

Salvaging the Nigerian identity: An exploration of the media and cultural promotion in Nigeria

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Abstract

This is a discourse on the cardinality of the media in promoting culture in Nigeria. Employing the analytic and direct observation methods, we used Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) as a lodestar to apprehend the issue of cultural promotion via the media. It was argued that the media is very relevant and potent for the promotion of culture. It was also argued that the media is effectively playing this role of cultural promotion in Nigeria based on the fact that several constitutional and legal provisions have been made by the Nigerian government to ensure the effective performance of such responsibility by the media. It was further claimed that over the years, the media in Nigeria have continued to ensure compliance by providing relevant media contents on Nigeria's culture with the ultimate aim of promoting the Nigerian identity. The conclusion reached is that both the ethnic minority and the ethnic majority cultures of the country are relatively well represented and promoted by the Nigerian media, but there is room for improvement.

Keywords: Media, Culture, Nigerian identity, Cultural promotion, Nigeria, SLT.

Introduction

In the world over, what really distinguishes a group of people and makes them unique and autonomous is not colour but culture. While culture is basically defined as the way a given people do their things, it is also perceived as the totality of the way of life of a given people. However, a more holistic definition of culture is the perception of culture as what people *Do*, what they *Have* and what they *Think* (Ifejirika, 2014). Culture is the way of life of a given people. It is what a society is known for. It shows the uniqueness of an ethnic group, community, region, nation, etc. Culture consists of the beliefs, behaviours, objects, and other characteristics associated with a given group of people. Also, it consists of customs, languages, norms, mores, values, etc.

The Cultural Policy of Nigeria in Ayakoroma (2011, p.1) delineates culture as “the totality of the way of life evolved by the people in an attempt to meet the challenge of living in their environment, giving order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbors.” It is a social inheritance that consists of ideas which were conceived long before we were born to bring about order, and create a process of natural adaptation to one’s environment. It is a frame which mirrors the ‘hard-learned knowledge and experience of generations past,’ which are passed on to future generations (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel in Patricia, 2013; Cole, 2022).

Kohl (2011, p.25) claims that: [culture is] an integrated [or interconnected] system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of members of any given society. Culture refers to the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that group of people thinks, says, does and makes – its systems of attitudes and feelings. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation. The position of Schein (1990, p.111) is also useful when discussing culture. He says there are three components that should first be identified, which are: (i.) the observable artefacts (ii.) the values and (iii.) basic underlying assumptions. These are the three ways, according to Schein, culture manifests itself. They constitute the basic elements of culture as well. In order words, they are the three components to quickly look out for when analysing culture.

The observable artefacts of culture refer to the aspects of culture that are tangible or touchable, which include the peculiar dress patterns of a people, hair style of women and men, tribal marks, buildings, architectural style, churches, mosques, temples, synagogue, town planning, weapons, cooking utensils, technology, musical instruments, agricultural plants, indigenous art works, peculiar natural features of a people’s environment, etc. Tangible culture is also sometimes referred to as ‘material culture.’ The observable artefacts of a culture also help to determine and shape people’s values, beliefs and norms. However, the values of a culture manifest and are more noticeable in that culture’s intangible aspects, which include the people’s beliefs, norms, customs, religion, practices (such as marriages, naming ceremonies, burial ceremonies), knowledge, skills, music, song dance, cultural spaces, cuisine, crafts and festivals, which can only be recorded through a vehicle but are not touchable or stored in a museum. Language is both part of intangible culture and also one of the vehicles for expressing and transmitting different aspects of intangible culture.

Other vehicles of transmitting intangible culture are books, creative works, word of mouth, electronic and print media platforms such as telephone, radio, television, newspapers and other forms. Again, the intangible aspects of culture are sometimes referred to as non-material culture. The third identifiable aspect of culture, is through their dominant thinking, feelings, motivations or the reasons why the people behave the way they do, which Schein (1990, p.111) refers to as their underlying assumptions.

