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Chinese Soft Power and CCTV: Between Exposure to Television Content and Awareness of Chinese Effort at Public Diplomacy in Nigeria

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Abstract

Soft power has been described as a combination of means used by nations to gain influence using efforts other than military power, force or coercion. As China grows in clout as an economic and diplomatic power, the role of soft power in its activities calls for special attention; especially in the background of the increasing failure of other world powers to use military force in gaining the compliance of smaller and often reluctant nations. This study is a preliminary investigation of the role of CCTV (Chinese Central Television) in China's soft power efforts in Nigeria in particular. Using a purposively selected sample of residents in Lagos, south west Nigeria, the study, in a survey, attempts to evaluate the relevance of CCTV in the overall awareness by citizens of Chinese public diplomacy. It concludes that CCTV's availability to viewers is not giving Chinese soft power any significant boost in Nigeria's mass communication space.

Keywords: Softpower, public diplomacy, Chinese Central Television, multipolar, International

Introduction

The concept of soft power has been relatively extensively discussed in the literature on International Relations since the term was first coined by Joseph Nye in the late 1980s to describe the ability of nations to co-opt and attract rather than use force, pay money or coerce as a means of persuasion. It is a means of getting others to give a desired outcome without forcing them but by making them to admire your values and emulate you and want the same outcome that you want. Nye (1990) asserted that intangible sources of power such as exportation of positive popular culture and willingness to solve problems through international bodies and coalitions are opposed to hard power of ordering or coercion. While agreeing that the US was weaker at the end of the 20th Century than it was at the middle of the century, he asserted that withdrawing from commitments on the international scene may reduce its influence even further without making its domestic economy any better off. Rather, he suggested that the US should exploit soft power along with its traditional hard powers to maintain its dominance in the world.

The current US government places a lot of emphasis on the doctrine of soft power in its national security strategy, just like its predecessor (Greenwald, 2010). Meanwhile, the soft power thesis has been criticized as an idea that holds no water in the present day world system, where the major security problem confronting countries no longer comes in the form of other hostile far and near nations but in the form of "non-state" transnational actors. Soft power may be useful in dealing only with those who desire the same world with you. The rationale for the soft power approach, to Greenwald (2010) for instance, is based on its supposed advantage, which arises from the too costly use of force for the great powers of today. To him, soft power is useful only in dealing with entities that are willing to cooperate. In the face of world terrorism and sworn enemies of the West's (especially America's) form of democracy, soft power is no longer a tenable approach.

Nye (2004) responds to critics of the soft power doctrine that the problem of terrorism cannot be tackled alone without alliance with other nations, and soft power is the tool to draw others into alliance and even more to reinforce their commitment to the alliance. Soft power, he says, "is not just a matter of ephemeral popularity; it is a means of getting the outcome the US wants". He draws several instances of

declining US spending on soft power platforms such as cultural and academic exchanges, international broadcasting, funding to foreign missions and agencies, the rude awakening to which came with the attack of 9/11. It seems that wielding of soft power is less unilateral an act than hard power (Nye, 2004), and consequently requires acceptance by the parties at which it is targeted.

Statement of Problem

If China is investing tremendously in Africa in the form of aids, knowledge and technology transfer, cultural exchange, etc. all of which constitute elements of soft power, while its international media outreach grows in Africa at the same time, it is pertinent to investigate the effect of this on the perception by the Nigerian audience of Chinese people and interest in terms of whether or not the audience perceives a notable presence of Chinese in the communication space and whether or not this awareness in turn indicates an awareness of Chinese public diplomacy. Is the population aware of any increase in Chinese effort to educate the world more about its culture, politics and business? In other words, is there an awareness of Chinese content on television and is this interpreted as an intensifying Chinese effort in promoting itself to Nigerians through their cable television?

Population of the Study

Lagos state is the smallest state in Nigeria in terms of land mass. It however has the highest population, which is over five per cent of the national estimate.

As at 2006, the population of Lagos State was 17.5 million (based on the parallel count conducted by the state during the National Census) with a growth rate of 3.2%, the state today has a population of over 21 Million. This was corroborated by the recent immunization exercise carried out across the State, where 4. 3million children were immunized. Children within the Immunization bracket are estimated at 20% of the entire population.

