

Sociological Impact of Mass Media on Rural Development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Lionel E. Ukoka, Ph.D¹, Daniel E. Eshett, Ph.D²

¹, Deputy Rector, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

², Dean, School of Communication Arts, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Abstract: This study examines the sociological impact of mass media on rural development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, focusing on its role in disseminating development information, enhancing agricultural practices, and raising health awareness. The objectives are to assess how mass media informs rural development, evaluate its influence on agricultural and health practices, and identify challenges limiting its effectiveness in rural areas. Theoretical frameworks including Development Media Theory and Social Change Theory guide the analysis, emphasizing media's role in promoting national development goals and fostering community-level change. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with 60 rural residents, analyzed thematically to uncover key patterns and impacts. Findings reveal that radio is the most accessible and widely trusted medium, effectively disseminating information on farming techniques and health practices. The study also identifies significant barriers, including unreliable electricity, high costs associated with media devices, and language barriers, which restrict media's impact. Additionally, respondents expressed concerns about the influence of external media content on local cultural values. The study recommends enhancing radio programming with content directly relevant to rural communities, using local dialects to improve accessibility, and implementing government subsidies for media resources like batteries and mobile data. These measures, combined with infrastructure improvements, could significantly increase media's role in supporting rural development, ultimately bridging the information gap and empowering rural residents.

Keywords: Sociological Impact, Mass Media, Rural Development, Akwa Ibom.

I. Introduction

Rural development has long been a critical component of national growth, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas. Despite the rapid urbanization trends, the rural sector continues to play a vital role in the country's economy, contributing significantly to agriculture, which remains the backbone of Nigeria's GDP (Ekong, 2003). However, rural areas in Nigeria face numerous challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to information, all of which hinder their development potential (Olatunbosun, 1975). In this context, the role of mass media becomes increasingly significant, as it serves as a conduit for information dissemination, education, and social mobilization, all of which are essential for fostering rural development.

Historically, the role of mass media in development has been extensively studied, with scholars like Lerner (1958) and Schramm (1964) highlighting the importance of media in modernizing traditional societies. These early studies positioned mass media as a critical tool for bridging the information gap between urban and

rural populations, thereby facilitating the transfer of knowledge necessary for development. In Nigeria, the mass media, particularly radio and television, have been pivotal in disseminating information on agriculture, health, education, and civic responsibilities to rural communities (Oso, 2012). Radio, in particular, has proven to be the most accessible medium for rural populations due to its affordability and the ability to broadcast in local languages, making it an effective tool for reaching even the most remote areas (Akinbode, Iwala, & Fapojuwo, 2011).

The impact of mass media on rural development is multifaceted. First, mass media serves as a vital source of information that can enhance agricultural productivity. For instance, farmers can access information on improved farming techniques, weather forecasts, and market prices, which can help them make informed decisions and increase their yields (Akinbode et al., 2011). Second, mass media plays a crucial role in health education, particularly in disseminating information on preventive measures, vaccination programs, and maternal health, which are critical in reducing mortality rates and improving the overall health of rural populations (UNICEF Nigeria, 2016). Furthermore, mass media can promote social mobilization by raising awareness about civic rights and responsibilities, thereby encouraging greater participation in community development initiatives and democratic processes (Okigbo, 1995).

However, the influence of mass media on rural development is not without challenges. One significant concern is the issue of media bias and misinformation, which can lead to the dissemination of inaccurate or misleading information, thereby exacerbating existing social tensions and undermining trust in media institutions (Nwabueze, 2014). Additionally, the dominance of Western media content has raised concerns about cultural erosion, as rural populations may adopt foreign values and lifestyles at the expense of their indigenous cultures (Okunna, 1999). This cultural imperialism can weaken the social fabric of rural communities and hinder the preservation of traditional practices and knowledge systems.

Moreover, the commercialization of media in Nigeria has led to a situation where profit-driven motives often overshadow the public interest, resulting in the underrepresentation of development-oriented content in media programming (Oso, 2012). This trend is particularly problematic for rural communities, where the need for educational and informative content is critical for development. The lack of sufficient investment in public broadcasting and community radio initiatives further exacerbates this issue, as these platforms are typically more focused on addressing the specific needs of rural populations (Sobowale, 1985).

In recent years, the advent of digital media has introduced new dynamics to the role of mass media in rural development. While internet penetration remains low in many rural areas of Nigeria, mobile phones have become increasingly prevalent, providing rural populations with access to a wider range of information sources (Farm Radio International, 2017). This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for rural development. On the one hand, digital media can enhance the flow of information and facilitate greater interaction between rural communities and development agencies. On the other hand, the digital divide poses a significant barrier to equitable access to information, with many rural areas lacking the necessary infrastructure to fully benefit from digital media (UNICEF Nigeria, 2016).

Rural development in Nigeria remains a significant challenge, despite various governmental and non-governmental interventions aimed at improving living conditions in these areas. The persistent issues of poverty, illiteracy, poor infrastructure, and limited access to essential services continue to plague rural communities, hindering their overall development (Olatunbosun, 1975; Ekong, 2003). These challenges are exacerbated by a significant information gap, where rural populations often lack access to timely and relevant information that could enhance their agricultural productivity, health practices, and educational outcomes.

Mass media, with its potential to disseminate information widely and effectively, is crucial in addressing these developmental challenges. However, despite its recognized importance, the impact of mass media on rural development in Nigeria is not fully realized. The researcher observes that, while radio and television are prevalent in many rural areas, the content is often not tailored to the specific needs of rural communities. Furthermore, the penetration of newer media technologies, such as the internet, remains limited due to infrastructural deficits, exacerbating the information divide between urban and rural populations.