Elements and Characteristics of Culture

Lumen's blog on sociology throws more light on the basic elements of culture. The blog identifies them as values, beliefs, norms (which include mores and folkways), symbols and language. These elements, according to the blog, are very essential in understanding and analysing culture. What are values and beliefs in a culture? Are they the same? Lumen blog answers 'no' to the second question. According to the blog, values are the standards created or evolved in a society or by a people's culture to determine what is good and bad, what is beautiful or ugly, or what is right or wrong; and that "values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs" (2022, para. 1). It states further:

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an ideal culture, the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from real culture, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. (Lumen's blog, 2022, para. 4)

On the other hand, Lumen blog delineates beliefs as the basic views, perceptions, convictions that people have learnt and acquired from their society and held on to as truth (2022, para. 1). It defines norms as "the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which a society is structured", which tend to prescribe the way to "behave in accordance with what a society has defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them" (2022, para. 8). Norms, however, manifest in two ways, either as 'mores' or as 'folkways.' Lumen blog's definition of both terms is memorable. It defines mores as those norms that are moral in nature and can attract sanctions or punishment when a member of that culture or stranger violates them; and folkways are norms which indicate appropriate patterns of behaviour and do not attract any punishment or sanctions (2022, para. 12-13). The examples of mores in a society are its condemnation of acts of murder, stealing, lying against people, destroying people's property, plotting or conniving to bring people down, verbal or violent assaults on people, adultery, incest, fornication, wilful or stubborn violation of family or communal tradition, violation of sacred rituals or religious rules, etc., which attract social or legal sanctions as the case may be. The examples of folkways are respect for elders and how to greet them, showing appreciation to your host or elders after eating, the need for women to close their legs when sitting when their dresses do not cover

their knees and legs, who and who not to shake hands with, the way to address elders, men don't wear women's dresses and vice versa, etc.

The blog also rightly identifies symbols and language as other elements of culture. It is true that people try to make sense of their surrounding world through the use of symbols such as words, gestures, objects, signs, signals, etc. Symbols also help humans to convey experiences and shared meanings (Lumen blog, 2022, para. 15). There are many symbols in a culture, some are functional, some are also representational and some purely aesthetic. Those that are functional such as stop signs are instructive; those that are representational such as gold ring indicating marriage, trophies or gold medals signifying victory, police uniforms and badge signifying authority and law enforcement which in turn can trigger confidence and safety in good people and fear and anger in bad people.

From the forgoing understanding of culture, its characteristics can be deduced. One, it is learned and some of it subconsciously acquired from birth. Two, it is shared and transmittable. It be passed from one generation to Three, it is dynamic, that is, it changes over time. It is interactive and change when it is in contact with other cultures. Four, it is integrated because different parts of culture are interconnected. Five, it exists in the minds and actions of people and in physical objects. Six, it can produce smaller groups of distinct patterns of learned and shared behaviour known as 'subcultures' within a larger culture. Such subcultures can manifest as gender and age groups within a bigger culture. In a pluralistic society such as Nigeria, it can manifest as different ethnic groups or races exhibiting patterns of learned and shared behaviour, within the bigger culture. Seven, culture is also based on symbols. While money and art are part of cultural symbols, language is the most symbolic component of culture.

Other Forms of Culture

Culture theorists identify some distinctive forms of culture. These are material and nonmaterial culture (tangible and intangible) that were explained earlier; ideal and real culture; and low and high culture (Spencer-Oatey, 2022; Cole, 2022). Ideal culture is the whole or comprehensive culture which is the goal of society but is hardly attainable by all, some or most of its members; but the aspect of ideal culture that members conveniently and convincingly practise in their social lives is the real culture. For example, the whole of Esan custom and practices is the ideal culture but for a member to neglect or ignore the practice of some or many of the customs is such a member's real culture. Low culture is said to be a derogatory term for aspects of popular (pop) culture. It refers to practices in a society that appeal to the masses or to the less well-educated, encompassing such things as gossip magazines, reality television, popular music, yellow journalism, escapist fiction, romantic fiction, and memes, fashion or dress sense of youths, jeans and t-shirt, hair style, sports such as football and baseball, all of which lack the capacity to endure for a long time, neither is its quality timeless.

