CONTENT PRODUCTION IN DIGITAL BROADCAST ERA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF STATE TELEVISION STATIONS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the effect rich content production has on revenue generation and sustainability of State government TV stations in South East Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory. The survey method was adopted. A sample size of 400 was drawn from a population of 1,028,200 using the Taro Yamane formula. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the survey while the snowballing sample technique was used for the interview. Findings showed that with a mean value of 3.1, programmes with rich contents attract audience to the television station; the content and quality of programmes (57.4%) are major determinants in the TV station preference made by the viewers; and with a mean value of 3.2, a product producer will not advertise his product on a TV station with low viewership patronage. We recommended that digitization of TV stations in Nigeria is important as it would impact on the TV stations' broadcast value chain; the programmes aired should be appealing to attract large audience; there is need for audience attention; and certain techniques such as audience rating should be employed to segment the audience.

Keywords: Contents production, preference, revenue generation, advertising patronage, audience.

Introduction

Television stations are always in competition to attract audience and advertisers. The broadcast industry is essentially the business of providing baits (programmes) that will attract a large number of viewers who can be sold to advertisers. This demands that television stations do what they could to make themselves visible and attract attention of potential viewers and advertisers. Suffice it to say that the more eyes and ears a programme attracts, the more valuable it would be to advertisers whose products would be displayed during the transmission and to the broadcaster who would profit from the sale of air time.

The advertisers are aware of this and so, willing to buy air time from TV stations that offer popular entertaining, informative and educative programmes that will guarantee wider exposure of their commercials to a larger audience. This demands that TV programmers and content producers device and produce rich programme contents capable of attracting mass viewers to the channel. Their programming should be such that focusses attention on those periods of the day that most of the audience tunes to Television. No doubt, advertising remains a major source of revenue for the broadcast media stations. Apart from the monthly subvention from Government to the government-owned TV stations, advertising revenue remains another major source of income. The fact remains that no advertiser would advertise his product on a TV stations whose audience rating is poor. The viewers' preferences for programmes aired by the TV stations hugely play a role in the advert placements.

Consequently, we intend to assess the effect rich content production has on revenue generation and sustainability of State government TV stations in South East Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Advertisers usually base their decisions on the assumed number of viewers that patronize a given TV station, area of coverage, quality and types of programmes offered. The advent of digital media is taking its toll on the revenue generated from the traditional TV advertising. The audience is migrating to the social media platforms, forcing the product advertisers to move where the market is. This has left fewer people tuning to the TV stations. Suffice it to say that at the moment in Nigeria, the television advertising still dominates the digital or social media advertising. Agreeably, it is gradually affecting the viewership rate of TV Stations. There is now stiffer competition for audience among the TV stations.

The problems now facing the TV stations are reduction in viewership patronage and advertising revenue. These are adversely affecting the sustainability of the TV stations in Nigeria. When a TV station cannot be sustained it leads to loss of jobs, and subsequent fold-up.TV stations managers have to device means of survival in the face of not only the digital onslaught from the social media that is reducing the audience, but the tougher market competition from familiar rivals in the television industry. As they jostle and scramble for the share of the diminishing audience, how they would remain in business is an issue of great concern. The remedy, perhaps, depends on the TV stations' broadcast value chain (content production, transmission and reception), especially content production.

Objectives of the study

1.   To ascertain how content production affects viewers' preference of television station.
2.   To determine major factors that influence viewers' preference of TV programmes.

3.   To ascertain effects of viewers' preference of TV programmes on sustainability of TV stations in South East Nigeria.

Conceptual framework

Television Programmes, Programming and Audience

Programmes are the major products manufactured by any broadcast station. They are conceived and designed to satisfy a specific aspect of the artistic needs of an audience (Owuamalam, 2008). Programmes provide information, education and entertainment to the audience. It is developed in a way to meet the expectations of the audience. They are things that attract audience to the channel.

Every broadcast programme is target audience oriented (Owuamalam, 2008). In broadcasting, a programme is seen as a broadcast material created to meet certain specific needs or attain some set objectives and transmitted to some pre-determined target audience (Eastman & Ferguson, 2006). Television programming is a scheduling strategy employed to give shows the best possible chance of attracting and retaining an audience. They are used to deliver shows to audiences when they are most likely to want to watch them and deliver audiences to advertisers in the composition that makes their advertising most likely to be effective (Eastman & Ferguson, 2013). It is the practice of organizing and/or ordering (scheduling) of broadcast media programmes in a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or season-long schedule. It is the minute planning of the transmission; what to broadcast and when, ensuring adequate or maximum utilization of airtime. Programming is the allocation of available slots to programmes. It involves strategic planning and ordering in order to get the most out of each programme and reach the most suited audience at peak availability. With this, the day is divided into parts and this process is known as "Dayparting".