The problem, therefore, lies in the underutilization of mass media as a tool for rural development in Nigeria. The content delivered by mass media is often urban-centric, with little consideration for the unique challenges faced by rural communities. Additionally, issues such as media bias, sensationalism, and the commercialization of media further dilute the effectiveness of mass media in fostering rural development. There is a critical need to assess how mass media can be better leveraged to meet the developmental needs of rural areas, ensuring that the information disseminated is relevant, accessible, and actionable for rural populations.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To assess the role of mass media in disseminating information that supports rural development in South-South, Nigeria.
- ii. To examine the impact of mass media on the agricultural practices and health awareness of rural communities.
- iii. To identify the challenges and limitations of mass media in addressing the specific needs of rural populations in south South-South, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i. How does mass media contribute to information dissemination for rural development in Nigeria?
- ii. What impact does mass media have on the agricultural practices and health awareness of rural communities?
- iii. What are the challenges and limitations faced by mass media in effectively serving the needs of rural populations in Nigeria?

II. Review of Concepts

Sociological Impact

Mass media significantly influences society, shaping norms, behaviors, and values while impacting individuals differently across diverse social groups. Scholars such as Kumari (2023) have described media's pivotal role in socialization, emphasizing its influence in creating shared perspectives within communities. According to the cultivation theory, long-term exposure to media content cultivates dominant social norms and values among viewers, subtly aligning public attitudes with the themes promoted in media (Gerbner, 1972, as cited in Kumari, 2023). By consistently broadcasting particular narratives, the media contributes to societal views on issues such as gender roles, political ideology, and social behavior, thereby guiding and sometimes restricting individual identity formation.

Another key area in the sociological impact of media is the disparity between urban and rural media coverage, especially evident in contexts like Nigeria. As Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) point out, Nigerian media primarily focuses on urban areas, often ignoring the rural populace, which constitutes a significant portion of the country's population. This urban-centered approach to journalism leads to an imbalance in information distribution, where rural communities receive limited coverage and are often depicted only when experiencing crises or conflicts. Such selective reporting contributes to a rural-urban information gap, hindering rural development by restricting access to critical information on education, health, and agricultural opportunities (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). This urban bias in media not only isolates rural areas from essential knowledge but can also reinforce negative stereotypes, impacting the social integration and empowerment of these communities.

The media also wields considerable influence over public discourse and the distribution of social power, as Matthews (2017) discusses in the context of media ownership and content production. Media institutions often reflect the interests of their owners and advertisers, prioritizing topics that serve specific economic or political agendas. The agenda-setting theory suggests that by controlling which issues receive attention, media can shape public perception and influence societal priorities (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, as cited in Matthews, 2017). This concentrated power means that media is not merely a mirror reflecting society but a dynamic force

that can maintain or challenge existing power structures. For instance, ownership consolidation within media industries has been criticized for limiting diverse viewpoints and perpetuating dominant ideologies, which potentially suppress alternative voices and marginalize less represented social groups (Matthews, 2017).

Furthermore, the dual role of media as both a tool of social control and a catalyst for social change highlights its complex function in society. Pollock (2017) underscores this duality, explaining that while media often reinforces dominant cultural norms and political agendas, it also possesses the capacity to instigate change by providing platforms for marginalized voices. For example, traditional media has typically aligned with status quo values, maintaining political and economic stability. However, the rise of digital platforms has democratized media access, enabling underrepresented groups to share their perspectives and advocate for change. As Matthews (2017) notes, these platforms have empowered individuals to contest mainstream narratives, fostering social awareness and promoting advocacy on issues like human rights, environmental justice, and racial equality. This transformative potential of media suggests that, while it can be a means of control, it can also drive progressive social movements and amplify minority voices.

Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) highlighted the role of media in promoting rural development and national integration, particularly in developing countries. They argue that, if effectively harnessed, mass media can unify diverse rural populations by providing essential information on national programs, health education, and local economic opportunities. They recommend expanding rural media coverage and employing journalists with a “rural-minded” approach to counteract the current urban bias in Nigerian journalism (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). By establishing community-based media, policymakers could ensure that rural communities are more integrated into the national discourse and receive the resources necessary for sustainable development.

Orhewere and Kur (2004) discuss the impact of radio and television on promoting societal issues, such as women’s rights and education, which were previously underrepresented. Through documentaries, talk shows, and public service announcements, media brings issues that impact society to the forefront, prompting public discourse and action.

This influence is seen particularly in initiatives related to health awareness. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigerian media played an essential role in educating the public on preventive measures, the importance of vaccination, and the health guidelines from the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC). The work of Nwabueze, Egbra, and Okoro (2021) underscores the critical role media played in disseminating information, which helped mitigate the spread of the virus and ensured public compliance with health measures.

Mass media profoundly impacts society, shaping collective values, reinforcing power structures, and promoting social change. Its role in either perpetuating societal norms or enabling progressive shifts depends significantly on the media's inclusivity and diversity. Scholars like Kumari, Matthews, and Pollock have emphasized the importance of media literacy, balanced reporting, and inclusive representation in maximizing media's positive sociological impacts. In settings like Nigeria, where rural areas are often overlooked, fostering equitable media representation is essential for societal integration and development.

Mass Media

The history of mass media in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the country’s political and socio-economic development. The evolution of the media sector dates back to the colonial era, with the establishment of the first newspaper, *IweIrohin*, by Reverend Henry Townsend in 1859. This newspaper was primarily aimed at spreading Christian values and literacy among the Yoruba people in Abeokuta (Omu, 2000). The emergence of this publication marked the beginning of print media in Nigeria, setting the stage for the development of other forms of mass media.

