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EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MASS MEDIA ROLE IN ENHANCING FOOD PRODUCTION FOR FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The need for increased agricultural production to ensure food security in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. The study which is based on the agenda-setting theory is principally targeted at finding out the role of the mass media in setting agenda for the adoption of mechanized farming in Nigeria. It is believed that governments in Nigeria should take the lead by conquering obstacles which hinder the adoption of mechanized agriculture in all farming communities in the country. Survey research method was adopted in the study. The findings show that the mass media are not doing enough in setting agenda for the adoption of mechanized agriculture in the country, and that the governments are also not according priority attention to mechanized agriculture in the country. Among the recommendations are: that the mass media should rise up to the challenge of setting agenda for governments and farmers to mechanized farming, and that government should evolve policies to surmount obstacles hindering the adoption of mechanized agriculture by farmers in the country.

Key words: **Mass Media. Food Production.Food Security.Nigeria.**

Introduction

The legendary Yoruba-born leader, Obafemi Awolowo in a lecture entitled, "Cooperation as Means to Accelerated Rural Development" which was delivered at Akure, the Ondo State capital on the 23rd of August, 1980 advised that "to avoid rebellion of the belly, we must lift the farmers from the prevailing morass of social degradation and economic miseries. "Speaking further,Awolowo described the average Nigerian farmer as being poor. "And he is poor because his health is poor, his knowledge is poor and his productivity is poor", (Awolowo, 1981:72). To fight Nigerian farmers' ignorance and boost their productivity, contemporary communication scholars seek the indispensable help of the mass media. Interestingly, over the years, the inextricable link among farmers, agriculture and the mass media has always been emphasized. It is our candid belief that no other weapon pushes away ignorance more effectively than regular effective communication.

Ochonogor (2007:264) had undertaken a study entitled Communication and Banking: The Hub of Agricultural Development in Nigeria". He found that:

> The role of communication in agricultural development is that ofproviding information and enlightenment on agricultural innovations and available incentives to encourage farmers, most of whom are rural dwellers to embrace modern precepts and practices in agriculture.

It does appear that Soola and Alawode (2007:1), were indirectly making reference to the role of communication via the mass media in the promotion of agriculture when they undertook an incisive study entitled "Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Agribusiness in a Democratic Nigeria." The result of the study made them asserts that:

> ... if news is the accurate report of supposed most important, relevant event or happening in the polity, then, it is safe to posit that the Obasanjo-led government is not committed to agribusiness.

The authors say that from the study, they reliably discovered that agri-business was grossly under reported by the national dailies during President Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian regime in Nigeria. Does this imply that the then Obasanjo-led democratic government in Nigeria did not do enough in the area of agriculture and agri-business to generate news report from the national dailies? The authors seem embittered because such an ugly trend would have made the national dailies switch-off interest in the reportage of agricultural matters. If this continues to happen, it spells doom as the little available information is not even shared by farmers,thereby, further making them ignorant.

It is our belief that the vast potentials of the mass media via the integrated marketing communication approach should be adopted in the holistic effort to improve the fortunes of agriculture in Nigeria and the rest of the developing nations. This is so, not only because, a nationthat neglects agriculture faces the "rebellion of the belly", but that its overall development will be stunted. Salau (2007:16), notes that the Obasanjo civilian administration came up with NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) which stresses that agriculture is a key element in the development process of any society. Referring to NEEDS documents, he writes that:

> The priority to agriculture (especially to improve the productivity of peasant farmers) is a key element of poverty eradication strategy ... Agriculture remains the largest non-oil export earner, the largest employer of labour, and key contributor to wealth creation and poverty alleviation.

This is why Abosade (1999] stated that "agriculture especially food production is the starting point of rural transformation". Reflecting on the foregoing, one wonders what should be the belief and vision of past leaders in Nigeria when agricultural matters were swiftly reduced to mere political propaganda. Nigeria has journeyed from Green Revolution to Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) down to NEEDS, yet hunger prevails in the country. This trend can be reversed if government gives consideration to Awolowo(1981:81). Hear him:

> We must not, in our planning, overlook the inevitable result ofmodernized agriculture development. The aim is not to increase the number of farmers, as some people imagine. Indeed, the aim is considerably to enhance the productivity of the farmers, so that fewer farmers will produce what we require. In the result, the number of those who work on the farms will be progressively reduced, thereby making more people available for employment in manufacturing and services enterprises.