The UN estimates that at its present growth rate, Lagos state will be third largest mega city the world by Y2015 after Tokyo in Japan and Bombay in India. Of this population, Metropolitan Lagos, an area covering 37% of the land area of Lagos State is home to over 85% of the state's population.

The rate of population growth is about 600,000 per annum with a population density of about 4,193 persons per sq. km. In the built-up areas of Metropolitan Lagos, the average density is over 20,000 persons per square km.

Current demographic trend analysis revealed that the state's population growth rate of 8% has resulted in its capturing of 36.8% of Nigeria's urban population (World Bank, 1996) estimated at 49.8 million people out of the national population. The implication is that whereas country population growth is 4/5% and global 2%, Lagos population is growing ten times faster than New York and Los Angeles with grave implication for urban sustainability (http://www.lagosstate.gov.ng/pagelinks.php?p=6). Lagos has 20 local governments and 37 local council development areas (LCDAs). With this demographic characteristics, it can conveniently represent the national urban population and manifest some of their features.

Methodology

The survey method was adopted for this study. Samples were purposively selected in two Lagos branches of Shoprite, a major shopping mall often patronized by a sizeable part of the middle class residents of the metropolis. It is assumed that target subjects representing all parts of the state can be captured at these two locations. A total of 250 copies of the questionnaire consisting 20 open-ended questions were

administered among shoppers at the Ikeja and Victoria Island branches of Shoprite (150 and 100 respectively). Analysis of gathered data was done using SPSS.

Conceptualising Soft Power in Chinese Public Diplomacy

The term *soft power* is now widely used in international politics and diplomacy in discussions by analysts and statesmen. Obviously, the conceptualization of soft power has been largely associated with the US, but the idea is now widely used to describe the way leading nations in the European Union (EU) and Japan now conduct themselves in relation to others in the current information society and era of globalization, using resources such as cultural attraction, political values, and foreign policy (Ding, 2010; Schmidt, 2012; Otmazgin, 2012). In Asia, the soft power argument has become a fashionable justification for the implementation of cultural policies that promote national diplomacy, and is often used by politicians to advance their agenda and convince the public of the diplomatic advantages of popular culture (Otmazgin, 2012).

Can Nye's conceptualization of soft power be applied in understanding China's policies at it warms its way into the hearts of countries in the developing world, especially in Africa? This question has been raised in the literature on soft power (Ding, 2010) and Zhang (2010) has pointed out that Nye in 2005 stated specifically that China's soft power is rising, although it had not grown to the level attained by that of the US.

In outlining the history of the adoption of the concept of soft power by China (Ding, 2010) concluded that the idea had been in use by China for two millennia, starting with its ancient rulers such as Sun Zi (544-496 BC) and Mo Zi (470-390 BC), who believed that:

> Morality, law and cooperation can form the basis for relations among nations states, that since human nature is not evil, peaceful and cooperative relations among states are possible; states can operate as a community rather than merely as an autonomous self-interested agents.

Ding (2010) asserted that the Chinese idea of soft power as reflected in its ancient philosophies is seen in Johnston's (1995) characterization of China's strategic culture, which is underlined among other things by preference for strategic defense, limited war, and low estimation of the efficacy of violence. Also, as indicated by Ding (2010), Chinese scholars become more acquainted with Western literature on international relations theories in the 1980s and 1990s, and as the discipline gained recognition in China, Nye's analysis of power gained acceptance among the Chinese and it soon became part of their lexicon.

Soft power as a concept has gained prominence not only in international relations and strategic interests among powerful countries, but also in describing activities by emerging economies and countries that are willing to attract tourists and international goodwill and even private sector activities. The idea of soft power features prominently in the history of emergence of China as a world power, and as it tries to embark on a post-Tiananmen image makeover, the country is making use of public diplomacy and international communication to reach a vast audience, including the global public, in order to increase its soft power, which Nye (2004) says arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies.

From the foregoing, therefore, soft power had to become an important element in the transition of China into a great power because the country had trailed behind the current superpower nation - the US -

in terms of hard power resources (Ding, 2010); and given its potentials to become a great superpower nation itself, China needs to reach out to the outer world and change the perception the international community holds of it as merely a hard-power wielding nation that enjoys no friendly cooperation from other nations. It needs to promote for itself an image of a peace-loving, international cooperator and autonomous actor nation (Zhang, 2010) and enormous efforts has been made in this direction by the Chinese government in recent times. Attracting substantial attention in the literature is China's aid activity as well as investment in Africa. This rise in Chinese interest in Africa is not new; it is only a re-emergence of the 1950s following a break in the 80s, when China decided to face domestic development (Ayodele and Sotola, 2014).

