

Television Stations in a Depressed Economy: A Critical Analysis of NTA Channel 12, Owerri

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Abstract

Media survival is a challenge in every depressed economy. In the absence of the media, societal development can be stalled since the information which it requires for advancement would be non-existing. This scenario showed why a study of "Television stations in a depressed economy" was necessary, using the NTA Channel 12, Owerri, as area of study. The study used the survey research method to sample the views of 399 respondents who represented the population of Owerri, where the study was conducted. It was found that programme content which satisfied the needs of the audience helped stations to retain loyalist and even expand their audience share. It was also discovered that effective programming which addresses the interest of the station's audience, accounted for their desire to patronize the station. It meant that programme content must be relevant to the expectations of television audience for a television station to remain afloat.

Keywords: *Television Station .Depressed Economy .Revenue Generation .Digitalization*

Introduction

Television broadcasting started in Nigeria in 31st October 1959. The then premier of Western Region, the legendary, Chief Obafemi Awolowo established the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) in Ibadan with Olapade Obisesan as its first Chairman. It was the first station in Africa and was owned by government only. In 1992 the Nigerian government liberalized the ownership of the broadcast sector, through Degree No.38 of 1992. This degree eased government's monopoly of the broadcast industry. It provided opportunity for individuals and groups to establish and operate broadcast media.

Since then, the industry has made an appreciable mark in the field of information dissemination though there are inherent challenges. The problem of broadcasting is how to reconcile these seemingly contradiction of maintaining objectivity in reporting as well as having enough funds to cater for the organization. The problem becomes obvious in a period of general economic hardship, as experienced in Nigeria. The problem of fund scarcity has adversely affected the fortunes of broadcast stations, particularly, since most of their owners can hardly meet their obligations. The consequence is the gradual dilapidation of resources in the broadcast sector; inability to procure technical equipment; lack of engagement of better qualified personnel even when the existing ones are retrenched (Abudah, 1986). The absence of capacity building to ensure proficiency and competence has greatly compounded the survival of television broadcasting in a depressed economy, (Owuamalam, 2006). The situation stimulates a research interest to what should be done.

As an indication of their inability to provide subventions needed, government has given her broadcast stations the task of becoming "self-supporting" meaning that they should earn more income on their own through advertising and other business activities. Advertising as the revenue yielding source which government has in mind by asking the

stations to commercialize, is tied to the economy that is at present depressed. It then becomes doubtful, if the dreams of survival and viability can be realized by the broadcast media in a depressed economy.

However, the Nigerian broadcast media had to respond to the clarion call for self-sufficiency by introducing news commercialization, (Edeani, 1986). According to him, the national broadcasting network has started charging companies thousands of naira for providing news coverage on their corporate activities. What is considered unethical and objectionable about this act is the fact that news coverage constitutes one of the cardinal social responsibility and statutory functions of the broadcast media as public institutions, functioning in the interest of the public. This shows the situation of the broadcast station, as dictated by a depressed economy.

It becomes necessary, therefore, to ascertain how television broadcasting can become viable in a depressed economy. It is the impact of depression on broadcast media prospects that the researcher has decided to investigate. The essence is to understand how television stations can literarily raise their heads above the trouble of economic recession.

Statement of the Problem

The demand for the Nigerian broadcast industry to stay economically afloat has posed very serious challenges. Reasons being that the monopolistic ownership pattern since the inception in 1932 by Colonial administration, has removed the zeal for broadcast media to liberate themselves from the harsh economic realities and also revive their dilapidated structures. Funds have therefore, constituted a major problem for the television stations effective operations, like the NTA 12, Owerri. The station can hardly train and retain the required manpower capable of producing exciting programmes for the viewing pleasure of the audience.

It is believed that where the problem of fund is addressed through audience interest in presented programmes and digitalization of station, like the NTA Channel 12 Owerri, then a window of opportunities can be explored for the survival of television stations in a depressed economic condition. This study therefore, focused on determining how NTA Channel 12 Owerri can survive the prevailing harsh economic realities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. Can subvention make television stations remain afloat in a depressed economy?
2. To what extent is revenue generation vital to television station's survival?

Review of Related Literature

Television as a Broadcast Medium

Television means to "see at a distance and the term broadcast means to send out to all directions" (Grob & Herndon 1999, p.1) Television comprises two elements, the audio and video (sound and sight). Both audio and video are Latin words. In the word video means "I see" while audio means "I hear". The two terms correspond with video to light and audio to sound. For television, its broadcast process is accomplished when differing light values in a "scene" are converted by a camera to corresponding electrical changes or variations. These changes in voltage and current make up a video signal.