Against this background, the thrust of this work is to convince governments in the country to engage and facilitate modernized farming and convince farmers to accept innovations and strategies for enhanced productivity.

Research Problem

Over the years, mass media practitioners, social researchers, governments and agriculturists have all harped on the intricate and mutual relationship existingamong farmers, farming and the mass media. It is believed that farmers must periodically undergo some orientation and re-orientation in the most modern art and science of farming through effective communication. As a result of this belief, almost every communication aimed at the promotion of agriculture emphasizes the training, orientating and informing the farmers about the most productive skills and practices in agriculture. Not much is said about adoption of mechanized farming and enhancing innovation. Let's hear Awolowo (1981:74) again on this:

> To cultivate and harvest 3 acres of cassava, for instance, he (the farmer) has to put in at least 255 days of hard work in the year. It is observed that, under the present methods of cultivation, the Nigerian peasant farmer would have to exert himself to almost physical breaking point to cultivate and harvest 4 acres of cassava in a year ... Whilst the mechanical peeling of 300 kilogrammes of cassava, with one man in attendance, takes about 5 minutes, the same quantity can he peel manually by ten men working for at least 2 days.

To further buttress his point, Awolowo (1981:76), maintains that it must be emphasized that without mechanization, it will take a farmer about 400 days to stump, pack, plough and harrow 10 acres of farmland, not to talk of ridging which will take another 150 days. Therefore, the major concern of the study is to investigate if the mass media are setting agenda for the various levels of government in Nigeria to realize the need to encourage mechanised farming (to enhance agricultural productivity) for the purpose of ensuring food security in the country.

Research Questions

1. Is mass communication relevant to the business of agriculture in Nigeria?
2. Do the mass media emphasize the need for mechanized agriculture in Nigeria?
3. Do the Governments have the capacity to demolish factors that hinder the adoption of mechanized agriculture in Nigeria? \
4. Are the mass media doing enough in the promotion of mechanized agricultural practices in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

HO_1The mass media are not relevant to the business of agriculture in Nigeria.
HO_2The mass media do not emphasize the need for mechanized agriculture in Nigeria.
HO_3The government does not have the capacity to deal with the factors that hinderthe adoption of mechanized agriculture in Nigeria.
HO_4The mass media are not doing enough in the promotion of mechanized agriculture in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on the agenda setting theory:According to Baran and Davis (2006:317), the proponent of the theory is Benard Cohen. In their writing, they noted that it was Walter Lippmann's earlier discussion on public opinion that was refined by Benard Cohen, thus leading to the emergence of the theory. Baran and Davis (2006:317), observe that Cohen is of the view that the mass media through the agenda- setting function may not be very successful in telling the people what to think, but are most successful in telling them what to think about. In further explanation, Baran and Davis (2006:317), note that Cohen's writing lingered in obscurity till Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw conducted a research that helped them confirm and articulate the agenda setting theory as propoundedby Cohen. In support of

the theory, Soolaand Alawode (2007:3), assert that, "the news media in itsfunction call attention to certain items and such items gain prominence among the audienceas the prevalent issue to think and talk about." Also, Wogu (2008:142) posits that issues of converstional currency in society derive from items reported with in the media. He explains that the idea behind agenda-setting theory is the belief that people consider as important those things reported in the media, and that major issues discussed in society are introduced by the media. This stand was indicated earlier by Bittner, (1989:385), stating that the media do not only inform the people but also influence them as to what is important to know and through this create agenda for our thoughts and influence us on what seems important.

Applied to this study, the media cannot afford to shy away from setting the agenda for public discussion and focus on agricultural mechanization in Nigeria.

Methodology

The survey research method was used. A total of 400 copies of questionnaire were administered. The study was limited to Abakaliki, Ebonyi and Izzi LGAs of Ebonyi State. The purposive sampling technique was used. At the end, 10 copies of the questionnaire were lost and 390 were returned.