As Nigeria approached independence, the media began to play a more prominent role in political advocacy and nation-building. The press became a vital tool for nationalist leaders who used it to mobilize support for independence and to criticize colonial policies (Oso, 2012). Newspapers like *The West African Pilot*, founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1937, were instrumental in galvanizing public opinion against colonial rule and in shaping the political discourse of the time (Dare, 2000).

The broadcast media in Nigeria began with the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) in 1951, which was later restructured as the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in 1957. This marked the start of radio broadcasting in the country, aimed at providing news and entertainment to a broad audience (Oseni, 1999). Television broadcasting followed in 1959 with the creation of the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) in Ibadan, which was the first television station in Africa (Uche, 1989). This development represented a significant leap in the media landscape, allowing for a more diverse and immediate dissemination of information.

The post-independence era saw the expansion of both print and broadcast media, with the establishment of more newspapers, radio stations, and television channels across the country. This period also witnessed the state's involvement in media ownership, especially during the military regimes, which often used state-controlled media as instruments of propaganda (Ojo, 2007). The liberalization of the media sector in the 1990s, particularly during the transition to civilian rule, led to the emergence of private media outlets, thereby increasing the diversity of media content and viewpoints available to the public (Ajibola, 2015).

The mass media landscape in Nigeria is diverse, encompassing various forms of print, broadcast, and digital media. Each type of media plays a unique role in the country's communication ecosystem, reaching different segments of the population with tailored content.

Print Media: Newspapers and magazines remain significant in Nigeria's media landscape, despite the global decline in print readership. Major newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian* and *ThisDay* continue to influence public opinion and provide in-depth analysis on national issues.

In Akwa Ibom State, the major print media outfits include: *The Pioneer Newspaper*, a government-owned newspaper, the private newspapers that also contribute to the print media in the state include: *TheMail Newspaper*, *The Ink Newspaper*, *Global Concord Newspaper*, *Sensor Newspaper*, and *The Oracle*, amongst others. Together, these media outfits play a critical role in delivering news, entertainment, and information to the people of Akwa Ibom State.

Print media is particularly important for reaching literate audiences in urban areas, though its influence extends to rural regions through syndicated content and local language publications.

Broadcast Media: Radio is arguably the most accessible form of mass media in Nigeria, especially in rural areas where literacy rates are lower. Radio stations broadcast in multiple languages, making it an effective tool for reaching diverse ethnic groups. Stations like *Radio Nigeria Atlantic FM*, *AKBC Radio*, private broadcasters such as *Inspiration FM*, *Uyo*; *Planet Radio 101.1 FM*; *Comfort FM*, *Uyo*; *Passion FM 94.5*; *TangSio FM 102.1*, *Uruan*; and *XL 106.9 FM*, provide a mix of news, music, and talk shows that cater to a broad audience. Other radio stations within Akwa Ibom include *Heritage FM*, *Eket*; *Redemption FM* and *Premium FM*, *Abak*.and *UNIUYO FM 100.7*, which is owned and operated by the University of Uyo, Nigeria.

Television also plays a crucial role, though it is more prevalent in urban centers. Channels like the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), *Channels TV*, and *AIT* are key players in the television sector, offering a variety of content ranging from news to entertainment. Television media in the state comprises *AKBC TV*, the State-government-owned station, along with private stations such as *Spectrum TV*; and *ADBN TV*.

Digital Media: The rise of digital media has transformed the Nigerian media landscape, driven by the widespread adoption of mobile phones and internet services. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are increasingly being used for news dissemination, political activism, and social interaction (Okoro & Adibe, 2013). Online news platforms such as *Premium Times* and *Sahara Reporters* have gained popularity for their investigative journalism and real-time reporting. The shift towards digital media has also democratized content creation, allowing individuals to share information and opinions with a global audience (Asemah, 2011).

Rural Development

Rural development in Nigeria encompasses a broad spectrum of activities aimed at improving the living standards and economic conditions of people living in rural areas. It involves the coordinated efforts of government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities to promote economic growth, enhance infrastructure, and provide essential services such as education, healthcare, and clean water (Aina,

2007). Rural development is often defined as a process of planned change aimed at improving the economic and social life of the rural poor. It includes measures to increase agricultural productivity, create employment opportunities, improve housing and sanitation, and foster social and cultural development (Okafor, 2010).

Key components of rural development in Nigeria include agriculture, infrastructure development, social services, and community participation. Agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy, and efforts to boost agricultural productivity through modern farming techniques, improved access to markets, and provision of credit facilities are central to rural development (Olayide, 1980). Infrastructure development, particularly in the areas of roads, electricity, and water supply, is also crucial for improving the quality of life in rural areas and facilitating economic activities (Mabogunje, 1980). Social services such as education, healthcare, and sanitation are essential for enhancing the well-being of rural populations and ensuring sustainable development (Ekong, 2003). Finally, community participation in the planning and implementation of development projects is vital for ensuring that these initiatives are relevant to the needs of the people and are sustainable in the long term (Igbokwe, 1996).

Despite numerous efforts and policies aimed at promoting rural development, the current state of rural areas in Nigeria remains a significant challenge. Rural communities continue to grapple with poverty, underdevelopment, and inadequate access to basic services. One of the primary challenges is the persistent high level of poverty in rural areas, where the majority of the population depends on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), poverty rates are significantly higher in rural areas compared to urban centers, with many rural dwellers living below the poverty line (NBS, 2020).

Another major challenge is the lack of adequate infrastructure. Many rural areas in Nigeria suffer from poor road networks, which hampers access to markets, healthcare facilities, and schools. This lack of infrastructure not only limits economic opportunities but also exacerbates social inequalities by isolating rural communities from essential services (Mabogunje, 1980). Additionally, rural electrification remains limited, with many villages relying on kerosene lamps and generators for lighting. The absence of reliable electricity further constrains economic activities and limits access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) that could otherwise contribute to development (Ekong, 2003).

