

Advertising as a Survival Strategy for Broadcast Media in Developing Economies: Evidence from Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Port Harcourt

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Abstract

Broadcast media organisations in developing economies face severe financial challenges arising from declining government subventions, technological disruptions, and economic instability. Advertising remains a critical alternative revenue source for sustaining media operations. This study examines advertising as a survival strategy for broadcast media organisations, with empirical evidence drawn from the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Port Harcourt. Using a survey research design, data were collected from 150 staff members of the organisation through structured questionnaire. Findings reveal that advertising constitutes a major revenue source for broadcast media sustainability, enhances programme quality, and supports organisational continuity during economic distress. The study also establishes that effective marketing strategies and audience expansion significantly attract advertising patronage. Anchored on the Mediation of Reality Theory and the Shifting Loyalties Theory, the paper concludes that advertising remains indispensable for broadcast media survival in developing economies and recommends diversification of advertising strategies and investment in quality programming to enhance revenue generation.

Introduction

Broadcast media constitute one of the most influential pillars of modern communication systems due to their capacity to disseminate

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***Related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.*

Information, preserve cultural values, provide entertainment, and promote socio-economic development. Television and radio broadcasting serve as primary channels through which governments, corporate organisations, and social institutions communicate with mass audiences. Scholars have consistently argued that broadcast media play a critical role in facilitating national development by providing platforms for public enlightenment, political participation, and cultural integration (Dominick, 2009; Agbanu & Nwamuo, 2009). In developing economies, where literacy levels and digital accessibility may vary significantly, broadcast media remain essential instruments for information dissemination and public communication.

Despite their importance, broadcast media organisations in developing countries face persistent financial challenges that threaten their operational sustainability. The capital-intensive nature of broadcasting requires substantial investment in production equipment, infrastructure, content creation, and human resources. Historically, many government-owned broadcast institutions relied heavily on public funding and government subventions to sustain operations. However, economic instability, declining government revenue, and competing national priorities have significantly reduced public funding for media organisations in many developing countries, including Nigeria (Udomisor, 2013). Rising operational costs and economic downturns have therefore forced broadcast media organisations to explore alternative revenue generation mechanisms to maintain their relevance and functionality.

The financial challenges confronting broadcast media have been further intensified by rapid technological advancements and the emergence of digital communication platforms. The proliferation of social media networks, streaming services, and online news outlets has transformed audience consumption patterns and intensified competition within the media industry. This transformation has resulted in audience fragmentation, reduced traditional broadcast viewership, and declining revenue from conventional funding sources. Armstrong (2018) notes that digitisation and technological convergence have reshaped broadcasting operations in Nigeria, compelling traditional media organisations to adopt new commercial and strategic approaches to remain competitive. Consequently, broadcast media organisations increasingly rely on diversified funding models that emphasise commercial viability and revenue sustainability.

Advertising has historically served as one of the most reliable and sustainable sources of revenue for broadcast media organisations worldwide. Advertising is generally defined as a paid, non-personal communication process used to promote goods, services, or ideas through identifiable sponsors (Dominick, 2009). Beyond its promotional function, advertising provides critical

financial support that sustains media operations by funding programme production, technological upgrades, and workforce development. According to Okolie (2011), advertising revenue significantly contributes to the financial survival of media organisations, particularly in developing economies where alternative funding sources are limited. Advertising also enhances the economic viability of media institutions by creating mutually beneficial relationships between advertisers and media platforms.

In Nigeria, advertising has emerged as a dominant source of revenue for broadcast media organisations due to the country's growing consumer market and expanding corporate sector. Available industry data indicate that Nigeria represents one of the largest advertising markets in Africa, with television advertising attracting substantial corporate investment because of its extensive audience reach and persuasive communication capacity (Guttman, 2019). The Nigerian broadcast sector has therefore become increasingly commercialised, with media organisations adopting marketing strategies aimed at attracting advertising patronage. Nwabueze, Ezebuenyi, and Ezeoke (2012) argue that advertising revenue has become central to media survival in Nigeria, influencing content production, programming strategies, and organisational decision-making processes.

The Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) represents one of Africa's largest government-owned broadcasting networks, with nationwide coverage and significant audience penetration. Established to provide national broadcasting services, NTA plays a crucial role in information dissemination, cultural promotion, and public education across Nigeria. However, like many public broadcasting organisations in developing economies, NTA faces financial sustainability challenges arising from economic fluctuations, declining government subventions, and increasing operational demands. Consequently, advertising revenue has become a major source of financial support for the organisation, influencing programming decisions and organisational strategies.

Against this backdrop, this study examines advertising as a survival strategy for broadcast media organisations in developing economies, using the Nigeria Television Authority, Port Harcourt, as a case study. The study provides empirical evidence on the role of advertising in sustaining broadcast media operations within economically distressed environments. By analysing institutional practices and professional perceptions, the study contributes to scholarly discourse

on media economics, advertising effectiveness, and broadcast sustainability in developing countries.

Statement of the Problem

Broadcast media organisations in developing economies face increasing financial challenges due to fluctuating government support, rising operational costs, and changing audience consumption patterns. While government-owned media organisations previously relied heavily on public funding, economic instability has significantly reduced such subventions. Consequently, many broadcast stations struggle to maintain quality programming, modern broadcasting infrastructure, and workforce stability.

Despite the growing reliance on advertising revenue, there is limited empirical evidence assessing the extent to which advertising contributes to the survival of broadcast media in developing economies. This study therefore investigates the role of advertising as a survival strategy for broadcast media organisations, using NTA Port Harcourt as a case study.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the role of advertising in sustaining broadcast media organisations.
2. Assess the significance of advertising revenue to broadcast media survival.
3. Identify strategies used by broadcast media organisations to attract advertising patronage.

Research Questions

1. How does advertising contribute to the sustainability of broadcast media organisations?
2. How significant is advertising revenue to broadcast media survival?
3. What strategies do broadcast media organisations employ to attract advertising patronage?

Literature Review

Advertising and Media Sustainability

Advertising has long been recognised as a strategic communication mechanism through which organisations promote goods, services, and social ideas to target audiences through mass media platforms. Traditionally, advertising functions as a marketing tool designed to influence consumer behaviour and stimulate market demand. However, within the context of media economics, advertising serves a broader institutional function by providing essential financial support for media organisations and sustaining broadcast operations. According to Picard (2011), advertising revenue plays a fundamental role in subsidising media content production and distribution costs, thereby enabling media organisations to provide programming to audiences at relatively low or no direct cost.

Media sustainability refers to the capacity of media organisations to maintain consistent operations, content production, and service delivery over time despite economic, technological, and competitive challenges. Scholars argue that advertising remains one of the most dependable revenue sources supporting media sustainability globally, particularly in broadcast sectors where operational costs are significantly high (Napoli, 2019). Broadcasting requires substantial financial investment in production facilities, transmission infrastructure, technical equipment, and skilled personnel. Advertising income therefore enables media organisations to maintain programming quality, upgrade technological infrastructure, and retain professional workforce capacity.

In developing economies, advertising assumes an even more critical role due to structural limitations affecting alternative funding sources. Government-owned broadcast institutions historically relied on public funding, but economic volatility and fiscal constraints have significantly reduced state support for media operations. Udomisor (2013) observes that declining government subventions in Nigeria have compelled public broadcast stations to adopt commercially driven survival strategies, with advertising emerging as a dominant revenue stream. Similarly, Okolie (2011) emphasises that advertising revenue not only supports operational sustainability but also enhances organisational competitiveness by enabling media organisations to invest in audience-oriented programming.

Recent studies further indicate that advertising contributes to media pluralism and content diversity by providing financial autonomy for media organisations. Mierzejewska and Hollifield (2020) argue that sustainable advertising revenue reduces excessive reliance on political or governmental funding, thereby promoting editorial independence and professional journalism standards. However, scholars also caution that heavy dependence on advertising may influence programming decisions and content prioritisation, potentially favouring commercially attractive programmes over public interest content (Napoli, 2019).

Within the Nigerian broadcasting industry, advertising has become a critical survival mechanism as the media landscape becomes increasingly competitive and technologically driven. Industry reports indicate that television broadcasting continues to attract significant advertising investment due to its broad audience reach and persuasive audiovisual communication capacity (PwC, 2023). Consequently, broadcast organisations strategically integrate advertising into programme scheduling and content development to maximise revenue generation and organisational sustainability.