Results

From the 390 respondents, a total of 290 (74.4%) were males while 100 (25:6%) were females. Again, the analysis still shows that 94 (24.1%) out of the 390 respondents are withinthe age bracket of 30 - 40 years, while 196 (50.3%) are within 41 - 50 years; and the rest 100 (25.6%) are within the ages of 51 and above years.

On educational qualification, 120 (30.8%) of the respondents haveOND/NCE as maximum educational qualification while 80 (20.5%) have HND/Degree, and the rest, 190 (48.7%) have WASC or its equivalent.

Testof Hypotheses

Table 1: Hypothesis 1

Respondents' perception of the relevance of the mass media to the promotion of agriculture

Respondent categories	**No of response**	**Percentages**
Highly relevant	332	85.1%
Just relevant	49	12.6%
Not relevant	9	2.3%
TOTAL	**390**	**100%**

Source: field survey 2012

Where $x^2=\frac{(fO) - fe)^2}{fe}$, x^2 - 22.8, df, - 2, a = 0.05, x = 5.991

Here the calculated chi-square is 22.8, while the chi-square table value less than 2 degrees of freedom is 5.991. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted given the fact the calculated chi-square is higher than the table chi-square value.

Table 2: Hypothesis 2

Mass Media Emphasise Need for Mechanized Agriculture in Nigeria

Respondent categories	**No of response**	**Percentages**
No	282	72.3%
Yes	90	23.1%
Don't know	18	4.6%

TOTAL	**390**	**100%**

Source: field survey 2012

Where $x^2 = \frac{(fO - fe)^2}{fe}$ = 10.3, df =2, α - 0.05, x -'13.99

Here the calculated chi-square is 10.3 while the chi-square table value is 13.99 taken under 2 degrees of freedom. This implies a rejection of the alternate hypothesis. Hence, it is taken that the respondents are of the strong opinion that mass media in Nigeria do not emphasize the need for mechanized agriculture.

Table 3: Hypothesis 3

Nigerian governments have the capacity to demolish factors that hinder the adoption of mechanized agriculture in the country

Respondent categories	**No of respond**	**Percentages**
No	382	97.9%
Yes	5	1 .3%
Don't know	3	0.8%
TOTAL	**390**	**100%**

Source: field survey 2012

Where $x^2 = \frac{(fO - fe)^2}{fe}$, x^2= 7.38, df = 2, α =0.05, x -5.991

The calculated chi-square is 7.38, while the table chi-square value is 5.991 under 2 degrees of freedom. Since the calculated chi-square value of 7.38 is higher than the table value of 5.991, it means the hypothesis is accepted. This means that respondents believe that the Nigerian government can surmount all obstacles to establish, and facilitate the adoption of full scale mechanized farming across the country.

Table 4: Hypothesis 4

The mass media are doing enough in setting agenda for the adoption and promotion of mechanised agricultural practices in Nigeria

Respondent categories	**No of response**	**Percentages**
No	263	67.4%
Yes	104	26.7%
Can't say	23	5.9%
TOTAL	**390**	**100%**

Source: field survey 2012

Where $x^2 = \frac{(fO - fe)^2}{fe}$, x^2- 9.5, df - 2, a =0.05, x - 13.8

This shows that the calculated chi-square value of 9.5 at two degrees of freedom is less than the chi-square table value of 13.8. This shows the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This means that the mass media are not doing enough in the promotion of mechanized agriculture in Nigeria.

Findings

The findings of the study are asfollows:

- That the mass media are relevant to the business of agriculture in Nigeria.
- That at present, the mass media in Nigeria do not emphasise the need for mechanized agriculture.
- That the governments in Nigeria are capable of surmounting obstacles to mechanized agriculture but have failed to do so.
- That the mass media are not doing enough to set agenda for adoption of mechanized agriculture in Nigeria.

Conclusion/Recommendations

It has been empirically proved that though much is being done to revive agriculture in Nigeria, much more needs to be done particularly in the area of mechanized andcommercialized agriculture in the country.

At the centre of the campaign should be the nation's mass media as theyset the agendafor public debate and education; they should as a matter of urgencybear the burden of telling the government and other organizedprivate bodies to take the lead in the pragmatic effort toward mechanized agriculture in Nigeria. The study has shown that the mass media in Nigeria have been found wanting so far in setting agenda for mechanized farming in the country.

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