

**EVALUATING REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL REALITIES THROUGH RADIO DRAMA**

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**Abstract**

*Studies have proven that radio is one of the most popular tools of communication and transmission. Radio dramas which are dramatized purely acoustic performance of societal issues are means through which awareness of happenings are transmitted. Most radio dramas are staged according to what is experienced in the society. It has been observed that the use of radio dramas to address certain societal ills have waned considerably with the advent of social media which seems to have taken the attention of the public off listening to radio dramas. Radio which is an accessible medium of communication has been known to effect social changes beneficial to a community or country which indicates that it is a tool for national development. Anchored on the Development Media Theory, this paper relied on secondary data to discuss how radio dramas can be used to address some issues that would bring about development and correct perceived ills in the society. The paper therefore recommends that for development to take place in a community, media practitioners should lay more emphasis on the use of radio drama to create awareness on societal happenings and equally focus on issues that foster national unity and understanding to bring about positive change in the society.*

**Key words:** Development, Radio Drama, Representation, Social reality

**Introduction**

From the inception of life, communication has been the live wire of human existence with the greatest aspect of it being the interactivity and the participation of the parties involved in the communication process. This is so because participation is used to evaluate feedback. Besides the face to face participation in the communication process, the broadcast media has over the years offered more access for participation and one of the ways is the audience participation in radio programmes. The mass media, most especially radio, have been used as a source of information centred on social development issues in many countries around the globe. Notwithstanding the fact that other sources of information such as interpersonal networks, may

mediate the media's effect upon social behavior, the media play an essential role in notifying the public on social development matters. The mass media delivers mobilizing information, which help individuals in their effort to manifest good societal and development behaviors. Edeani (1981) observed that the attention devoted by the mass media to a certain public issue, gravitates towards directing the general public, to see the issue as important, and that the constant discussion of any particular issue among, and between one's reference group, tends to clarify the issue. In this regard, mass media channels are generally appraised as primary knowledge creators. Despite the fact that mass media are not the only decisive instrument for achieving such goals, yet they are salient as they continually mirror society to itself and thus, direct it in the way of dynamism and progress.

### **Background to the Study**

The aim of establishing radio as a mass medium is to educate, entertain, inform and act as an agent of socialization. The emphasis largely has to do with creating awareness on societal issues, surveillance of the environment and correlation of the parts of the society in responding to its environment and the transmission of cultural heritage (McQuail, 2013). It also aids in providing individual reward, relaxation and reduction of tension, which makes it easier for people to cope with real life problems and for societies and communities to avoid a breakdown. (Folarin, 2012). That radio has had a tremendous social impact, affecting attitudes and behaviour is undeniable. (Okeke & Nwosu, 2021) Popular experiences in contemporary times reveal that radio has become a channel through which the political, economic, religious, intellectual and cultural aspects of humanity have met with real transformations. Yet despite this impact of radio, it remains simple in its coverage. (Moemeka, 2009). In recognition of the unique nature of radio in terms of simplicity and wider coverage bringing the world to those who cannot read. Its immediacy (McLeish 2015), its transmission in various local languages (Moemeka, 2009) as well as its contribution to the development of a nation makes it the most credible source of news and enlightenment in most parts of Africa. (Okigbo, 2010). This made radio one of the most appropriate means of communication in any society, beating literacy barriers (Moemeka, 2009). In addition radio has that personal touch that lends urgency to change. In radio programmes, there are audiences that are made up of people who are different from each other in many aspects. These differences may be social, educational, economic, psychological, cultural, ethical and religious. This wide diversity of audience backgrounds, skills, attitudes enables radio presenters produce programmes to satisfy their different tastes. Producing radio programmes is therefore a mixture of the ideal and the expedient (Chester, Kingson & Rome Cowgill, 2014). Thus, the programmes must have the ability to capture the mind's eye of its audience. The producer has to have a deep knowledge and understanding of the people and the community he is directing the programmes to. By this, he can produce programmes that the audience can relate with. Sociologists believe that people of different social positions will share similar demographic characteristics and would exhibit similar reaction to messages. Variables such as gender, age, education, income, ethics, background and religion have influence on the kind of programme packaged for airing.