Zettl (1997) says that the television camera converts whatever it sees (optical images) into electrical signals that can be temporarily stored or directly reconverted by the television set into visible screen image. It has the capability of revealing scenic pictures and compelling sounds faithfully that excites audience interest and curiosity in the television broadcast medium. Accurate and faithful presentation of events as social activities make television broadcast relevant as a potent and efficient mass communication medium that can be believable, reliable, and acceptable, (Owunamalam 2006).

Zettl (1997), also tells us that a system is a collection of elements that work together to achieve specific purpose. Each of the elements is dependent upon the proper workings of all others, and none of the individual element can do the job alone. Television programmes have impact on the mass audience who attend to them. They reflect societal moods by presenting graphic pictures of events with accompanying images such as photographs and illustrations. According to Wimmer and Dominick (1999, p.104), 'we study television for a lot of reasons: Its social impact; its effects on politics; its influence on modes of conversation; fashions and relationships among others'. However, the majority of the public seem to believe that television is only about one thing, and that is programming. Programming, whether found on the broadcast networks, local television or even the cable has only two major functions of information and entertainment. One can say that people watch television programmes for mainly news and entertainment. They maintained that while television news credibility has taken some hits lately, television, today, is the primary source of news for more than two-thirds of the public.

Finally, given the high costs, cumbersomeness and complexity of programme production, television as a medium of broadcasting is much less capable of diversity. Programme production tends to consist of centralized, ready-made materials for relay. It means that revenue generation strategies must be adopted by the television stations if they must survive and remain on air in a depressed economy.

The Economic and Social Benefits of Television Broadcasting

Chester and Garrison (1978, p.6) state that 'the economic significance of television broadcasting far outweighs the dollar volume of their business alone'. The significance of television as a communication medium is measured by its importance as an advertising medium for the distribution and sale of all forms of consumer's goods and services. Economically, advertising is the main source of revenue generation for television stations. Advertising is the major reason why they are still on air. It is their strong source of sustenance. The advertisers increase their sales of product, thereby increase their income. For the audience or viewers (public), it informs and entertains them. Advertising is, therefore, beneficial to television stations, the advertisers, and the public as a source of survival in a depressed economy.

Television is referred to by advertisers as a selling machine. Television has established itself as the most effective and selling medium for commercials, ever developed. It brings to its advertisers a bigger share of the market.

Television creates brand name awareness to people. It also increases awareness as to the availability of products and services. It increases the ability to recognize a trade mark, and teaches consumers to identify a slogan or a copy. Television produces great public relations benefit and brings out the advertised brand to increase in revenue for the television station, financial economic gain for the advertisers and quality information and entertainment for the public.

From the social angle, television serves as a major source of information and enlightenment to the people. Television news broadcast has long been among the public's favorite programme because of its visual effect. The ability of television to broadcast news bulletins after the actual event took place with its visual impact, gives it a clear advantage over others. The coverage of special events, including natural disasters, such as flood, hurricanes, war, accidents and crime scenes and other events of public interest, like presidential inaugurations, the visit of both foreign and national political leaders and debates, offers the public an opportunity of the unfolding history. Such sponsored programmes generate substantial revenue for the survival of the television station in a depressed economy.

The social effect of television programme varies. Television influences daily living. Viewers are perceptibly and imperceptibly affected by the programmes they watch. Television has power to induce panic in viewers. Television can induce panic through

scaring broadcast programmes and can as well quell panic stemming from other sources. During natural disasters, like wars, television has calmed, reassured and directed the populace into controlled and reasoned behaviour. Therefore, there is every reason to believe that television will continue to serve the public as it has been doing both in time of crisis and peace. It is through such dedicated service that television generates the support which enables its' survive in a depressed economy.

The Concept of Depressed Economy

A depressed economy is one that is under-developed, (Toderro 1980). It is an economy that is characterized by the problem of low income, low productivity, low investment, and low savings in particular. It is an economy that is faced with the problem of disequilibrium at the international market for prices of its products instead of the price mechanism.

Most of the developing countries especially the West African countries are classified as depressed economies because they are faced with the problem of vicious circle of poverty. Development economist like Toderro, as well as Nwosu, classified Nigeria as a country with a depressed economy because of its high dependence on importable and on donor agencies for survival.

According to Anyanwu (1997, a depressed economy is subject to structural rigidities such as backwardness in technology, education, scientific discovery as well as modernizations. Politically, a depressed economy is subject to the vagaries of both internal and external dictatorship, bad leadership and also, electoral fraud and rigging. Nwosu (2000) described a depressed economy in summary as an economic system or structure that is backward socially, politically, economically and culturally, because it cannot stand on its own rather it depends on other nations for survival.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on social exchange theory as proposed by John Thibaut and Harold Kelly (Thibaut and Kelly, 1959, p.287). According to them:

Individuals evaluate relationship in a relatively rational manner akin to an economic analysis. This analysis involves an assessment of the rewards and costs that are perceived from past relationships and possible future relationship. These concepts come together in defining rational outcomes, comparison levels of alternatives.