Economic Distress and Media Funding Models

Economic distress remains a persistent challenge confronting broadcast media operations in many developing countries. Economic distress is characterised by unstable macroeconomic conditions such as inflation, unemployment, currency fluctuations, and declining government revenue. These economic challenges directly affect media funding structures, particularly for public broadcasting organisations that depend heavily on government subventions. According to Olorunnisola and Douai (2013), financial instability in developing economies often results in reduced public expenditure on media infrastructure and broadcasting services, thereby weakening institutional capacity and operational sustainability.

Historically, public broadcast media in developing countries operated under state-controlled funding models designed to promote public service broadcasting objectives such as national integration, educational programming, and cultural promotion. However, fiscal austerity and competing national development priorities have reduced the viability of government-dominated funding models. As a result, media organisations increasingly adopt hybrid funding structures combining public funding, advertising revenue, corporate sponsorships, programme sponsorships, and audience subscriptions (Picard, 2011).

Among these funding mechanisms, advertising remains the most accessible and economically sustainable source of income for broadcast media organisations in developing economies. Advertising offers continuous revenue opportunities linked to market growth and consumer demand, unlike government funding, which is often influenced by political and economic fluctuations. Armstrong (2018) notes that technological advancement and digital media convergence have further intensified competition for limited financial resources, compelling broadcast organisations in Nigeria to commercialise operations and prioritise advertising revenue generation.

Furthermore, global media industry trends demonstrate a gradual shift from state-funded broadcasting systems toward market-driven media models. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2023), many broadcast organisations worldwide are restructuring funding models to incorporate diversified commercial strategies that emphasise advertising, digital monetisation, and audience engagement. In developing countries, where subscription-based revenue models remain relatively weak due to limited purchasing power and infrastructural challenges, advertising continues to dominate media financing strategies.

However, reliance on advertising revenue introduces structural vulnerabilities, particularly during economic recessions when corporate advertising expenditure declines. Nielsen (2022) reports that advertising spending typically fluctuates with macroeconomic conditions, affecting revenue stability for media organisations. This cyclical dependency underscores the importance of strategic advertising management and diversified funding models to ensure long-term broadcast sustainability.

Advertising and Broadcast Audience Expansion

Advertising effectiveness in broadcast media is strongly influenced by audience reach, programme quality, and viewer engagement levels. Advertisers generally seek media platforms capable of delivering large, demographically diverse audiences to maximise marketing impact. Broadcast media, particularly television and radio, possess extensive audience penetration in developing countries due to their accessibility, affordability, and cultural relevance. According to Dominick (2009), broadcast media remain powerful communication tools because of their ability to simultaneously reach mass audiences and deliver persuasive audiovisual messages.

Audience expansion strategies have therefore become central to broadcast media survival and advertising revenue generation. Media organisations strategically design programme content to attract wider audiences and increase advertising patronage. Napoli (2011) emphasises that audience measurement and ratings significantly influence advertising placement decisions, as advertisers prefer programmes with high viewership and demographic relevance. Consequently, broadcast media organisations often prioritise entertainment programmes, sports coverage, and reality shows that attract large audiences and generate higher advertising demand.

In developing economies such as Nigeria, broadcast media continue to play a crucial role in reaching diverse and geographically dispersed populations, including rural communities with limited internet access. Nwabueze, Ezebuenyi, and Ezeoke (2012) argue that television broadcasting maintains strong audience loyalty due to its combination of visual and audio communication, making it particularly attractive to advertisers seeking brand visibility and consumer engagement. The extensive coverage network of national broadcasters such as the Nigeria Television Authority enhances advertising effectiveness by providing nationwide audience access.

Recent technological developments have also transformed audience expansion strategies through digital broadcasting and multi-platform content distribution. Digital convergence enables broadcast organisations to extend audience reach through online streaming, social media integration, and mobile broadcasting services. According to PwC (2023), Nigerian broadcast organisations increasingly adopt cross-platform advertising strategies that combine traditional television advertising with digital audience engagement to maximise revenue potential and market competitiveness.

Despite these opportunities, scholars highlight potential challenges associated with audience-driven advertising strategies. Excessive focus on audience ratings may encourage content commercialisation and reduce public service broadcasting commitments. Mierzejewska and Hollifield (2020) note that balancing commercial advertising interests with public service media responsibilities remains a major policy and operational challenge for broadcast organisations in developing economies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the **Mediation of Reality Theory** and the **Shifting Loyalties Theory**, which explain the relationship between advertising effectiveness, audience perception, and the economic sustainability of broadcast media.

