

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK AND PROGRAMMING IN THREE SELECTED TELEVISION STATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The place of feedback in communication is not in doubt. But whether or not it is attended to, and the level of attention given to it has always been a source of concern. This study examined the influence of audience feedback on television programming in three selected television stations in Lagos: Lagos Television (LTV), Television Continental (TVC), and Nigerian Television Authority 2 Channel 5 (NTA2 Channel 5). The purpose of the study was to find out whether or not television stations in Nigeria consider audience feedback in planning, scheduling, executing and evaluating their programmes. The following research questions were raised: Do LTV, NTA 2 channel 5 and TVC have operational feedback channels? Does audience feedback influence programming of LTV, NTA 2 channel 5 and TVC? What other Factors influence programming of LTV, NTA 2 channel 5 and TVC apart from audience feedback?

The programme managers of the stations were interviewed to find out the role which audience feedback plays in the programming of the selected stations. Also, to verify the interview data, the programme schedule the three stations for two quarters were observed along with two social media feedback channels (Facebook and Twitter).

The findings of study show that all the three selected television stations consider audience feedback in implementing their programmes except NTA2 Channel 5, with evidence that programming is also influenced by other factors, especially government activities, in government owned stations.

Key words: Programming, Feedback, Audience, Planning, Scheduling, Television station.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of feedback in the communication process cannot be overemphasized. It is an essential element of the communication process that enables the source of the message to know whether he/she has communicated effectively with the audience.

Dominick (1994) defines feedback as those responses of the receiver that shape and alter the subsequent messages of the source. To underscore feedback as an essential component of communication, Idemili (1990) cited in Daramola (2003), posits that feedback helps us to modify and tailor our future messages to suit our audiences and helps us to correct our mistakes. Daramola (2003) writes that the more feedback-oriented we are in communicating, the greater our potential for communicating effectively.

Just like in other forms of communication, and in fact other media types, the concept of feedback in broadcasting is instituted to obtain audience reaction. In broadcasting, the possible feedback channels available include: letters to the station concerning its programming and programme content, telephone recording devices attached to a special phone number in which listeners or viewers, as the case may be, are encouraged to dial and present their opinions or point of view and so on. Others are: E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, You-tube, and perhaps other social media platforms through which members of the audience can air their views about a programme or set of programmes.

Apart from the aforementioned feedback channels, scholars have identified the use of audience research as a means by which broadcast stations obtain information about the composition of their audience and measure the impact of their programmes on their audiences. It can also be used to obtain the views of the audience regarding programme selection, scheduling and content.

Feedback regarding programme content or scheduling ought to influence the programming of stations. This is because the station is in business to satisfy the audience and as such needs feedback from them to know whether programmes aired actually satisfy their communication needs or not. And because the broadcast environment has become highly competitive, there is a scramble for available audience among TV stations, and only a station

manager with adequate knowledge and understanding of his station's audience preference can survive by selecting and airing programmes that are compatible with their interests and needs.

Therefore, considering the enormous growth in the Nigerian broadcast industry since its liberalization, it is necessary to know whether or not the audience component of the communication chain is given its deserved consideration in the programming of stations, especially television, with focus on three selected TV stations: Lagos Television (LTV), Nigerian Television Authority 2 Channel 5 (NTA2), and Television Continental (TVC).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are pertinent to this study and serve as a guide to the research:

RQ1: Do *LTV, NTA2 channel5, and TV continental* have operational feedback channels?

RQ2: Does audience feedback influence programming of *LTV, NTA2 channel5, and TV continental*?

RQ3: What other factors affect programming of *LTV, NTA2 channel5, and TV continental* apart from audience feedback?

METHODOLOGY

The survey method was adopted to find out from the selected television stations if they consider their audiences in programme conceptualization and implementation. The researcher made use of the personal interview method of gathering information to find out from the three (3) selected television stations whether the responses gotten from their audience are considered in their programming.

The population of this study was all television stations in Lagos state. The reason was that Lagos state has the highest number of TV stations in the country (12 television stations currently in operation). They include: Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)2 channel 5, Nigeria Television Authority NTA channel 10, Africa Independent Television (AIT), Television Continental (TVC), ONTV, Silverbird Television (STV), Lagos Television

(LTV), Murhi International Television (MITV), Channels Television, Super-Screen television, Galaxy TV and DBN.

The three selected TV stations were purposively sampled especially on the basis of ownership to enable the researcher generalize the findings of the research more reliably. Television Continental (TVC), Nigerian Television Authority (NTA5) and Lagos Television (LTV) were sampled as private, federal government and state government owned stations, respectively.

In addition, the programme schedules of the three stations were observed. Out of the four quarters of their annual programme schedules, two quarters were selected for observation by the researcher in order to ascertain whether there were modifications and adjustments in the schedule, and if these adjustments were attributable to audience feedback or other factor that might influence programming.

