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Development Journalism, Africa and Breast Cancer Care Among Women

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Abstract:

In the sphere of media studies, development journalism has been conceived as a type of journalism that can be used to facilitate development in any modern society. Among scholars and media experts, development journalism is essential in tackling development issues that affect the different facets of life. The thrust of this paper explores the effective use of development journalism as a means of promoting breast cancer care in Africa. In addition, it also examines the principle of development communication in promoting sustainable health development. Against the backdrop of agenda setting theory and development media theory, which moves that media should focus on the audience needs, the paper draws attention to the various pathways in promoting breast cancer care among women in African countries. In conclusion, it was advocated that there was dire need for development journalism to serve as a health communication to promote breast cancer care among women in Africa and the wider world.

Key words: Development Journalism, breast cancer, intervention, women and Africa

1. Introduction

In the sphere of health communication, media awareness campaigns are important activities that facilitate health promotion in any society. Scholars agree that media awareness campaigns cannot be effective without influential and impending roles of the mass media. They argued that mass media channels have the power to reach to heterogeneous audiences (Kreps, 2008; Kreps & Sivaram, 2009).

The effective use of the mass media in media awareness campaigns have long been recognised among scholars in the field of health communication. Okorie (2013) reasoned that since mass media affect all levels of the society, the mass media must get involved in the efforts to overcome the obstacles presented by the disease. Thus, the mass media channels serve as effective health communication channels in Nigeria. They have the potentials to frame breast cancer messages as well as report such issues. Also, Okorie (2013) citing Chew et al., (2006) reasoned that although there are numerous channels that influence health information in the Nigerian society, the mass media serve as potent sources of health information.

This paper expounds on the effective use of development journalism for breast cancer intervention among women. Furthermore, the paper provided a theoretical and conceptual framework for the use of development journalism in promoting breast cancer care among women.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper was hinged on the Agenda Setting theory and Development Media theory.

- **Agenda Setting Theory** stipulates that the media have the capability to determine what issues are foremost and pertinent, thereby setting the 'agenda'. Scholars have identified three levels of setting agenda, which are policy, public and media agenda (Folarin, 1998; Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008). As it relates to issues of breast cancer care among women, the mass media can ascribe prominence to the stories related to breast cancer. Development journalists can set a media agenda to promote the importance of breast cancer care among women.

- **Development Media Theory:** The major drive of the theory emphasizes the probable role of the mass media in Third World countries. The theory stipulates that mass media should work hand-in-hand with the government to promote developmental projects (Folarin, 1998; Mc Quail, 2007; Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, 2008). Also, the theory stipulates that the mass media should identify issues that affect development and provide solutions to them. As it relates to this paper, the theory posits that media experts and development journalists should accept the task in promoting breast cancer care among women. Development journalists should promote the knowledge of breast cancer care in terms of eating habits, hygiene, the practice of breast self examination and clinical breast examination.

3. Health Communication and Breast Cancer Care

Breast cancer simply refers to cancer of the breast region. Okorie (2011) observed that breast cancer is a lifestyle disease that affects women in developing and developed countries; the disease has contributed to the deaths of many women in different countries of the world. The various risk factors associated with breast cancer can be categorised into epistemological and life style factors. However, all these factors have been regarded as well confirmed factors and probable factors via studies and medical researches carried out on breast cancer across the globe (Hulka & Moorman, 2001; Anderson et al., 2008; Yip, Smith & Anderson, 2008). These factors are as follows: (1) Age (2) Diet (3) Family history of breast cancer (4) Alcohol and Folake (5) Obesity and physical activity (6) Hormone/Pregnancy-related factors

In Nigeria, there have been many cases of women that have died of the disease. For example, the wife of the Edo State Governor died due to the disease. Also, the then Deputy Governor of Ekiti State died due to the disease. These are just a snippet of many cases of women who have died due to the disease. Women living with breast cancer face the danger of losing their lives because breast cancer can be treated only when it is detected at the early stage. An average woman is said to have a one in thirty chances of getting the cancer, but if that person had family history of the disease, their chances has been measured up to a one in six chance (IARC, 2002; 2008; WHO, 2008).