According to Miller (2002, p.15) "the outcomes of a particular relationship involves a consideration of both the rewards derived from the relationship and the cost of relationship." He concludes that "a relationship with many rewards and few costs would have high outcomes; one with few rewards and many costs would have low outcomes.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the survey research method and obtained data from the sample size of 399 using a population of 127,335 which was the population of people living within the Owerri municipal as provided by the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006). The study made use of questionnaire to obtain answers from the respondents through a purposive sampling technique by a face-to-face distribution approach.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This segment dealt with the presentation of data obtained from the field. Frequency tables were used in the presentation of obtained data and their results. The essence was to present a clearer analysis of the obtained field data. The researcher produced and distributed 399 copies of the questionnaire to respondents. A total of 379 or 95% of the administered copies were valid for the study while the other 20 copies or 5% were invalid because eight were not returned, seven were wrongly completed while five were partially filled. It means that the valid 379 copies, therefore, formed the 100% which was used for the purpose of data analysis and discussion of findings. Out of the 379 respondents,

178(47%) were male while 201(53%) were female. On the other hand, 127(34%) of total respondents were within the age bracket 20 - 30, 148(39%) were within age bracket 31 - 40 and 148(27%) were within the age limit of 41 and above. Also, 98(26%) were O'level holders, 186(49%) were first degree holders while the remaining 95(25%) represented those who had other qualifications apart from O'level and first degree.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Data

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	178	47
Female	201	53
Total	379	100
Age	Frequency	Percentage
20 - 30	127	34
31 - 40	148	39
41 and above	104	27
Total	379	100
Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
O'level	98	26
First degree	186	49
Any other	95	25
Total	379	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Research Question One

Can subvention make television stations remain afloat in a depressed economy?

Item 7 in the questionnaire: "Is total reliance on subvention capable of sustaining television stations in economic depression?" was therefore used to answer research question one. The obtained result showed the following:

Table 2: Audience Perception of Television Subvention

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	75	20
No	212	56
Can't Say	92	24
Total	379	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

Data in table 2 above showed that 75(19.79%) respondents were of the opinion that subvention alone can make television stations remain afloat in a depressed economy but as many as 212 respondents which represent 55.94% disagree to that while 92 respondents chose *Can't Say*.

Research Question Two

To what extent is revenue generation vital to television station's survival?

The result from item 9 in the questionnaire: "Is revenue generation necessary for the survival of a television station in a depressed economy?" was presented hereunder as follows:

Table 3: Audience Perception of Revenue Generation

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	202	53
No	73	19
Can't Say	104	27
Total	379	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

The data in table 3 above showed that more than half of the entire respondents 202(53%) agreed that television stations generate funds as a survival strategy in a depressed economy. While 73 respondents which represent 19% disagreed to that, 104(27) were undecided on that issue.

Discussion of Findings

The following findings emerged from this study:

The Issue of Television Subvention

Data collected were good enough to handle the issues at hand. To establish if subvention alone was capable of sustaining a television station in a depressed economy, the details in table 2 proved very useful as 75(19.79%) respondents were of the opinion that subvention alone can make television stations remain afloat in a depressed economy but as many as 212 respondents which represent 55.94% disagree to that while 92 respondents were not sure of either *yes* or *no*. What this outcome implies is that it is very difficult for any television station to run the establishment effectively with total reliance on subvention because in a depressed economy, the government has limited finance and this also affect the size of any subvention to be given. Hence, reliance on this downsized fund will surely hamper the steady flow of the television station.

The Issue of Revenue Generation

However, the issue of internally revenue generation by the television station was treated with the data in table 3 above where as many as 202(53%) respondents agreed that television stations generate funds as a survival strategy in a depressed economy. While 73 respondents which represent 19% disagreed to that, 104(27) were undecided on that issue. The import of this is that internally revenue generation is very essential to the sustenance of television station during an economic recession to enable the station have enough fund to run the organization.

Conclusion

There was a relationship between a station's survival strategies and fund generation in a depressed economy. It is audience satisfaction that is explored for revenue generation to enable the stations to survive in a depressed economy. Again, a television station can survive in a depressed economy so long as it can produce programmes that meet the expectations of its audience. Digitalization affects the revenue generation capacity of the television station. It enables a station to produce and present qualitative and consumable programmes as products from that television station. Digitalization is essential in the survival of a television station, in a depressed economy because it helps to retain the interest and attention of the audience thereby creating a wider opportunity for revenue generation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in the study:

1. Programmes which are to be produced should be tailored to suit a specific audience interest.
2. Profit creation avenues should be followed to a logical conclusion because it is the difference between revenue and operational cost that determines if a television station can stay afloat in a depressed economy.
3. Television stations should contemplate digitalization as a veritable approach to fund generation. The technology reduces staff strength and builds performance capacity to the staff of a television station.

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