High culture on the other hand is also a derogatory term but its cultural products appeal to the elite or those in the aristocratic class. Aspects of high culture include classical music, symphonies, hymns, fashion style which appeals to the high or privileged class such

as suits, creative works which deal with the complexity of human existence, in fact anything that is above street level. Cultural theorists categorise low or high culture as subcultures. Many believe that the barrier between low and high cultures have since been broken down. The distinction is no longer meaningful as consumers of cultural products have become omnivores and their interests overlap.

Types of Culture in Nigeria

Nigeria has diverse cultures because of her different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Though there are three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, which are Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, with other three, Fulani, Efik-Ibibio and Edo also popular, the number of ethnic groups is believed to be over 500 (Omoera, 2021). Each of these ethnic groups has its own distinct language. The three major religious groups are Christianity, Islam and traditional religion. The cultures of the six ethnic groups mentioned earlier are arguably the most popular in Nigeria. These are the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Efik-Ibibio and Edo cultures.

The identities or characteristics of these cultures in Nigeria are noticeable by their dresses/clothing, costumes and ornaments, peculiar food habits and delicacies, cooking utensils, natural resources, natural environments, prevailing traditional or orthodox religion, customs, norms, values, beliefs, mannerisms, world-views, architectural style of buildings, history, crafts, art works, dances, poetry, drama, festivals, language, sometimes accent, etc. These are also distinguishable features of the over 500 other cultures not listed here. Nigeria is indeed a rich multicultural society all operating within an evolving single larger culture, which may be labelled 'Nigerian' now or in the future. There are also gender, age groups and pop culture subcultures growing in Nigeria within the evolving authentic national culture, irrespective of Nigeria's ethnic, cultural or religious diversity.

Social Learning Theory, Media and Cultural Promotion

Albert Bandura (1963) in his Social Learning Theory (SLT) put forward that new behaviours can be acquired by observing and imitating others. This statement implies that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement (Bandura, 1963). Learning as well occurs through the observation of rewards and punishments, a process known as vicarious reinforcement that platforms such as media could provide through TV drama, films and related programmes. Bandura opens up the scope of learning mechanisms by introducing observation as a possibility. He adds to this the ability of modeling – a means by which humans represent actual outcomes symbolically.

Furthermore, Grusec (1992) claims that a person's behaviour, environment, and personal qualities all reciprocally influence each other. The point for this study, therefore, is that we can observe and learn from the media in the context of Albert Bandura's SLT that explains that behaviours and attitudes can be modeled by observing the behaviours and attitudes of others by listening to television programmes, films and other wholesome cultural media contents. This implies that the media possess the power to influence society and such influence emanates as results of the various contents embedded in the various

programmes carried by the various media channels, especially television and film. The media using the various channels would be able to promote, preserve and project Nigerian cultural heritages to the world. (Omoera & Umunnah, 2020)

The mass media is regarded as a major carrier of culture. The media serve as cultural storytellers and forum for cultural debate and cultural exchange. They also serve as cultural databank—as a storehouse or library that preserves peoples’ cultural heritage. The media transmit these heritage from generation to generation, beyond national frontiers. Indeed, cultural heritages including languages, marriage rites, burial rites, birth rites, dressing, greeting, music, folklore, religion, and other tangible cultural monuments, natural sites and cultural landscapes that would have died due to modernization, or western cultural influences (in the case of African cultures) are preserved, kept alive through the media databanking, and then transmitted across continents. This is the power of the media in regenerating and communicating the substance and plausibility of a culture. As the media transmit cultures, all elements of a culture – history of a people, their religion, symbols, values, social organizations and languages are transmitted to all parts of the world as far as coverage is possible. Books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, the cinema, records, tapes and videos, and other forms of mass communication occupy a central role in peoples’ lives and continue to advance, encourage and facilitate cross cultural interaction (Iheanacho, 2014, p.95).