The basic idea in programming is to broadcast programmes that will attract sizeable and enough audience to satisfy advertisers (Allen & Hakanen, 1997). This has become an increasing complex job. This is so because, not only are more stations in operations, other media such as the digital media (social media) are growing in number and they compete for the available audience.

The audience is the reason for the production of any broadcast programme and as such audience satisfaction is expected in any broadcast programme production. It is the endorsement of any broadcast station through the patronage of its programmes that guarantees the viability or prosperity of any broadcast station (Owuamalam, 2008). The success or failure of any programme rests on its delivery to the audience. How the audience perceives the broadcast value chain (content production, transmission and reception) affects the station. If the content is rich but the transmission is poor, then the reception and its impact on audience cannot be achieved. Parasuraman et al., (1985) in Manero, García-Uceda & Serrano, (2013) posited that the perceptions of quality have been recognized as key constructs for explaining consumer behaviour towards programmes viewed. Heselwood (2005) supported by saying that audiences will watch programmes not channels; they will consume entertainment that excites and informs them, regardless of the platform it is delivered on and they will be happy, for the right to enjoy that entertainment at a time, and on a device of their choice.

Munyoki & Kirigo (2011) asserted that viewers' preference and choice of programmes is highly influenced by the following factors: the content, quality, language and the presenter of the programme in that order of reducing importance, and Wijenayake & Samaraweera (2016) who added that age, marital and employment statuses have significant positive relationship with the demand for knowledge based programmes.

Cohen (2002) in study, using analysis of programme content and programming features identified patterns of television viewing preferences that explain why certain shows are frequently

watched than other shows. The results replicated earlier findings indicating that programmes viewing preferences are explained by channel loyalty and genre loyalty, but the study added a focus on the importance of programming language in non-English-speaking television markets.

A programme producer should understand audience dynamics if the purpose of the programme is to be realized, asserts Owuamalam (2008). He advised that it becomes imperative to determine the psychological frame of the target audience in audience determines how best to present a broadcast programme for maximum result. However, the ability of the audience to appreciate the programme, he asserted, depends on the efficiency of the communication within the same "attention aggregate". The programme producer and the audience must have a common frame of reference, which provides the same meaning. Programmes should be packaged in a way that would be attractive to the audience. Programme packaging influences the overall outlook of the station (Hasan, 2014).

Television Viewing and Advertising

TV stations are now under pressure with declining viewers due to increased competition from digital media. The competition for the remaining audience has become stiffer. Television station managers are now trying to enhance their broadcast value chain to outwit their competitor. Production of rich contents becomes the key. Television station that has programmes with rich contents invariable will be ahead of others as it would attract more viewers to itself. Commenting on the relevance of audience to sustainability of media organizations, Fisher, McGowan & Evans (1980) said that revenue is closely related to audience size and characteristics. Audience value depends upon its location relative to the station and differs according to time of day.

Product advertisers who use programmes as vehicles for carrying commercials have a great responsibility. Not only must they be sure that the commercials appearing on the programmes are good advertising but they must be certain that they are compatible with their product and overall objectives. They buy time slots on television in the same way they buy page spaces in newspapers or magazines. They must select programmes which will attract the audience they want to reach. Thus, advertisers must know a great deal about the intricacies of broadcast programming. This enables them to choose the right kinds of programmes for their purpose. To meet this challenge and in view of media competition, the programme producer must produce contents that can attract audience, which invariably attracts the advertisers.

As earlier established, programmes not only serve to draw large number of audience to a particular station but are also the determinant of the type of person who is attracted to that station during a particular time period. Becker (1983) asserts that viewing follows another interesting pattern with age. Among children, preschooler's view the most, between 32 and 33 hours a week on the average. As children progress through school, the amount of viewing time on the average drops steadily with teenagers averaging about 24 hours a week. Then however, viewing begins to rise again with the greatest of it being with adults and over the age of fifty-five, an average of about 38 hours per week. In addition, among adults, women view television substantially more than men.