CCTV in China's Soft Power Policy

China's engagement with the developing world serves several Chinese interests, from securing steady supply of critical natural resources and overseas markets for its exports to ensuring a *multipolar* world that promotes the interests of the developing world, including China's, while countering US hegemony (Mitchell, 2007). It is sufficiently clear that China is intensifying its foreign relations efforts in the developing world, including Africa, in order to implement its set foreign policy objectives, which termed developed countries as the "key", its neighbours as the "priority" and developing countries as the "basis" of the relations (Mitchell, 2007).

Considering the fact that Chinese aid to Africa has grown from some hundred millions of US dollars in 2005 to several tens of billions of US dollars between 2009 and 2012 (Ayodele and Sotola, 2014; Provost & Harris, 2013; Mitchell, 2007), it cannot be a coincidence that Chinese international broadcasting is equally expanding in Africa. This thinking is corroborated by Nelson (2014) in saying that:

> As China rolls out its grand strategy to advance its global political and economic position, there are signs that it is making media a critical part of the package. In this integrated approach, media infrastructure is married to investment in the developing world, and news and entertainment content is distributed through channels designed to further public diplomacy.

Also, Provost and Harris (2013) submit that:

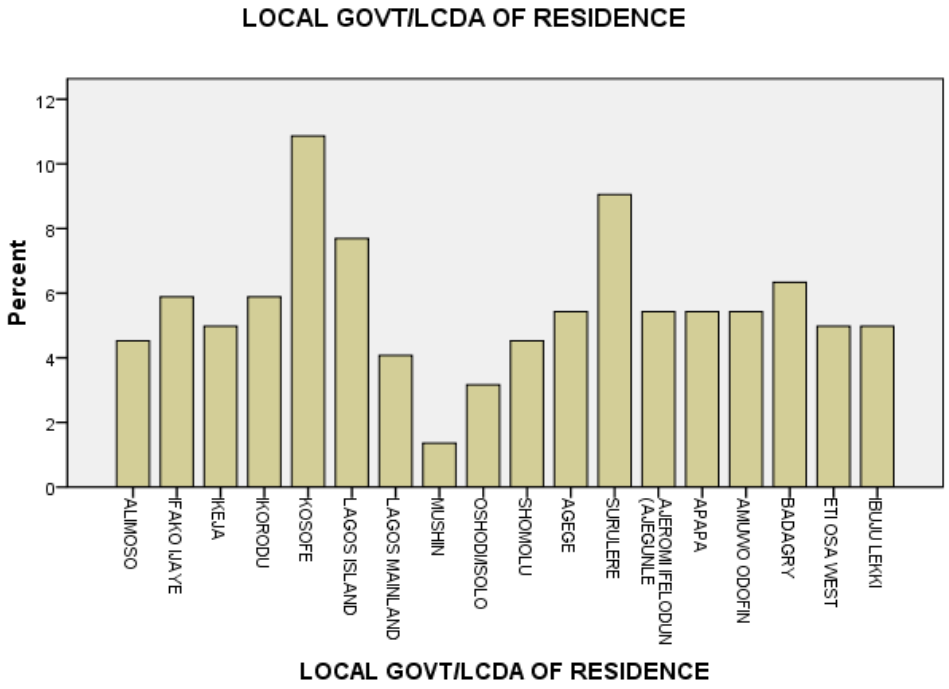
> Beijing has also sought to improve its image on the continent by financing the rapid expansion of Chinese media outlets across the continent to counter negative images of China and Africa with upbeat stories. This is an explicit part of China's official Africa policy, released in 2006, which encourages exchange and co-operation between African and Chinese media to "enhance mutual understanding and enable objective and balanced media coverage of each other.

CCTV (China Central Television) began as a domestic broadcast outlet. It launched its international services in 1990 with broadcast to East Asia while further expansion to French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian language services took place within the next decade. CCTV English service now reaches Asia, Africa, North America, Europe and Australia using the platforms of many cable and satellite networks.