The **Mediation of Reality Theory** posits that mass media shape audience understanding of social and commercial realities through selective presentation of messages. Advertising effectiveness is therefore enhanced when integrated into credible media environments that influence audience perception and trust. Broadcast organisations create communication platforms that facilitate message visibility, audience engagement, and advertising patronage. This relationship highlights how media institutions generate revenue by structuring programmes that attract advertisers and sustain operations (McQuail, 2010; Picard, 2011). The theory is relevant to this study because it explains how the Nigeria Television Authority utilises its wide coverage and institutional credibility to enhance advertising effectiveness and financial sustainability.

The **Shifting Loyalties Theory** explains how advertising influences consumer preferences and brand loyalty patterns. The theory suggests that repeated exposure to advertising messages shapes consumer behaviour, encourages product patronage, and sustains advertiser investment in media platforms. This dynamic relationship between advertising and consumer demand creates a continuous revenue stream that supports broadcast media survival (Tellis, 2004; Armstrong & Kotler, 2019). Within the Nigerian broadcast industry, advertising campaigns leverage NTA's nationwide audience reach to influence consumer markets and generate operational revenue.

Together, these theories provide a complementary framework for understanding advertising as a survival strategy for broadcast media organisations. While the Mediation of Reality Theory explains how media environments enhance advertising effectiveness, the Shifting Loyalties Theory explains how advertising influences consumer behaviour and sustains media revenue streams, particularly in economically challenged environments.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design to obtain empirical data from media professionals. The survey approach allows for systematic collection and analysis of responses regarding advertising and broadcast media sustainability.

Population of the Study

The population comprised staff members of the Nigeria Television Authority, Port Harcourt, totaling 275 employees.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 150 respondents was selected using purposive sampling. The sampling technique ensured that respondents possessed relevant knowledge of advertising and media operations.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using structured questionnaires containing both closed and open-ended questions designed to capture respondents' perceptions of advertising and media sustainability.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analysed using frequency distribution and percentage analysis to interpret responses.

Results and Findings

Advertising as a Sustainability Tool

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents strongly agree that advertising plays a critical role in sustaining broadcast media organisations. Respondents indicated that advertising provides financial resources necessary for programme production, staff salaries, and operational maintenance.

Significance of Advertising Revenue

Results indicate that advertising constitutes a major source of revenue for broadcast media organisations. A significant proportion of respondents agreed that media organisations cannot survive without advertising revenue, especially during economic downturns.

Strategies for Attracting Advertising Patronage

The study identified several strategies employed by broadcast media organisations to attract advertisers, including:

- Development of high-quality and audience-oriented programmes
- Strengthening marketing and sales departments
- Expanding audience reach through strategic programming
- Maintaining strong relationships with advertising agencies

Discussion of Findings

The findings confirm that advertising remains a crucial survival mechanism for broadcast media organisations in developing economies. The reliance on advertising revenue reflects the realities of economic instability and declining government support for public broadcasting.

The study also demonstrates that audience size and programme quality significantly influence advertising patronage. Media organisations that invest in quality programming and marketing strategies tend to attract more advertising revenue, thereby improving sustainability.

Furthermore, the results support media economics theory, which emphasises the financial interdependence between advertisers and broadcast media institutions.

Conclusion

This study establishes that advertising serves as a vital survival strategy for broadcast media organisations in developing economies. Evidence from NTA Port Harcourt demonstrates that advertising revenue supports operational sustainability, programme quality, and organisational growth.

The increasing economic challenges faced by broadcast media organisations highlight the necessity of adopting innovative advertising strategies to maintain financial stability. Broadcast media institutions must prioritise audience expansion and quality programming to remain attractive to advertisers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Broadcast media organisations should strengthen marketing and advertising departments to increase revenue generation.
2. Media organisations should invest in high-quality and audience-driven programming to attract advertisers.
3. Government-owned broadcast institutions should diversify funding sources to reduce overdependence on government subventions.
4. Media organisations should establish strategic partnerships with advertising agencies and corporate organisations.

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