and defend its rights. On the other hand, the state should ensure that if the press contravenes the law, it should face prosecution expecting a fair and speedy trial. He concluded that "nothing in the origin, basis and principles of development media theory should be interpreted as shielding media and journalists from social responsibility or ousting the concept of press freedom" (Folarin, 2002:38). Having reviewed the tenets or principles of the development media theory which we have tried to apply to the Nigerian press, we now briefly review an empirical study done on development news in Nigeria.

Kadijat (2009) states that studies have shown that media are not making enough contribution to the development of society in Nigeria. She cited Jimoh (2007) which is a study on the press and the challenges of rural development: a comparative study of the *Weekly Trust* and *Gaskiya Tafi Kwbo*. It examined the extent of coverage of development-oriented and non-development oriented issues, and the dominant area of coverage between rural and urban development-oriented issues by the two newspapers. It found out that development issues were given inadequate coverage by both newspapers compared to non development news.

This writer conducted a pilot study by doing a casual content count of news items, features, articles and interviews carried by two national dailies of thursday, April 29, 2010. *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* are the two national newspaper used. Out of 104 items counted in *The Guardian* 28

representing 27% were classified as development news. *Daily Trust* carried 113 items out of which 26 representing 23% were development news items. This clearly shows the under-reporting of development news.

CONCLUSION

We conclude this paper by proposing the adoption- with minor modifications- of the development media theory by the Nigerian press. This is because, as we have tried to show, it is appropriate to the development challenges that Nigeria is currently facing. Its adoption, it is believed, would help greatly in meeting these development challenges.

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