Culture stands for the aggregate values and concepts which characterize a community. It then follows that people who lack culture or are ignorant of their past experience either written or unwritten are themselves not in full existence (Onabajo, 2005, p.94). Recognizing the importance of culture to human existence, efforts are often made to ensure its preservation. One of the fundamental tools utilised for cultural promotion is the media. The media is no doubt very cardinal in projecting the culture of a given society. The cultural promotion/transmission function of the mass media connotes that the media are major carriers of culture. This function places a demand on the media to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the people’s cultures. Okoye (2009, p.23) asserts that “the media function as carriers and transmitters of cultural norms, values, and heritage of our people from one generation to another.” The media are both a component of society and culture. As an independent entity, the media sits between other cultural and social organizations, which shapes their mutual interactions. The media takes materials from society, repackages or remodels them and gives them back to society as culture (Awosola & Omoera, 2008). The process of this symbiotic relationship between the media and society engenders a kind of mediation whose profundity is invaluable in cultural communication (Epochi-Olise & Omoera, 2022).

Cultural transmission as a function of the media borders on past heritages. A core responsibility of the mass media is the transfer of culture from one ethnic group to another, one country to another and one generation to another for the purpose of promoting and integrating cultures (Sambe, 2005). The mass media disseminate cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the past heritages for the people; they also help in the development of culture by awakening and stimulating the imaginative, creative and

aesthetic abilities in individuals, thus leading to the promotion of cultural artefacts (Okunna, 1994). This function of the media also forges and maintains commonality of values (Ndolo, 2005).

The mass media cannot be taken for granted when it comes to cultural promotion. It is a fundamental task for the media to actualize. The function of cultural promotion/transmission demands that the mass media promote the cultures of the people in their reports. Inequality between majority and minority groups can be balanced (Eze, 2011). Eze further affirmed that the mass media have (in line with the cultural promotion function) helped in the promotion of the cultures of several ethnic groups, nations and continents. According to Moemeka (2000, p.120), radio and by extension, the media, can be used in cultural innovation or diffusion. Since culture is not static, radio could help remove the negative aspects of some of our cultures and help the citizens to absorb that, which will improve their welfare and culture awareness. It could also be used to bring to children, youths and adults the greatest achievements of our cultural heritage in art, music, drama, poetry and so on.

Media and Cultural Promotion: The Nigerian Situation

Nigeria as a nation also recognizes the importance of promoting the cultures of the land via the media. For instance, Nigeria's national cultural policy recommends that the media should be used for the dissemination of cultural and artistic products for the purposes of preserving Nigerian's cultural heritage; the media should enhance Nigeria's cultural development by broadcasting the citizen's horizon, awakening their imagination and stimulating, their aesthetic awareness, values and creativity. Also, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) clearly states that broadcasting in Nigeria should be a conscious effort towards the realization of the cultural objectives for which it was established to fulfill. Specifically, Section 1.5.2 of the NBC Code states that broadcasting shall, among others:

- a. Seek, identify, preserve and promote Nigeria's diverse cultures;
- b. Select, critically, the positive aspects of foreign cultures for the purpose of enriching the Nigerian culture;
- c. Develop and promote the application of indigenous aesthetic values;
- d. Promote the development of a high level of intellectual and artistic creativity;
- e. Foster generally acceptable moral, ennobling and spiritual values.

The essence of these cultural objectives was and still is to ensure that broadcasting in Nigeria be a conduit for cultural learning; through which the mass society are constantly reminded of their cultural heritage. In order to ensure the realization of these objectives, television and radio programmes must be local content centred. Daily broadcast should constitute at least 70% local content which are programmes produced by: a broadcast licensee or individual with the intention to promote the development and sustenance of the

diverse cultures, moral and community life of the Nigerian people through broadcasting (Nigerian Broadcasting Code, 2002 p.53) cited in (Patricia, 2012, p.27).

According to Sambe (2005), the mass media is mandated by the Nigerian constitution of 1999 (as amended) in its fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy (article 21), to ensure that: The state shall protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian culture enhance human dignity consistent with the fundamental objectives. This shows that the media is saddled with the task of making government to protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures. It also shows that government is conscious of the fact that certain cultures of the country are for the furtherance of human dignity, and are universally recognized. Through their coverage of cultural festivals, traditional dances, exhibitions of local arts and crafts, folklore and vernacular discussion programmes on radio and television as well as publications in magazines, the mass media play a role in the enforcement and transmission of culture (Tsebee, 2011, p.31).