Theoretical framework

The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratification Theory. This theory argues that people actively choose media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs. Katz et al. (1974) posit that gratification is derived from the media content which is believed to satisfy the needs for education, information, entertainment and escapism. According to this theory people select media and content to satisfy their felt needs or wants that are expressed as motives for adopting particular medium use. Therefore, users actively select media they consume to achieve their gratification.

Gratification is mainly obtained from watching a specific programme. It focuses on "what users do with the media" instead of "What media do to people". It connects the need gratifications and media preference on the side of the audience.

Research methodology

The Survey method was adopted for this study. It enabled the researcher deal with the characteristics of the chosen set of people whose opinion, behaviour and attitudes were essential for the collection of information required by the study (Owuamalam, 2012).

Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo are the five states that make up South East of Nigeria. The projected population of study based on the 2006 National population census is 21,955,456 people and population of the select LGAs put at 1,028,200. The Taro Yamane formula was used to get the sample size of 400. Data was collected through questionnaire and interview guide. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the survey while the snowballing sample technique was used for the interview.

South East States	Select LGAs from South East States	Select LGAs Pop.	Proportion Distributed	No of Questionnaire Returned
Abia	Umuahia South	182,200	71	67
Anambra	Awka North	148,400	58	56
Ebonyi	Abakaliki	198,100	77	75
Enugu	Enugu North	326,900	127	118
Imo	Owerri Municipal	172,600	67	64
TOTAL		1, 028,200	400	380

A total of 400 questionnaire were distributed to audience of the selected five State TV stations in Southeast Nigeria. 380 were returned. Total of 10 Interview guides were administered the Directors of Programmes and Directors of Commercials of the selected TV stations. Tables were used to show representation of the data collected through questionnaire. For the analysis, the percentage and Likert scale mean value method were adopted. The research questions were answered using the mean score benchmark of 2.5 for a 4-point scale.

Presentation of data

1. Effect of content production on viewer's preference of television station.

Table 1: Shows responses to if rich contents attract audience to the TV station.

Table 1						
Response	Total	%		X	F	FX
Strongly agreed	143	37.6		4	143	572
Agreed	156	41.1		3	156	468
Disagreed	48	12.6		2	48	96
Strongly disagreed	33	8.7		1	33	33

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{FX}{F} = \frac{1169}{380} = \mathbf{3.1}$$

The first objective of this study was to ascertain how content production affects viewers' preference of television station. Table 1 showed that the mean value of 3.1 was greater than the decision point of 2.5, hence positive.

2. Major Factors that influence viewers' preference of TV programmes.
Table 2: Showing responses to factors that influence your Choice of TV Programmes.

Table 2							
FACTORS	Umuahia South	Awka North	Abakaliki	Enugu North	Owerri Municipal	Total	%
Content/Quality of progr.	43	33	42	64	36	218	57.4
Time of progr.	16	10	20	29	16	91	24
Duration of progr.	2	5	10	16	9	42	11
Knowledge about progr.	6	8	3	9	3	29	7.6
TOTAL	67	56	75	118	64	380	100

The second objective of this study was to determine factors that influence viewers' preference of TV programmes. A research question was raised to achieve this objective. The responses (Table 2) revealed that the content and quality of programmes aired are major determinants in the choices made by the viewers.

3. Effects of viewers' preference for TV programmes on sustainability of TV stations in South East Nigeria.

Table 3: Showing responses to the type of programmes viewers watch most.

Table 3							
PROGRAMMES	Umuahia South	Awka North	Abakaliki	Enugu North	Owerri Municipal	Total	%
Entertainment/Sports	35	25	40	56	34	190	50
News & Current Affairs	15	10	10	21	9	65	17.1
Educational	2	4	6	10	5	27	7.1
Religious	10	7	9	20	7	53	14
Talks & Discussion	5	10	10	11	9	45	11.8
TOTAL	67	56	75	118	64	380	100

Table 4: Showing responses by viewers to the question that a Product producer will not advertise his product on a TV station with low viewership patronage.