The radio is an aural and intimate medium - (i.e. it belongs to the home, offices and even moves with people in their transport systems). As a result of its portability, it has the ability of reaching people and areas otherwise thought inaccessible". Although the medium is constrained by its nature as a purely aural medium of information dissemination, it highlights its advantages as a medium with inexhaustive reach and penetration; with relatively simpler methods of broadcasts to reach far and wide; appealing to both the blind and the sighted persons. It is also worthy of note that even though the radio medium has the inability to demonstrate visually, it has the potential to stimulate the interest and imagination of the learner. (Ubong, 2009).

Radio is an intensive informant, and we learn from its messages. (Ubong, 2009). It has the ability of expanding a person's perception beyond the confines of his immediate surroundings. Through it one gets information directly about national and international happenings. Hence, the reason radio should be used to package dramas that would project the happenings in the society to bring about a positive change.

The aim of the paper therefore is to rekindle the awareness on producing radio dramas to focus on issues to bring about development in a community and foster unity and understanding amongst members of a community. The coming of the New Media should not render radio drama redundant but act as a boost to propagating societal good. This paper therefore suggests modalities for the more positive employment of radio drama in representing social realities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In these days, when dynamic live programming, dominated by innovative phone-in programmes and social commentaries, forms the bulk of Nigeria's popular radio broadcast sphere and with the advent of social media with all its glamour, many listeners might not be aware that a major tradition has been largely overlooked or even been neglected. In the early years of post-independence broadcasting, Nigeria's radio drama repertoire was widely regarded all over the English-speaking world as a truly innovative and exciting medium of creative expression focused on societal issues and realities with a major objective of bringing about positive change and development. Among the most memorable productions in the era of radio drama were some popular drama series aired which were known as Safe Journey, with its famous star characters "Shakey-Shakey" the lorry driver, and "Alao" his conductor which was a world-class comedic programme and story, story...Voice of the market with most of them aired through Radio Nigeria. Its scripting was carried out by various impressively talented writers; prominent among whom were the late Ralph Opara who also produced some of the series, Solomon Ayagere a librarian and scholar, and Sam Iyamu a British-trained theatre director. These very accomplished scriptwriters did not confine themselves however to writing episodes of the popular series. Every Sunday afternoon there was a slot for serious drama on Radio Nigeria or the Nigerian Broadcasting Company (NBC) as it was then known. In those days of Radio drama broadcasting, some impressive works of serious literary expression were commissioned by radio producers, who were notably adventurous in their production styles. Iyamu, and Tunde Aiyegbusi were among two of the most innovative of these producers and their Sunday Afternoon Theatre of the Airwaves recorded some remarkable and memorable examples of audio-theatre which reflects social realities that created awareness on societal happenings to members of the society. It is unfortunate that due to the emergence of social media and an incredible display of historical ignorance by the bureaucratic establishment of the broadcasting profession in Nigeria, the legacy created by those devoted professionals has been lost and the use of radio dramas to represent social realities has gradually become a thing of the past. This paper therefore advocates the resuscitation of radio dramas to cater for the percentage of the population that cannot afford smartphones and computer laptops to be updated on societal happenings through the various social media platforms, to those that are not sophisticated and literate enough to follow the high level English phonetics - speaking radio broadcasters in today's broadcasting arena. The idea of radio dramas is to bring about positive change, development and foster unity among members of a community, therefore this should be employed to carry every segment of the nation's population along especially in developmental processes as studies have shown that radio still remains the most affordable and most accessible medium of communication and information dissemination especially among rural dwellers.