Breast cancer care is a concept that empowers women to engage in some preventive measures against breast cancer. Okorie (2013) sees breast cancer care in two major dimensions. First, women must consider the kinds of food they eat and engage in physical exercises. Second, women must engage in breast self-examination (monthly), breast clinical examination (yearly) and mammogram screening. Okorie (2013) believes that the core of breast cancer care is rooted in breast self-examination, which helps women to engage in a daily examination of their breast regions. In the same vein, WHO (2008) emphasized the need for breast self-examination and physical examinations of the breast. It also emphasises the need for programmes that encourage breast awareness and early diagnosis of breast cancer, especially for women aged 40-69 years attending primary health care centres or hospitals.

The significance of breast cancer care system is to promote breast cancer screening practice among women in the Nigerian society. Breast cancer care involves an individual and collective practice of women conducting and encouraging breast cancer screening and preventive measures to promote a healthy lifestyle among women in the Nigerian society. The infrastructure and facilities essential for promoting breast cancer care in Nigeria are insufficient. Adebamowo (2001) reported that breast cancer care system in Nigeria lacked adequate facilities. This was because there are few hospitals in Nigeria that specialise in breast cancer treatment and screening. He also noted that the few hospitals that specialise in breast cancer treatment and screening do not have the adequate equipment to handle the various ramifications of the disease.

Presently, there are a number of agencies that are spearheading the media awareness campaigns in the Nigerian society. Some of these agencies include: Care. Organisation. Public Enlightenment (C.O.P.E), Princess Nikky Foundation, Breast Cancer Association of Nigeria (BRECAN), Pink Pearl Foundation, Breast without Spots, etc. These agencies have spearheaded these health communication campaigns across the country, mobilising women to be aware of breast cancer and practice preventive screening measures.

4. Development Journalism and Breast Cancer Care

Using development communication as a tool of professional media practice in tackling this issue has become imperative. Okorie (2011, p.180) reasoned that "journalists should embrace the philosophy of development journalism in handling issues about women right based in the constitution and the cultural norm in the society. This is necessary in order to balance competing interest i.e. the cultural norm of the society and the women interest in reporting issues about discrimination and violence against women". He further explained that "Journalist should perceive women as contributors in all community development actions and activities in their news reports and publication. Such presentation of women in media report could help destroy cultural prejudices of women in the African society" (Okorie, 2011, p.180). In order to tackle the issue of breast cancer in Africa, development journalists are expected to take cognizance of the following in the conduct of their responsibilities:

- **Partnership:** Development journalists should partner with non-governmental and government agencies in promoting breast cancer care among women. Importantly, journalists should seek assistance from NGOs, government agencies and international organizations to mobilise their resources in reporting issues of breast cancer among women. Second, development journalists should make use of opinion leaders in media awareness campaigns to promote breast cancer care among women in the rural areas. These stakeholders are essential because they can communicate breast cancer care messages in their indigenous languages of people who reside in rural setting.
- **Policy Agenda:** Development journalists should spearhead or promote campaigns that could enlighten and educate women about the importance of breast cancer care. Also, professionals in the media industry and the government should promote greater public interest on issues of women's rights. This will help guarantee consistency in the flow of

information designed to educate and enlighten people on the manner in which women are to be treated. In essence, journalists should cancer apply their agenda setting function to educate the public about breast cancer among women.

- **Channel Selection:** For any media awareness campaign to be successful, the appropriate channel must be selected. The issue of breast cancer care demands good media planning, selection and placement. A study conducted by Okorie (2013) found out that the three primary information sources for breast cancer intervention were magazines/newspapers, television and radio. Thus, it becomes imperative that magazines/newspapers, television and radio should be considered as primary information sources for breast cancer interventions.
- **Message Construction:** For any media awareness campaign to be successful, the message must be effective. Breast cancer is a sensitive issue among women because it affects the delicate region of the body. Message must be simple, clear and concise in the use of words. Also, the tone of the message should not offend women. Okorie (2013) recommends that media messages should form major elements of media awareness campaigns to promote breast cancer care among women. This is necessary because media messages can openly and obliquely create helpful changes in the healthy behaviours of women

5. Conclusion

Development journalism is a style of journalism that can positively influence health policies in any modern society. These journalists serve as change agents that can help promote breast cancer care among women in developing countries. Furthermore, these journalists can perform their informational, leadership and watchdog roles in tackling issues of breast cancer among women. For instance, since the mass media report health -related issues (HIV/AIDS, cancer, polio...etc) in the society, it tends to change the opinion of individuals about these issues or diseases. These individuals in turn create the awareness and knowledge of these diseases through the mass media as well.

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