Table 4						
Response	Total	%		X	F	FX
Strongly agreed	137	36		4	137	548
Agreed	193	50.8		3	193	579
Disagreed	50	13.2		2	50	100
Strongly disagreed	-	-		1	-	-
Total	380	100			380	1227

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{FX}{F} = \frac{1227}{380} = \textbf{3.2}$$

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The third objective of this study was to determine effects of viewers' preference for programmes on sustainability of TV stations in South East Nigeria. Table 3 showed that majority of the people tune to entertainment programmes. Table 4 showed that a producer will not advertise his product on a TV station with low viewership patronage as this will adversely affect advertising revenue. The mean value of 3.2 was greater than the decision point of 2.5, hence positive.

Discussion of findings

The first finding was that programmes with rich contents attract audience to the television station. This finding was supported by Parasuraman et al., (1985) in Manero, García-Uceda & Serrano, (2013) who said that the perceptions of quality have been recognized as key constructs for explaining consumer behaviour towards programmes viewed. Heselwood (2005) supported by saying that audiences will watch programmes not channels; they will consume entertainment that excites and informs them, regardless of the platform it is delivered on and will be happy, for the right to enjoy that entertainment at a time, and on a device of their choice.

Interview participants asserted TV stations should be content driven, since we are now in the digital era, which has brought a different angle to competition for the audience. To them, it is the broadcast station that gives the most compelling content that would remain competitive and re-asserted the notion that Content (programmes) is king and content is key.

The second finding was that the content and quality of programmes aired are major determinants in the choices made by the viewers. Other factors such as the time the programme is aired, duration, as well as prior knowledge of the programme were also indicated as factors. This finding was supported by the findings of Munyoki & Kirigo (2011) who said viewers' preference and choice of programmes is highly influenced by the content, quality, language and the presenter of the programme in that order of reducing importance, and Wijenayake & Samaraweera (2016) added that age, marital and employment statuses have significant positive relationship with the demand for knowledge based programmes.

The interview participants agreed that quality content production as the major factor that endears audience to the programmes of the station and advocated for the digitization of TV stations. Digitization benefits include increase in the number of quality programmes as a result of the speed at which these machine works; clarity in pictures as a result of the use of digital video cameras; palatable programmes as a result of digital editing; and programmes with sound effects now incorporated in it.

The third finding was that majority of the people tune to entertainment programmes. Also, a product producer will not advertise his product on a TV station with low viewership patronage as this will adversely affect advertising revenue and it's sustainability eventually. The mean value of 3.2 was greater than the decision point, hence positive (Table 4). This was supported by Fisher, McGowan & Evans (1980) who said that revenue is closely related to audience size and characteristics. Audience value depends upon its location relative to the station and differs according to time of day.

Interview respondents corroborated the foregoing by asserting that programmes with rich contents attract huge audience base and this is what advertisers look out for when placing their adverts. The amount of adverts placed on a TV station determines the revenue generated through advertising.

Conclusion

The digital revolution has had an impact on Television broadcasting. It has affected virtually everything associated with it. The digital media especially the social media has compressed the space, luring the hitherto huge TV captive audience. The traditional TV stations are now in stiff competition

with the digital media. Digitization has come with its numerous advantages such as making production of rich programmes or contents possible. The content and quality of programmes aired to a large extent, determine the choice of programmes by TV audience in South East Nigeria. Content is king and content is key to determining viewers' preference of television programmes. Other factors include time of the programme, duration, knowledge of the programme, age, marital status and employment status of the audience.

Programmes rich in contents attract audience to the television station, and those in South East Nigeria are no exceptions. It's a fact that advertising is a major source of revenue and sustainability for TV stations. Therefore, the viability of any station depends on the extent to which it can attract the large audience. Large audience sizes attract advertisers who want large markets for their products. For the audience to effectively receive product messages, it has to be during entertainment programmes and better aired at prime. A product producer will not advertise his product on a TV station with low viewership patronage as this will adversely affect advertising revenue.

The inability of TV stations to produce rich contents for transmission has affected the audience reception of their programmes and has impeded their ability to compete favourably with other similar stations in the quest for the advertising revenue generation.

Recommendations

1. The digitization of TV stations in Nigeria is important as it impacts positively on stations' broadcast value chain (content production, transmission and reception).
2. Programmes with quality and rich contents should be produced by TV stations in South East Nigeria.
3. There is need for audience attention. The worst nightmare of the advertiser and the station is that people do not view their programmes on which their products are advertised. Certain techniques such as audience rating should be employed to determine which people view what type of TV programmes during what time of day.

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