### **Concept of Radio Drama**

Okigbo (2010) defines Radio drama, or audio drama, audio play, radio play, radio theatre or audio theatre as a dramatized, purely acoustic performance, broadcast on radio. With no visual component, radio dramas depend on dialogue, music and sound effects to help the listener imagine the characters and story. Media scholars posit that it is auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension. Moemeka (2009) states Radio drama programmes are particularly effective in motivating for societal change. Thus, the radio drama (also known as radio plays or drama) is the fusion of theatre and radio as a means of communication. In other words, is the adaptation of the theatrical genre to the radio. So adaptation is valid, the producer renounces the visual aspects of the drama scene and replaces them with sound elements: sound effects for the narration of scenes or dialogue between the actors, a background music that serves as an atmosphere and a greater emphasis on the vocals by actors. According to Ubong (2009), the various elements of radio drama have a purpose: that the listener activates your

imagination to get into the story. This no doubt helps to put into perspective the concept of radio drama, which is using sounds and words to create vivid pictures in the minds of the listeners and which must satisfy some goals. Starting from 1920 the radio became a mass medium and a form of entertainment that incorporated music and information. By then, it became fashionable to produce radio serials and through the radio devices were known plays of different genres, preferably the drama. This phenomenon was very popular in Spain and Latin American countries. Its popularity had an explanation: theatre drama is an entertainment that is not within the reach of everyone and to adapt it to the radio made this class disparity disappear. But with the emergence of television and Social media, the radio drama started losing prominence. In this sense, the television soap operas and the use of social media platforms by the audience replaced the radio serials.

Onyekwere (2010) states that radio drama feelings, emotions and philosophies must be honest because the radio provides direct emotional communication between the writer and the listener. Radio drama is very economical and there is no room for padding, excessive exposition or description, unnecessary characters or superfluous sound effects. Radio drama is much shorter than stage or television drama. The reason for this is ingrained in the need to maintain a continuing listener interest and if this is not the case, the listener switches off. It is for this reason that radio drama seems very appropriate for bringing about developmental change to a society

### **Radio Drama and the Representation of Social Realities**

Sanders(2019) defines Social reality as the consensus of attitudes, opinions, and beliefs held by members of a group or society. It is distinct from biological reality as it represents a phenomenological level created through social interactions transcending individual motives and actions. Onyekwere (2015) states that it is a reality or fact of life peculiar to a particular society; specifically a phenomenon such as social class, religion and culture as experienced by a particular social group dependent on their customs and beliefs. Radio drama is essential in representing the social realities of a social group as its main objective is entertainment. It educates the society by sharing experience and creating a context for reflection and action. Klapper (2012) opines that radio drama play draws out the social realities of a group of individuals of a community by educating the society through sharing of experiences and creating a context for reflection and action. Moemeka(2009) asserts that radio drama play draws out participation and expression of popular concerns and analysis, overcoming people's fears and rationalizations and building confidence and identity, stimulating discussions and a critical understanding of problems, contradictions and structures underlying everybody's reality; clarifying the possibilities and strategies for action, string people's emotions and eventually mobilizing them for action. Radio drama can thus be used to develop awareness of rural populations, using local media in the form of songs, dance and proverbs.(Ubong,2009). Radio drama is therefore suitable as a medium of social change, conflict resolution, discussion on human rights, democracy and gender issues as it affects a society. Gipson (2013) posits that through radio dramas, local community radios can reflect local identity and culture of the people, representing different groups and interests in a community with an inclusion of marginalized and minority groups.