Healthcare services in rural Nigeria are also grossly inadequate, with many communities lacking access to basic medical facilities. The shortage of healthcare workers, coupled with poor infrastructure, results in high mortality rates and a low life expectancy in rural areas (Olaniyan & Sunkanmi, 2012). Education in rural areas is similarly challenged by a lack of schools, trained teachers, and educational resources. As a result, literacy rates in rural Nigeria are lower than in urban areas, which further perpetuates the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment (Aina, 2007).

The Issue of land tenure and land use also presents significant obstacles to rural development. In many parts of Nigeria, traditional land tenure systems limit the ability of farmers to secure land for agricultural production or to use land as collateral for loans. This has hindered the expansion of commercial agriculture and reduced investment in rural areas (Olayide, 1980).

Moreover, environmental degradation poses a serious threat to rural livelihoods. Deforestation, soil erosion, and desertification, driven by unsustainable farming practices and climate change, have reduced agricultural productivity and exacerbated food insecurity in many rural communities (Igbokwe, 1996). The impact of climate change is particularly severe in the northern regions of Nigeria, where desert encroachment has led to the displacement of rural populations and increased competition for scarce resources (Olaniyan & Sunkanmi, 2012).

Despite these challenges, there have been some successes in rural development, particularly in areas where there has been strong community participation and effective collaboration between government agencies and NGOs. However, the scale of the challenges requires sustained and coordinated efforts at the national, state, and local levels. There is also a need for more innovative approaches that leverage technology and private sector investment to address the multifaceted problems facing rural communities in Nigeria.

Akwa Ibom State

Occupying a total land mass of 8,412sq/kms, of Nigeria's coastal basin, Akwa Ibom State is located at the southernmost tip in Nigeria's south-south geo-political zone. The state falls within the tropical belt with a dominant vegetation of green foliage, shrubs and oil-palm trees. It has a high density of cash crops such as rubber, cocoa, coconuts, citrus, cassava, yam, maize, cowpeas, plantain, banana, pineapple and kolanut.

The state is one of the largest oil-producing states in Nigeria and is also endowed with rich deposits of limestone, gravel, salt, silver nitrate, silica sand and kaolin. Akwa Ibom State has two distinct seasons: the rainy season that starts from April and lasts till October, and the dry season with November to March duration. The coastal areas of the state witness rainfall almost all year round. Harmattan occurs around December and January (Akwa Ibom Diary 2022).

Akwa Ibom is made up of thirty-one (31) local government areas and has an estimated population of 5 million people (NPC and NBS, 2017). A majority of the rural populace engage in farming alongside fishing, trading, hunting, woodcarving, raffia works and other crafts.

III. Related Literature Reviews

Madhavrao, G. S. (2021). Study of the Sociological Impact of Mass Media on Rural Development

The study of the sociological impact of mass media on rural development is a crucial exploration in understanding the transformative potential of media in shaping rural communities. Mass media, encompassing television, radio, print, and digital platforms, wields substantial influence in disseminating information, shaping perceptions, and catalyzing social change in rural areas. This study seeks to investigate the multifaceted dynamics between mass media and rural development, emphasizing its role in disseminating agricultural knowledge, promoting healthcare awareness, and fostering community cohesion. By analyzing the access, content, and reception of media in rural settings, this research aims to uncover how mass media can either bridge or exacerbate the rural-urban information gap. Furthermore, it delves into the implications of media-driven social change on traditional rural values and practices. Ultimately, the findings of this study will contribute to informed policies and strategies aimed at harnessing the sociological potential of mass media to catalyze sustainable rural development and empower rural communities.

Kumari, S. (2023). Impacts of Media on Society: A Sociological Perspective

This study aims to investigate the effects of media on society, considering both positive and negative impacts on individuals, families, and social structures. The primary objective is to understand how media influences social behaviors, public opinions, and cultural norms. The research specifically highlights the role of mass media in shaping societal attitudes and behaviors, analyzing the extent to which media promotes social cohesion, informs the public, and sometimes perpetuates stereotypes or misinformation.

The research employs a qualitative approach, synthesizing literature and theoretical perspectives to explore media's role in modern social settings. Through a sociological lens, theories like cultivation theory, social learning theory, and agenda-setting theory are applied to examine how media creates dominant images, educates, and influences public perceptions. This theoretical framework supports the study's discussion on how media impacts various social domains, including education, health awareness, and consumer behavior.

The findings suggest that media is a powerful socializing agent, significantly shaping public opinion and societal norms. However, the study addressed concerns about media's potential to spread misinformation, create unrealistic expectations, and contribute to social anxieties. For instance, while media campaigns have successfully increased awareness about health issues, they can also reinforce stereotypes or encourage consumerism.

Recommendations emphasize the need for media literacy programs to help individuals critically evaluate media content. Additionally, she suggests regulatory policies to curb misinformation and promote responsible media practices, ensuring that media fulfills its role in fostering an informed and balanced society.

Matthews, J. (2017). *The Sociology of Mass Media*. In K. O. Korgen (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociology*

This work aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the sociology of mass media, examining its influence on society through media institutions, content, and audience interactions. Matthews' main objective is to contextualize the role of media in shaping social behavior, cultural values, and public perceptions. The research analyzes the role of mass media across different dimensions, such as media ownership, organizational practices, representations in media content, and the impact of technological advancements on audience behavior.