Omoera and Umunnah (2020) aver that media professionals in Nigeria have a mandate as elaborated by government to promote and preserve Nigeria's cultural heritage according to the National Cultural Policy – Federal Ministry of Youths, Sports and Culture (1988) and the National Broadcasting Commission (2002) because nation's cultural policy can be said to be the government actions, laws and programmes that regulate, protect, encourage and financially (or otherwise) support activities related to the arts and creative sectors such as painting, sculpture, music, dance, literature, filmmaking, among others; and culture which may involve activities related to language, heritage and diversity.

The task of salvaging our culture as a nation is enhanced if media plays its major roles in the implementation of cultural policies and in helping to democratize culture. This is because the media performs the role of agenda setting in society. The press has many roles to play in cultural development of a society. First, the media has the responsibility of guiding the society to avoid the mistakes we continue to make in Nigeria and the rest of Africa in addition to our being colonized culturally and religiously by other cultures, a mistake which has allowed the effects of scientific and technological culture of others to become the way we behave. This is because we have not cared to use these cultures of general application to develop our own responses to them; this has tremendous negative effects on the mental development and behaviour of our people. The media owes the obligation of highlighting perennial existential problems of moral failure that have bedevilled the Nigerian society in recent times. These moral issues pertain to those values that were cherished among Nigerians in the recent past, but which have now been supplanted by the imperatives of the new-value system introduced through colonial contact and its subtle influences in the fields of education and religion. The media must promote the peoples' culture. The strength of the media lies principally in its capacity for wide transmission of information within a society and across borders. The media therefore has the obligation of emphasizing the importance of culture to society. It must stimulate societal interest in culture to society (Tsebee, 2011, p.33).

As a development agent, television can do much to activate human intention and cultural development through serious educational programmes which happily are now a

feature of Nigerian television. Also, looking at the socio-cultural aspect, television has the ability to activate, socialize, homogenize and even adapt people to their own culture. It also has the ability not only to reflect but also shape opinion, and to play a part in forming attitudes, which affect morality. The Nigerian Television has not lagged behind in revitalizing the nation's cultural heritage (Onabajo, 2005, p.95).

The media role of cultural transmission is an effective educational tool for relaying cultural knowledge to the masses. In Nigeria for instance, in order to promote cultural awareness, the Nigerian media have so far tried to promote the identities of the ethnically, culturally, linguistically diverse peoples of the country. Nigeria's cultural policy has evolved into a continuing search for a distinct cultural and national identity, which recognizes the ethnic components of the Nigerian population, the linguistic pluralism and the multicultural composition of the Nigerian nation. This is reflected in most media institutions in Nigeria. The Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) and African Independent Television (AIT) have among their policies the wearing of traditional and local attires during news casting. The newscasters as a matter of policy wear their cultural attires while presenting the news items. AIT allots programme times for different cultural groups to showcase their cultural products and cultural identity.

What's more, the NTA also has programmes that showcase the different cultural diversities of the Nigerian nation. The Radio Nigeria Corporation has the same policy and tradition. Its introductory jingles at national news times co-opt the three Nigerian major ethnic languages (Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba) (Iheanacho, 2014). A core objective of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), formerly known as the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) is to "provide a professional and comprehensive coverage of Nigerian culture through broadcasting; to promote cultural growth through research into indigenous cultures, and to disseminate the results of such research" (Onabajo, 2005).

Conclusion

Just like many other parts of the world, the media is no doubt very critical in the promotion of culture in Nigeria. To ensure the media promotes culture in Nigeria, the Nigerian constitution and other relevant media regulatory documents clearly indicate that the media should, as a matter of necessity, promote the Nigerian culture and went ahead to even state how such promotion should be done to achieve efficiency. Accordingly, the media in Nigeria have continued to fulfil this responsibility of cultural promotion, but there is room for improvement as the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) take the centre stage in the global digital era.

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