Also, out of the 12 programme managers of the TV stations in Lagos, three were selected and interviewed. The programme managers were selected because they are the main gate-keepers of programmes that are broadcast. Before any programme goes on air, it is approved by the programme manager who ensures that all programmes aired are in consonance with the NBC code and other ethical standards. To this extent, the programme managers of the three sampled television stations were considered most appropriate to provide the data pertinent to this study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of audience feedback in programming cannot be over-emphasized. McQuail (2007) opines that the media need their audience more than the audience needs the media. Hence, proper feedback channels should be put in place to ensure that audience members air their views, opinions and dissatisfactions about a particular programme or set of programmes as they are the main-stay of a television station. A broadcast station would not be acting wisely if it ignores complaints or reactions from its audience. Members of the audience should be encouraged to write letters or phone-in their suggestions.

Dominick (1994) commenting on this fact states that broadcasters should pay very close attention to the feedback they receive and treat it seriously. Onabajo (2001) explains that for broadcasting to be meaningful, it must be identified with the yearnings and aspirations of its audiences. As such much consideration should be given to audience feedback in programme conceptualization and implementation.

Bitner (1989), corroborating this fact states “you should never discount the impact of reader/viewer feedback. Your own letter to the editor or head of a broadcasting station can be a key indicator to personnel about what the public is thinking and why. One letter indicates to management that there are many other people who undoubtedly feel the same way but did not just take time to write.”

According to Jannarone (2012) a US research firm, Bluefin labs' 2012 report, claims that comments posted on *twitter* and other social-media websites about television shows/programmes increased from 8.8 million in 2011 to 75.5 million in 2012. He further posits that producers say they pay close attention to comments on social-media sites to gauge audience response in real time. And that some of these producers also state that the comments posted on the social-media are not always totally representative of the people who view that particular programme. Some people can tweet more than ten times about a particular programme or comment more than 10 times on the face-book page of that programme.

In addition, qualitative analysis of key themes and topics of discussion over the course of the show provides important feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of a program, well beyond what may be identified through the inherently artificial device of audience interviews and focus groups. Such analysis may also be usefully combined with conventional audience ratings and feedback tools, and in combination, these techniques enable researchers to understand audiences in an increasingly converged media environment (Simons, 2011).

In Nigeria, the concept of feedback has been instituted in many television stations across the country. However, differences in programming across these various stations depend on the use and implementation of the feedback gotten from members of the audience. Onabajo (2003) noted that many programme producers in Nigeria do not care as to the effectiveness of their programmes. He stated that many producers sit on their desk and

initiate programmes for the audience and at the end do not care to evaluate how effective their programmes are by finding out audience reaction.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

TABLE 1: Objectives and Target Audiences of the Television Stations

Television Station	Objectives	Target Audiences
Television Continental (TVC)	Inform and entertain	Youths and middle-aged
NTA2 Channel 5	To foster National unity, peace and stability among various ethnic groups in Nigeria.	Nigerians within the country and in Diaspora
Lagos Television (LTV)	To oil the information dissemination machinery of Lagos state and to communicate with the rural populace in the state.	rural people in Lagos state

From table 1 above, the objectives of the three (3) stations were succinctly identified. While conducting the study, the programme manager of NTA2 channel 5 noted that fostering national unity, peace and stability among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria is the general objective of the station. However, he noted that NTA2 channel 5 has a secondary objective of satisfying the entertainment needs of the people.

Lagos Television initially was set up to oil the information dissemination machinery of the state as the Lagos state government under General Mobolaji Johnson was not sure of adequate media coverage by NTA. But, with successive governments running the state, the objective of the station has gone beyond disseminating government information and has extended to serving as a communication link between the Lagos state government and the rural populace in the state. While Television Continental, a privately owned television station, has no intervention from the government but seeks to inform and entertain its audience largely for commercial purposes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the need for and the use of audience feedback in the three TV stations studied is dependent on the objectives for the establishment of the station. Television Continental's objective is primarily entertainment and information; NTA2 is a government owned station and has as its objectives the promotion of government policies and to foster national unity, identity and peace while Lagos Television's objective is to oil the information dissemination machinery of the state and to reach out to the rural populace. All these stations agree to the need for audience feedback in programming, hence the establishment of the various feedback channels.

However, from the study carried out, the use of feedback in programming is also dependent on the objectives for setting up the station. Television Continental as a commercial station thrives on advertisements and sponsorships and depends on a large audience to attract this, thus agreeing to the use of audience feedback in structuring its programmes.

NTA2 as a government-owned station does not make use of the feedback gotten from the audience but rather base their programmes on commercial gains and government intervention while Lagos Television makes use of audience feedback to an extent but, as a state government owned station, its programming policies are still subject to influence from the government.

The findings of this study also revealed that there are other factors that influence television programming apart from audience feedback. These include competition, commercialization (advertisers & sponsors), government activities, National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Advertising Practitioner Council (APCON), current trends in the society, nature of the target market, prime time belt and timing of the programmes i.e the particular time the programmes are aired.

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