The study utilizes a qualitative, literature-based approach to understand the evolution and impact of mass media. The study reviews theoretical frameworks from prominent sociologists and media theorists, applying concepts like agenda-setting, cultivation, and mediatization to assess how media institutions and content influence social dynamics. By examining both historical and contemporary perspectives, the research draws on examples of media's influence on social norms, audience agency, and cultural values.

Findings indicate that mass media profoundly impacts society by shaping public discourse, reinforcing social norms, and sometimes perpetuating power dynamics that favor dominant groups. The study highlights how ownership and control within media organizations often dictate content, while media representations influence societal perceptions around issues like race, gender, and politics. Additionally, the research discusses audience agency, noting that while media can reinforce certain ideologies, individuals also interpret media messages in diverse ways, informed by their social and cultural backgrounds. In his recommendations, the paper suggests the need for more diverse media ownership, the promotion of media literacy, and continued research into the social implications of new media technologies. He advocates for an approach that encourages critical engagement with media to mitigate bias and support a more equitable society.

Ocheni, S., & Nwankwo, B. C. (2012). *The Role of Mass Media in Rural Information System in Nigeria*. *Studies in Sociology of Science*

This study focuses on the role of mass media in enhancing rural information systems in Nigeria, highlighting the media's potential to address issues specific to rural communities and bridge the information gap between urban and rural areas. The primary objective of the work is to identify how mass media can better serve rural populations in areas such as education, health, political awareness, and social development, thereby reducing rural isolation and aiding community progress.

The research employs a qualitative analysis, examining existing literature on media roles and observing patterns of media coverage in Nigeria. Through this approach, the study investigates the limitations of the current media system, which tends to focus on urban-centric issues, often overlooking rural needs. The analysis reveals a systemic bias in Nigerian journalism, where urban news dominates, leading to the neglect of rural areas and skewed coverage that often only portrays rural regions in a negative light when extreme events occur.

The findings indicate that rural areas in Nigeria are largely underrepresented in the media, resulting in a lack of critical information flow that could otherwise support local development efforts. Ocheni and Nwankwo argue that this urban focus exacerbates rural-urban migration and stifles rural progress, as rural populations remain uninformed about government policies, health programs, and educational opportunities.

The study recommends that media houses increase their coverage of rural areas and employ more "rural-minded" journalists who can report accurately and sensitively on rural issues. It also suggests the development of community-based media initiatives, such as community newspapers and localized radio programs, to engage rural audiences. These changes, the authors contend, could foster national integration, promote rural development, and ensure that rural voices are included in the national discourse.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on Development Media Theory, and Social Change Theory. Each of these frameworks provides a lens for examining how mass media influence rural communities, fosters development, and drives social transformation.

Development Media Theory

Development Media Theory, proposed by Denis McQuail, is centered on the role of media in promoting social and economic development in developing regions. This theory suggests that mass media should actively support national development goals by providing educational content, promoting cultural values, and encouraging civic engagement. In the context of rural development in South-South Nigeria, Development Media Theory helps explain how mass media can serve as a tool for disseminating information on agricultural practices, healthcare, education, and community-based initiatives that foster socio-economic growth. The theory further emphasizes that media should focus on issues relevant to rural populations, bridging the gap between policy and community action.

Social Change Theory

Social Change Theory offers a framework for understanding how media can influence transformations in social norms, values, and behaviors within a community. This theory is based on the idea that exposure to new information can lead to shifts in traditional practices and stimulate community-level change. In rural communities, mass media plays a dual role: it not only informs but also shapes cultural attitudes toward education, health, and gender roles. This theory is especially relevant for analyzing the sociocultural impacts of mass media, as rural residents might adopt or resist changes based on their alignment with existing values and community dynamics. Social Change Theory also helps address the challenges rural communities face when exposed to diverse or conflicting cultural values through mass media.

By integrating Development Media Theory, and Social Change Theory, this study provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the multifaceted role of mass media in rural development. These theories collectively explain how media informs, persuades, and drives change in rural communities by promoting development initiatives and influencing social structures. Together, they underscore the importance of accessible, culturally relevant media content tailored to the specific needs and challenges of rural communities in South-South Nigeria.

IV. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the sociological impact of mass media on rural development in Nigeria.

Population and Sampling

For this study, the target population typically included individuals living in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. The state is made up of thirty-one (31) local government areas and has an estimated population of 5 million people (NPC and NBS, 2017).

However, given the focus of this study on rural area, the rural population in Akwa Ibom, is estimated at 72.66% (Effiong, Ben and Ukpa, 2024). Thus, the estimated rural population in Akwa Ibom State is 3,633,000 people.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

For a study on Akwa Ibom's rural development, a sample size of 60 individuals was used. This range allowed for in-depth interviews across various rural communities, representing different demographics and experiences

For the sampling technique, multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure representative samples from various rural areas. The multi-stage sampling process involves narrowing down from the three senatorial districts to specific communities within select rural Local Government Areas (LGAs). First, stratified sampling was used to categorize the local government areas into senatorial districts. Thereafter, random sampling was applied within selected local government areas to select the specific communities to be included in the study. Below is a step-by-step breakdown.

Stage 1: Stratified Sampling for Categorization by Senatorial District and Selection of Rural LGAs

Akwa Ibom State has 31 LGAs divided into three senatorial districts, each with varying socio-economic profiles. The districts and their LGAs are as follows:

Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District: Etinan, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ibiono Ibom, Itu, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Ubium, Uruan, and Uyo.

Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District: Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikono, Ikot Ekpene, Ini, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam, and Ukanafun.

Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District: Eastern Obolo, Eket, Esit Eket, Ibeno, Ikot Abasi, Mbo, Mkpát Enin, Okobo, Onna, Oron, Udung Uko, and Urue Offong/Oruko.