CCTV's international presence in terms of coverage and outreach reflects China's foreign policy priorities, and as Chinese investment continues to rise in Africa, it is observable that the greatest impact

of CCTV, which began as the country's party propaganda outlet before growing into a global television service, may be in regions where China is directing its international investments (Nelson 2013). The 1990s was regarded as the decade of Chinese re-emergence in Africa and was characterized by an unprecedented level of involvement in Africa in areas such as trade, development assistance, technology transfer and training and investment (Ayodele and Sotola, 2014), which are some of the major instruments of soft power. More so, China considers its foreign aid and investment as working to promote Chinese economic interests as well as Africa's development.

DATA PRESENTATION



DO YOU SUBSCRIBE TO SATELITE/CABLE TV LIKE DSTV, GOTV, MyTV STAR TIMES, ETC?

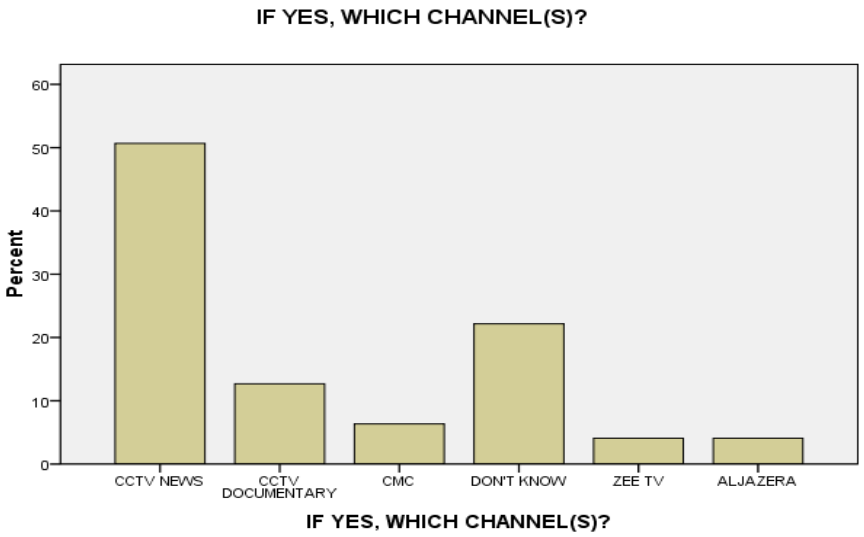
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
YES	202	91.4	91.4	91.4
NO	10	4.5	4.5	95.9
DON'T KNOW	9	4.1	4.1	100.0
Total	221	100.0	100.0	

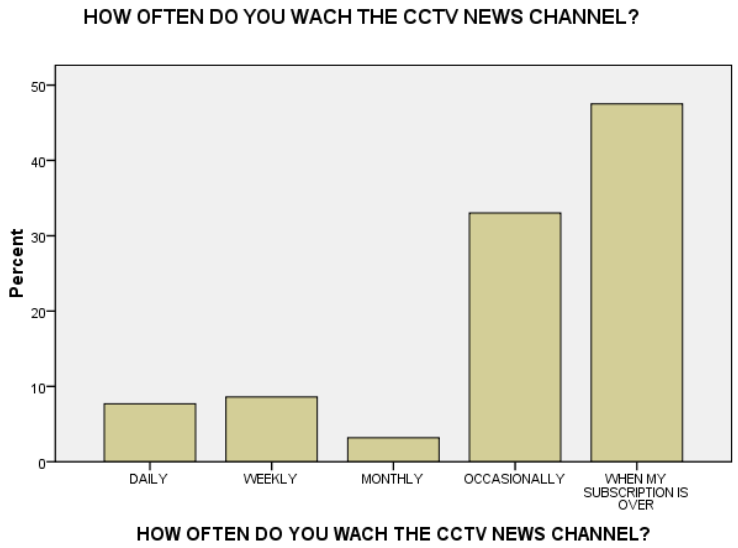
IF YES WHICH ONE?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
DSTV	121	54.8	54.8	54.8
GOTV	43	19.5	19.5	74.2
STARTIMES	51	23.1	23.1	97.3
COMSAT	6	2.7	2.7	100.0
Total	221	100.0	100.0	