Radio dramas are a form of entertainment and education. The basis of entertainment education also known as 'edutainment' is to combine entertainment and education, to achieve the goal of communication, to inspire a change of attitude, and endorsement of advocated ideas. Edutainment basically provides the audience with fun and amusement while passing crucial messages across, at the same time. Reason why the Nigerian mass media routinely present dramatic works in English, the Nigerian pidgin, and Nigerian indigenous languages, as prime entertainment items in their programming menu. Hence, Nigeria's most successful social campaigns targeted at development have employed dramatic formats, the qualities of whose creative contents have been powerful in obtaining, and awakening audience participation and interests.(Folarin,2012)

### **Why Radio?**

According to Ubong (2009), the radio is an intimate medium and its major place is the home. It is equally a portable and a mobile medium as it could be carried about or made to form part of a transportation system. This intimacy makes it a medium of premium choice for the creation of development programmes, education and communication process. The message that is sent through the medium could reach a good number of persons in diverse places simultaneously. Sambe (2008) also states that there are some features of radio that has placed it as a better choice for representing social realities. This features include:

- Radio breaks barriers of Language and Literacy: One does not have to be literate to listen to radio programmes. Radio programming transcends all the barriers of poverty, ignorance and in-capacities. There are programmes that are intended for everyone and simple messages are used to convey information to the audience. It can be translated into local languages to accommodate the interest of the illiterate and semi-illiterate listeners scattered all over the rural areas of developing nations.
- Radio builds Community: Radio is a social medium, fostering participation and engagement in people's home languages. It goes where newer technologies cannot go, beyond electricity, beyond a mobile phone signal, beyond illiteracy. It is the most effective way of delivering information to remote areas where having the right knowledge is a paramount goal to be achieved.
- Radio is Cheap: Radio is a cheap medium of communication. The cost of production for radio is low as compared to that of television. With studio sounds (drama or recorded programmes can be played over radio as a live program. Again, a small radio set can be bought at a very cheap price. Radio sets are more affordable than other forms of technology and cost less to power.
- Radio has Speed: Radio is an extraordinarily fast medium; it is instant. As production takes place in the studio or outside the studio, messages can be sent or broadcast. These messages can be picked up by anyone who has a radio set or receiver tuned to a particular station.
- Radio signals are received in many places, within the primary service and bordering areas at the same time, thus it overcomes air and other barriers.
- Radio is flexible in pre-erupting the schedule programmes and has freedom of time.
- Radio is very effective in mobilizing people; hence it bypasses illiteracy and appeals to the individual person.

But the intimacy of radio also has its adverse implications, which the radio drama producers must not overlook. Unlike in the formal drama theatre which has a confined experience with near-exclusive attention to the performance on stage, the radio is competing for the attention of the listener with many other plausible interests. Besides the fact that the radio set itself can enable immediate change from one station to another, the listener has alternative interests like the telephone, the video, the television, the spouse, the children, friends, relations, etc. In other words, to capture the listener's attention and pass the message of developmental responsibility to him, the drama programme has to be such that could captivate and sustain his interest.

Although modern programmers have devised a method of getting feedback on aired messages, through phone-in programmes, and the creation of other programmes where the views of listeners are articulated, these do not cover all programmes in a station's schedule. Besides, some of such programmes lack immediacy, a vital characteristic of radio broadcasting. A credible method of circumventing this failure is the employment of radio as one in an integrated development education programme.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on the Development Media theory which was propounded by Dennis McQuail (2013) states that the media must at all times support an existing political regime and its efforts to bring about a nation's development. It is a normative theory which assumes that the government will use the media for the purpose of fostering national development goals which might be economic or social until the nation's economic development is well underway (Baran & Dennis, 2012). The basic assumptions of the theory as summarized by McQuail (2013) include that the media should accept and fulfill certain obligations in society. These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high standards of truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance. In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of the law and established institutions. That is to say that the media in developing countries should be actively

involved in the task of nation building by helping to create awareness and mobilizing the citizenry for national development. The theory therefore makes it imperative to emphasize the role and importance of the media and what it can do if properly harnessed to bring about achieving national development. Relating the theory to the study, the use of radio dramas to represent social realities of a society in order to create awareness on very important societal issues, correct perceived ills, mobilize the citizenry for national development and foster unity among members of a community is a sure step to ensuring and bringing about national development. Here, radio is the development media tool which is actively involved in the task of nation building. Here, national development is seen as consisting of three basic objectives: to promote a civic sense, focus on an integrated pattern of development in which economic development and development of social infrastructures are complimentary and supplementary and a progressive participation of people in their own development. However, critics of the theory hold strongly to the view that the theory leans towards authoritarianism as it stipulates that the media must support government policies at all times which neglects the watchdog role of the media to the public.