For this study, LGAs will be categorized as rural or urban based on socio-economic characteristics, such as infrastructure development, industrialization levels, and predominant rural activities like farming. The focus will be on LGAs with more rural characteristics, which may constitute about 15-20 rural LGAs.

Stage 2: Random Sampling of Rural LGAs

From the identified rural LGAs in each senatorial district, a subset of LGAs will be randomly selected to ensure representative coverage across the districts. Following a simple random sampling technique, three rural LGAs will be selected from each senatorial district:

Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District:
Selected LGAs: Etinan, Ibiono Ibom, and Nsit Atai

Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District:
Selected LGAs: Abak, Ikono, and Oruk Anam

Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District:
Selected LGAs: Eastern Obolo, Esit Eket, and Mkpát Enin

This process results in a total of 9 rural LGAs from the three senatorial districts, providing a balanced representation for the study.

Stage 3: Selection of Communities within Each Selected LGA

Within each of the selected LGAs, all rural communities will be listed, and a subset will be randomly chosen to further refine the sample. Using a random sampling method, two rural communities from each of the selected LGAs will be chosen. Below are examples of selected communities:

Akwa Ibom North East

Senatorial District:

Etinan: Ikot Udo, NdonEyo

Ibiono Ibom: Ikot Usen, Ikpanya,

Itak, Afaha Offiong

Nsit Atai: Odot, Ibiaikot

Akwa Ibom North West

Senatorial District:

Abak: Afaha Obong, Ikot Ekeang

Ikono: Iton, Ibiaku

Oruk Anam: Ekparakwa, Ikot

Ibritam

Akwa Ibom South Senatorial

District:

Eastern Obolo: Iko Town,
Okoroete

EsitEket: Akpautong, Uquo

MkpatEnin: Ikot Abia, Ikot
Ekpaw

For data collection, an interview schedule was used. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically. This involved coding the data to identify key themes and patterns, which were then interpreted in relation to the research questions and objectives.

Data Presentation and Analysis Based on 60 Respondents' Interviews on the Sociological Impact of Mass Media on Rural Development in Akwa Ibom State

This section presents the findings from 60 in-depth interviews conducted with rural residents across various communities in Akwa Ibom State. The responses are analyzed using thematic analysis, with patterns and themes emerging from participants' experiences and perceptions. The key themes include access to mass media, awareness of rural development programs, media's influence on development activities, social and cultural changes, and challenges faced in media usage.

1. Background Information

Key Observations: Approximately 78% of respondents are long-term residents of their communities, with 62% primarily involved in farming and small-scale trade. Other occupations include teaching, health services, and crafts. Most interviewees have an education level ranging from basic to secondary school, with 15% having no formal education.

Analysis:

The respondents' backgrounds provide insight into the socio-economic and educational context of Akwa Ibom's rural communities. Their occupations and limited formal education highlight a reliance on media to access information on development and lifestyle improvements. These factors likely shape their understanding and responsiveness to mass media content aimed at rural development.

2. Access to Mass Media

Here, the responses by the interviewees were not mutually exclusive, but the interviewees responded to each medium depending on individual usage of each medium, cutting across the whole

Responses:

- **Radio:** All 60 respondents (100%) have access to radio.
- **Television:** 39 respondents (65%) reported using television.
- **Mobile Phones (with social media):** 27 respondents (45%) have mobile phones with social media access.

Challenges Identified:

- **Electricity Supply:** 48 respondents (80%) cited unreliable electricity as a major issue.
- **Battery Costs:** 36 respondents (60%) struggle with high battery costs.
- **Network Coverage and Data Cost:** 24 respondents (40%) reported limited mobile coverage and data costs as barriers.

Analysis:

Radio is the most universally accessible medium in these rural areas, with all 60 respondents (100%) reporting regular use due to its affordability and ease of access. This makes radio a crucial tool for information dissemination across rural communities. However, while television and mobile phones offer additional avenues for media engagement, their usage is notably lower due to accessibility challenges. Specifically, only 39 respondents (65%) reported using television, and 27 respondents (45%) accessed social media via mobile phones. These lower figures reflect the infrastructural and economic constraints within the area, which limit the overall reach of mass media.

It's important to note that responses were not mutually exclusive. Many respondents used a combination of media sources, with radio as the primary medium supplemented by television and mobile phones where feasible. This overlap suggests that while rural residents rely on radio for consistent information, they also seek additional media when possible, indicating varied but overlapping patterns of media use.

The main challenges impacting media access include unreliable electricity (cited by 48 respondents, or 80%), high battery costs (36 respondents, or 60%), and limited network coverage with high data costs (24 respondents, or 40%). These challenges further indicate that respondents' media usage patterns are influenced by the reliability and affordability of each medium. Overall, while radio remains central, the varied responses show that rural residents attempt to navigate the limitations of each medium to maximize their media engagement for development-related information.

3. Mass Media and Rural Development Awareness

Responses:

- **Primary Source - Radio:** 45 respondents (75%) reported getting development information through radio.
- **Secondary Sources - Local Meetings and Word of Mouth:** 12 respondents (20%) mentioned local government meetings, and 3 respondents (5%) cited word of mouth.

Analysis:

Radio stands out as the primary source of rural development information, with 45 respondents (75%) identifying it as their main channel. However, respondents' reliance on local government meetings (12 respondents or 20%) and word of mouth (3 respondents or 5%) highlights the importance of secondary sources in supplementing radio broadcasts. These responses were not mutually exclusive, as many interviewees reported using multiple sources to stay informed.