DO YOU WATCH ASIAN CHANNELS ON YOUR SATELITE/CABLE TV?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
YES	116	52.5	52.5	52.5
NO	66	29.9	29.9	82.4
I DON'T KNOW WHAT ASIAN CHANNELS ARE	20	17.69	17.7	100
Total	221	100.0	100.0	





CCTV ENGLISH NEWS CHANNEL ON SATELITE/CABLE TV HAS MADE ME MORE INTERESTED IN NEWS ABOUT ASIA

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
STRONGLY AGREE	21	9.5	9.5	9.5
AGREE	81	36.7	36.7	46.2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	10	4.5	4.5	50.7
DISAGREE	75	33.9	33.9	84.6
I DON'T KNOW	34	15.4	15.4	100.0
Total	221	100.0	100.0	

Data Interpretation and Discussion

Data above show that 91.4% of the population of study subscribes to some form of satellite/cable television service, while 8.6% does not. Since CCTV is free to air on most of the satellite/cable services such as DSTV, GOTV and StarTimes, almost all of the respondents have access to CCTV channels. However, only 52.5% say they would subscribe to Asian channels. 29.9% of them do not see CCTV as being Asian, while 17.7% do not know of any Asian channels on their cable television. 63% actually watch one CCTV channel or the other and associate them with Asia. 81.9% of the population is aware of the presence of CCTV channels on their satellite television services, while 69.2% describe them as either Chinese or Chinese-English language channel.

The CCTV news channel is watched by 88.2% of the population for various reasons. 13.6% watch because of interest in Eastern/Asian cultures and lifestyle; 11.3% for the high quality programmes that are comparable to those of BBC, CNN and ALJAZEERA; 17.6% do because the channels present news from perspectives other than American/European or Arabic; 45.7% tune to CCTV news only when their subscription runs out and there are no other channels to watch. Most of the viewers watch CCTV

news at home (77.4%), while 61.5% of the population knows that China and Chinese issues are given the highest priority on the news channel.

15.4% of the population consider the presence of Asian people in the locality/environment as either very huge or huge, while 34.8% consider Asians as having little presence in their environment. Meanwhile, 22.6% have no Asian presence in their locality.

27.1% consider the presence of Asian business in the locality as either very huge or huge while 58.4% consider Asian business presence as either very little or little. 57.5% see Asian business presence as being beneficial to their locality while 15.8% do not. The remaining 26.7% do not know whether or not Asian businesses are beneficial to their locality. 63.3% want to know more about Asian people and culture while 78.8% believe that there is actually more content on Asian culture, politics, business and region on cable and satellite television these days. However, only 9.5% find CCTV English news channel as being responsible for creating in them interest in news about Asia.

The data presented above indicate that most residents of the Lagos metropolis who could represent the average city dweller in an urban setting in the south west of Nigeria would watch CCTV news and other CCTV channels only if there are no other alternatives, even though the channels exist on most cable and satellite television services available to them. This is an indication that content about China as presented on CCTV news and other CCTV channels is doing very little or nothing to promote Chinese soft power among the population and that the channels may not be contributing much to China's public diplomacy among the Nigerian population.

Conclusion

While the data presented here cannot be said to be entirely conclusive on the role of CCTV or its usefulness as a tool for promoting Chinese soft power and public diplomacy, preliminary conclusions could be drawn as an ongoing attempt to understand the phenomenon of CCTV as an aspect of Chinese international news production efforts.

While China continues to invest huge sums of money in building an international television news channel and making its content available to the populations of countries where it has economic interests, preliminary indications are that even though Chinese investment and economic interests continue to grow in Nigeria as in many other places in Africa, the average citizen seem to be oblivious of efforts by China to push more information about itself, its people and culture to the public space in its ever present quest to leverage on the current boost in its economy to gain more clout in international politics and public diplomacy.

Recommendations

China’s efforts at public diplomacy in Nigeria requires more intense extra-media input, which could play a supportive role in addition to what media channels such as CCTV are doing to advance Chinese interests among the Nigerian public. There is need for more actions outside the media - such as cultural and educational exchanges - that could potentially bring the average citizen directly in contact with Chinese goodwill and hence promote the country’s image as a mainstream international player, whose interests go beyond economic gains.

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