### **The Significance of Radio Drama as a Vital Tool for Societal Change**

Radio is seen as the blind man's medium. it nevertheless has the ability to stimulate the mind. It was invented by a great Italian electrical engineer, Guglielmo Marconi in 1895 (Folarin,2012) and has developed into an almost universal medium of communication. It is a medium that links the continents, the nations, states, regions and communities in an instant. It presents the world to those who cannot read and helps maintain a connection for those who cannot see. According to Okigbo (2010), he points out the popularity of radio in Nigeria asserting that: "the attraction radio has for rural dwellers is derived from its cheap price and cost of operation" "Radio sets are portable and can be used by both the educated and the illiterate."

Radio drama as stated by Okigbo (2010) is a dramatized, purely acoustic performance broadcast on radio or published on audio media such as tape or compact disc. Radio drama depends on dialogue, music, and sound effects to assist the listener imagine the characters and story as it has no visual components. It is auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension. By the 1940s, radio drama became a leading international popular entertainment.(Moemeka,2009).

Onyekwere (2010) explains that the aim of these programmes are "relaxation" and entertainment. He opines that local stations utilize drama to propagate societal norms, values and systems. It can equally be used as a satire to correct societal ills and clarify blatant misconceptions held about peculiar societal issues. The essence of radio drama cannot be over-emphasized because it can serve as a corrective tool for social change. In Nigeria, the need to reform societal behaviours has become of great necessity. The moral degradation in the Nigerian society is increasing on a daily basis. But in the broadcasting sphere today, most radio programme directors/producers do not see the need of producing a radio drama anymore. Thus, radio drama has been neglected not only in the educational theatre but also in the general society. This has made the public overlook the importance of radio drama. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to resuscitate the interest of the people and radio programme producers to using radio drama to bring about societal change. People must adapt to favourable social changes for a better and healthy living as change is the only activity constant in nature. Nevertheless, radio drama is a potent tool through which these changes can be accomplished.

### **Conclusion**

Research has shown that radio is one of the medium of communication and information needed to bring about messages that would bring social change and national development.(Moemeka,2009) Radio dramas which are one of the means through which awareness about societal issues are highlighted and transmitted are fast becoming a thing of the past due to the incursion of newer technologies which seems to have taken up the attention of both the broadcasters and the audience. Attention has been shifted to more glamorous ways of broadcasting and disseminating societal issues through phone-in programmes with radio producers of such programmes forgetting the fact that most rural dwellers may not have the wherewithal to participate in such programmes. Again, the paper posits that the advent of social media has shifted the focus from radio

to itself because most content producers create contents for the social media audience again forgetting the fact that most citizens cannot afford android phones or computer laptops to key in and be carried along. Radio dramas which are mostly staged according to what is experienced in the society therefore remains the surest medium to reach both the rich and the poor, the literate and non-literate to bring out major issues and areas to make corrections on which will in turn bring about nation development and peaceful co-existence. Developmental messages should be all inclusive and no segment of the population should be left out.

### **Recommendations**

Radio dramas keep the public aware of societal happenings and proffer solutions to societal issues of interest thereby fostering unity and peaceful co-existence. To further enhance the utilization of radio dramas for bringing about developmental messages, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- Media stakeholders should revive radio dramas to our airwaves as it has been proven that radio dramas aid in bringing about the needed change in the society.
- Radio drama producers should ensure messages always address an issue of interest that will bring about a desired change to a community.
- Relevant government stakeholders and Development experts should utilize the radio drama platform more for bringing about development messages to the people.
- Radio drama messages should cater for every segment of the society. No citizen of a society should be left out of a developmental process.

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