The fact that respondents accessed information across these varied sources demonstrates a layered approach to gathering development-related knowledge. Rural residents combine media with community-based interactions to form a fuller understanding of development initiatives. This interwoven pattern shows that while radio is critical for disseminating widespread information, local meetings and interpersonal networks play a valuable role in validating, discussing, or elaborating on the information received, especially when community-specific details are needed. Thus, rural residents' awareness of development programs is constructed through both mass media and local social channels, each serving distinct but complementary roles.

4. Impact of Mass Media on Rural Development

Recalculated Analysis Based on Mutually Exclusive Responses

In this analysis, each respondent selected only one applicable option per variable, making responses mutually exclusive, with a total of 60 respondents contributing to 100% of the data. This calculation allows for a clear understanding of which impact areas received the most focus from rural residents based on mass media exposure.

Responses

Influence on Development Activities:

- Adoption of Improved Farming Techniques: 32 respondents (53%)
- Awareness of Health Practices (Sanitation and Clean Water): 18 respondents (30%)
- Community Involvement in Development Programs (e.g., Agricultural Loans, Women's Empowerment): 10 respondents (17%)

Behavioral Changes:

- **Adoption of New Practices:** 38 respondents (63%) reported incorporating new practices (such as using organic fertilizers and enhanced healthcare habits) based on information from mass media.

Community Participation:

- **Increased Community Engagement:** 34 respondents (57%) noted that mass media encouraged greater participation in rural development initiatives, particularly through discussions inspired by radio programs.

Analysis

With responses mutually exclusive, each respondent indicated a single primary area where mass media had the greatest impact on their development activities. Most respondents (53%) indicated that mass media was instrumental in helping them adopt improved farming techniques, underscoring the agricultural focus prevalent in rural areas. Health awareness also ranked significantly, with 30% reporting media influence in sanitation and clean water practices. Community involvement in development programs, though lower at 17%, highlights mass media's role in motivating civic engagement in programs like agricultural loans and women's empowerment.

In terms of behavioral changes, 63% of respondents reported adopting new practices directly influenced by mass media exposure, especially in agriculture and healthcare. Additionally, community participation was enhanced, with 57% noting increased involvement in development projects due to radio broadcasts. This mutually exclusive approach shows that while media had varied impacts, the largest influences were in practical, day-to-day agricultural improvements and health awareness, reinforcing mass media's role in driving specific, focused areas of development in rural communities.

5. Social and Cultural Impacts of Mass Media

In this analysis, each respondent selected only one option per variable, resulting in mutually exclusive responses that total 100% across 60 respondents. This approach clarifies the specific social and cultural impacts of mass media as experienced by individual interviewees.

Responses

Social Norms and Cultural Changes:

- Increased Interest in Education, Shifts in Gender Roles, and Adoption of Modern Farming Practices: 43 respondents (72%) reported noticing these social changes due to media influence.
- Concerns about Foreign Cultural Influence: 17 respondents (28%) expressed concern that mass media exposure introduced foreign cultural elements perceived to conflict with traditional values.

Positive vs. Negative Impacts:

- Perceived Positive Influence (Promoting Health, Education, and Agricultural Development): 47 respondents (78%) indicated that mass media had a positive impact on rural development, particularly in areas of health awareness, educational encouragement, and modern agricultural practices.

- Perceived Negative Influence (Erosion of Traditional Values): 13 respondents (22%) felt that certain media content negatively impacted cultural practices, particularly among youth, leading to a perceived decline in traditional values.

Analysis

Given the mutually exclusive nature of the responses, each respondent identified a primary impact of mass media on their social and cultural environment. A significant majority (72%) observed positive shifts in social norms, such as increased educational interest and gender role adaptation, while a smaller portion (28%) expressed concern about foreign cultural influences potentially clashing with local traditions.

Most respondents (78%) viewed mass media's influence as beneficial, citing progressive changes in health practices, education, and agriculture. However, 22% reported negative impacts, particularly regarding the erosion of traditional values among youth due to exposure to external media content. This division suggests that while mass media is largely seen as a force for positive change, there is also a notable minority concerned about cultural preservation, indicating a need for media content that balances modern development with respect for local traditions.

6. Challenges and Recommendations

Responses

Key Challenges:

- Insufficient Resources to Implement Media Information: 28 respondents (47%)
- Misinformation or Lack of Detailed Guidance: 18 respondents (30%)
- Language Barriers and Complex Terminologies in Media Programs: 14 respondents (23%)

Recommendations from Respondents:

- Developing Community-Centered Content Relevant to Local Needs
- Using Local Dialects in Media Programming to Address Language Barriers
- Providing Government Support to Reduce Media-Related Costs (e.g., Subsidizing Batteries and Data)

Analysis

With responses recorded as mutually exclusive, each respondent identified a primary challenge impacting their ability to benefit from media-driven rural development initiatives. Nearly half (47%) reported that insufficient resources, such as funding and practical tools, were their greatest barrier to implementing the information provided by media programs. Misinformation or a lack of clear, actionable guidance was also a significant issue, affecting 30% of respondents. Language barriers, including the use of complex terminology that does not align with local dialects, were highlighted by 23% of respondents as a hindrance to understanding and utilizing media information effectively.

Respondents' recommendations suggest targeted solutions to address these challenges. Many expressed a desire for media content that is more closely tailored to their specific needs and circumstances, including using local dialects to make information more accessible and culturally relevant. Additionally, they recommended government interventions, such as subsidies for batteries and data, to lower the costs associated with accessing media. These recommendations underscore the community's recognition of the potential for media to drive positive change if infrastructural and communication barriers are addressed.

This analysis reveals that while mass media—particularly radio—plays an essential role in rural development in Akwa Ibom, challenges related to resources, clarity of information, and language accessibility limit its full impact. Addressing these areas through localized content and supportive policies could significantly enhance media's contribution to improving quality of life in these rural communities.

Findings and Discussion

The study aimed to explore the sociological impact of mass media on rural development in Akwa Ibom State, with specific objectives to assess the role of mass media in disseminating development information, examine its impact on agriculture and health awareness, and identify media challenges faced by rural communities. The findings from 60 interview responses, supported by literature and theoretical frameworks, are presented below in line with the study objectives.

i. Research Question 1: How does mass media contribute to information dissemination for rural development in Nigeria?

Findings: The data show that 100% of respondents had access to radio, making it the primary medium for rural development information, particularly in disseminating agricultural, health, and government initiatives. Radio's widespread use aligns with the findings from Kumari (2023), who emphasized media's central role in rural information dissemination. Television (65%) and mobile phones with social media (45%) supplemented radio access, though usage of these media was limited due to challenges like unreliable electricity (80%) and high battery costs (60%).

V. Discussion:

These findings confirm the role of mass media in reaching rural populations, consistent with agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which suggests that media influences public focus by highlighting certain topics. Radio's dominance as an accessible and affordable medium aligns with the literature, supporting Matthews' (2017) assertion that radio is pivotal in rural contexts. The findings underscore that while television and mobile phones contribute to information access, infrastructural barriers limit their impact in rural areas.

Objective ii: What impact does mass media have on the agricultural practices and health awareness of rural communities?

Findings:

The data reveal that 53% of respondents credited mass media with helping them adopt improved farming techniques, while 30% cited media as a source for health-related practices like sanitation. Behavioral changes were noted by 63%, who reported adopting new farming methods and health practices, which they attributed to media exposure. Additionally, 57% of respondents said that mass media encouraged their community involvement in development programs.

Discussion:

These findings demonstrate mass media's influence on agricultural practices and health awareness, resonating with Pollock's (2017) findings that media can serve as a driver of behavioral change. The social learning theory by Bandura (1977) also supports these outcomes, positing that individuals adapt behaviors through observed media information. Matthews (2017) emphasized how media shapes practices by spreading information on modern farming and health, which is evident in the responses. Mass media's role in promoting agricultural innovation and health awareness highlights its effectiveness in fostering rural development.

Objective iii: What are the challenges and limitations faced by mass media in effectively serving the needs of rural populations in Nigeria?

Findings:

Challenges affecting media usage in rural communities were significant, with 47% of respondents identifying insufficient resources to implement media-provided information. Additionally, 30% cited misinformation or lack of clear guidance, and 23% noted language barriers due to complex terminology in media programs. Recommendations from respondents included developing community-centered content, using local dialects in programming, and seeking government subsidies for media-related resources.

Discussion:

These findings reflect the challenges highlighted by Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), who pointed to rural infrastructural deficiencies as barriers to media access. The cultivation theory, which suggests that media can shape audience perceptions and understanding (Gerbner, 1972), is limited by these challenges, as incomplete or unclear information can skew perceptions and hinder effective action. Matthews (2017) and Kumari (2023) both emphasize the importance of accessible, accurate information to support rural development, suggesting that addressing these challenges could enhance the impact of mass media on rural communities.

VI. Conclusion

The study highlights the sociological impact of mass media on rural development in Akwa Ibom State, underscoring its role as an essential channel for disseminating development-oriented information. Radio emerged as the primary medium for reaching rural residents, providing accessible and affordable information on agricultural practices, health awareness, and development initiatives. Television and mobile phones also contribute to media engagement, but their impact is constrained by infrastructural barriers like unreliable electricity and high battery costs. The study's findings demonstrate that mass media has positively influenced the adoption of improved farming techniques, enhanced health practices, and increased community involvement in development programs. However, challenges such as insufficient resources, misinformation, and language barriers limit the full potential of media in promoting rural development. These findings align with previous studies, supporting the need for tailored media content that addresses rural communities' unique socio-economic needs and infrastructure limitations.

Recommendations

i. Enhance Radio Programming for Rural Development

Given that radio is the most accessible medium, it should be further leveraged to deliver tailored, development-focused content. Programs should include clear, practical information on agricultural techniques, health practices, and government initiatives that are directly applicable to rural life. By making programming more relevant and actionable, radio can continue to play a pivotal role in rural development.

ii. Government Support for Media Accessibility

To address the infrastructural barriers impacting media access, the government should consider subsidizing resources essential for media consumption, such as batteries and data costs for mobile devices. Additionally, investing in rural electricity infrastructure would greatly improve access to television and mobile-based media, expanding the scope of information available to rural communities.

iii. Localized Content and Use of Local Dialects

Media organizations should prioritize producing community-centered content that reflects the specific needs and realities of rural populations. Using local dialects and avoiding complex terminology can help make programs more accessible and relatable. This approach could reduce language barriers and improve comprehension, enabling more rural residents to benefit from media resources.

iv. Addressing Misinformation and Enhancing Media Literacy

Misinformation and lack of clear guidance in media content were significant challenges reported by respondents. Media organizations should aim to provide accurate, clear, and actionable information, especially regarding health and agriculture. Additionally, implementing media literacy programs would help rural residents critically assess information and reduce the risk of misinformation.

v. Community Engagement and Feedback Channels

Establishing community feedback mechanisms could enhance the effectiveness of media programs by allowing residents to communicate their specific needs and challenges. Media producers could incorporate this

feedback to refine their programming, ensuring that content is responsive to the unique issues faced by rural communities.

By addressing these recommendations, mass media in Akwa Ibom State can become an even more powerful driver of rural development, empowering communities with knowledge and resources that align with their socio-economic contexts. The strategic use of mass media, particularly radio, combined with supportive infrastructure and relevant content, has the potential to bridge the development gap and improve the quality of life in rural areas.

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