



LALICO Journal of Languages, Literature, and Communication

Print ISSN: 2651-6462

www.lalicojournals.com

Volume 3; Issue 3; December 2025, Page No. 30-36.

Developing Appropriate Media Literacy Skills for Sustainable Rural Community Development

*Nkenchor, I.C.

Department of Mass Communication, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni Port
Harcourt

*Corresponding author email: christianankenchor@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined ways of developing appropriate media literacy skills for sustainable rural community development. Three research questions guided the study. The study anchored on uses and gratifications theory and adopted survey research design. The population of the study is 38 and census sampling technique was adopted. The instrument for data collection was a self-questionnaire which was validated by experts via face and content validity method and used for data gathering. The reliability of the instrument was established at 0.76 using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient (PPMC). The study found amongst others that the ways media literacy skills can be developed includes inculcating in media users' skills that will enable them to critically analyze and evaluate media content, make informed decisions, identify bias and misinformation and incorporate media literacy into school curriculum. The study concluded that if well-established media education curriculum as currently exist in developed countries such as United Kingdom, America, Canada etc are replicated in Nigeria education system, it will go a long way to promote media literacy and hence facilitate the process of rural community development in many areas. The study recommended amongst others that educational planners should as a matter of urgency introduce media literacy education as an obligatory curriculum in the school system from primary to tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Media, Media Literacy; Media literacy skills; Sustainable rural community, Development.

Introduction

Media is considered as any method of communication, and refers to a broad spectrum of shared information. Through this shared information, people receive news about current events, political issues, or current trends and happenings both local and international (Hobbs, 2010). This information can appear in the form of newspaper or advertisement, movies, television shows, and podcasts. There are different types of media, such as print, broadcast, internet and newspaper. All these media types are meant to keep individuals in society aware of what is going on around them and not just what they are currently experiencing in their lives. The Media is very important in the development of the society, without the media society will be numb, there will not be any means of passing information to the citizenry. It is because of the relevance of the media in societal development that gave rise to the academic field of study named "Development Communication"- a field of study that focuses on the use of communication to promote social and economic development (Nkenchor, 2024).

Media plays a major role in modern society by keeping people up to date on current events, trends, social movements, fashion, and any other piece of information that might interest different shades of people. Media influence society by giving people information so they can form opinions and make informed judgments. It also enlightens individuals on the experience of others and opens up the mind to new ideas, perspectives and ways of doing things. The vast amount of information being shared is filtered through the different types of media. All these attributes of the media help to raise an informed citizenry and this in turn bring about development in the society. Media literacy on the other hand, is an expanded conceptualization of literacy that includes the ability to access and analyze media messages, as well as create, reflect and take action using the power of information and communication in the world. Media literacy implies being knowledgeable about the different types of media such as print (which includes newspapers and magazines), broadcast media (television, radio programs and podcasts), internet media (social media, websites, Facebook, twitter, Instagram), and newspaper. Media literacy is seen as an important knowledge area for work, life, and citizenship. It includes the ability of media users to be able to

reflect on their media choices, identify sponsored content, recognize stereotypes, analyze propaganda and discuss the benefits, risks, and harms of media use (Potter, 2010).

Media literacy also includes the ability to create and share messages as a socially responsible communicator, and the practice of safety and civility as digital citizenship (Claybourn, 2023). Media literacy education thus, is the process used to advance media literacy competencies and is intended to promote awareness of media influence and create an active stance towards both consuming and creating media (Potter, 2010). Media literacy skills can be developed through education and training. In this regards, educational institutions will play crucial roles by teaching students and indeed other media users how to critically analyze media contents, identify bias and misinformation and understand the positive and negative impacts of the media in the society. By making media literacy an obligatory school curriculum, students at very early stage in their cognitive development would be able to develop the skills needed to make informed media choices that support sustainable development in the society they found themselves (Nkenchor, 2024). Media literacy education in recent times has attracted scholarly attention in most universities across the globe. One key aspect of media literacy is the ability of media users to identify sponsored media content, that can be misleading or biased.

The society today is characterized by aggressive media. Information is constantly at peoples' fingertips be it through the books, newspapers and magazines they read, the televisions they watch, the radio stations they listen to or the computers that connect them to the world in a matter of seconds. In today's digital age, media literacy skills are becoming more important than ever before. This is because media knowledge is needed to be able to access the numerous information available both on conventional media and online to remain current and well informed. Obtaining accurate and unbiased information has become necessary to make informed decisions on a number of issues. Scholars of development communication have strongly advocated the use of media literacy skills in promoting the course of society and community development (Nkenchor, 2024). They are of the view that acquisition of appropriate media literacy skills will engender the use of media and communication technology in disseminating information, help in the development of communication campaigns, raise awareness about development issues and facilitate dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. This has become very imperative in the light of the emerging roles of the media in the development of the individual, organizations, and the society at large. Media literacy skills if well developed and harnessed can facilitate development in a number of ways. Some of these ways as identify by Nkenchor (2024) include:

1. Good media knowledge will promote the sharing of knowledge, data, and updates on a number of issues essential for making informed decisions and taking appropriate actions that will bring about meaningful development in areas such as public health eg, campaigns to raise awareness about diseases, preventive measures to avoid certain ailments. This will result to improved health practices among the citizenry who through the instrumentality of the media are now better informed.
2. Disseminating development messages. When the individuals in a community are well informed about any development initiative as made available through the media, they tend to participate actively towards it success. Thus, information sharing through the media create space for the people to take part in development initiatives and ownership.
3. Communication as passed on through the media can be used to persuade the individuals to adopt certain behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes and to influence their opinions and actions. Thus, by shaping public opinion and behavior, the media can drive positive change and contribute to the advancement of societies.
4. In development projects, effective communication as passed on through the media serves as a means of building relationships and fostering collaborations among stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries. This is essential for building trust, resolving conflicts and achieving common goals. By facilitating dialogue, negotiations, and consensus building, the media can strengthen partnership, enhance teamwork and promote sustainable development.
5. The media plays crucial roles in project monitoring and evaluation. Through feedback mechanisms, surveys, and assessment, the media is able to track progress, measure impact and identify areas of improvement on public projects and be in a position to effectively communicate to major stakeholders who based on such available information can now make evidence-based decisions.

Informed by the above, it is then pertinent for scholars in media studies to begin to think along the line of developing appropriate media literacy skills for media users that can promote sustainable rural community development.

Statement of the problem

Media literacy is conceived to mean the ability to access and analyze media messages, as well as create, reflect and take action using the power of information and communication in the world. This ability to access and analyze media messages can be explored and effectively utilized in rural community development especially in developing country like Nigeria. In recent times, the inclusion of media literacy as part of the obligatory curriculum of university education and indeed other levels of education is gaining more grounds among countries of the world. The advocacy for media literacy education among scholars also appears to be gaining more grounds and adding impetus to role of media in economic development. This is further reinforced by emerging knowledge on the role of media in promoting sustainable rural community development. This paper therefore examines the appropriate media literacy skills that can be developed through media education for sustainable rural community development in Nigeria.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were developed:

1. In what ways can media literacy skills be developed to enable media users make informed media choices for sustainable rural development?
2. In what ways can media literacy skills be developed to enable media users identify sponsored media contents for sustainable rural development?
3. In what ways can media literacy skills be developed to enable media users create and share messages as a social responsibility for sustainable rural development?

Conceptual clarifications

Media

The term media is used to connote the communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data. The term refers to the components of the mass media communication industry, such as print media, publishing, the news media, photography, cinema, broadcasting and advertising (<https://www.igi-global.com>). From another dimension, media is the main means of mass communication using platforms such as broadcasting, publishing, and the internet. In its simplest form, media is conceived as a means of communication such as radio and television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet, that reach or influence people widely (<https://libguides.aber.ac.uk/c.php>). Media according to Ugande (2012), is an organized, technical and psychological process of communication designed to reach and influence large numbers of people simultaneously without the necessity of personal contact. It comprises all technological and mechanical devices engaged by a source to reach a diversified and heterogenous audience with messages simultaneously.

Media literacy/literacy skills

Media literacy within the context of this paper is the ability to reflect on one's media choices, be able to identify sponsored content, recognize stereotypes, be able to analyze propaganda and be able to discuss the risks and harming of media use. Media literacy also includes the ability to create and share messages as a socially responsible communicator, and the practice of safety and civility in accessing information (en.m.wikipedia.org). Media literacy education itself is the process used to advance media literacy competences, and it is intended to promote awareness of media influence and create an active stance towards both consuming and creating media. Media literacy education provides tools to help people develop receptive media capability to critically analyze messages, offer opportunities for learners to broaden their experience of media, and help them to develop generative media capability to increase creative skills in making their own media messages.

Sustainable rural development

Sustainable rural development is a comprehensive approach that seeks to balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental stewardship in rural areas. By adopting sustainable practices, the rural dwellers can enhance the wellbeing of their communities while preserving their natural resources for future generations (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse>). Sustainable rural development as conceived by Mba (2024), is defined as a multi-dimensional process encompassing improved provision of services, enhanced opportunities for income generation and local economic development, improved physical infrastructure, social cohesion, and physical security within rural communities. It also involves supporting active representation in the local political process and effective provision for the vulnerable. Rural development thus is the process of enabling change in the rural communities to enable the poor people to earn more, invest in themselves and their communities and improve the quality of their lives.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on uses and gratifications theory. The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is a communication theory that focuses on the active role of media consumers in selecting and using media to satisfy

their needs and desires. This theory suggests that individuals are not passive recipients of media messages, but rather actively seek out and use media to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. The UGT posits that individuals choose media content based on their personal preferences, motivations, and goals, and that the media serves as a tool for fulfilling these needs. One of the key proponents of the Uses and Gratifications Theory is Elihu Katz, who along with Jay Blumler, first introduced the theory in the 1970s. Katz and Blumler argued that individuals use media for a variety of reasons, including entertainment, information, personal identity, social integration, and escapism. They believed that individuals are selective in their media consumption, choosing content that aligns with their interests and values. Media literacy has become an essential skill in today's digital age, as individuals are constantly bombarded with information from various media sources. Developing media literacy skills is crucial for individuals to critically analyze and evaluate media messages, understand the impact of media on society, and make informed decisions about media consumption. In this study, we will explore the Uses and Gratifications Theory as a suitable framework for understanding and developing media literacy skills.

The uses and gratifications theory posits that individuals actively seek out media to fulfil specific needs and desires. According to this theory, people use media for various purposes, such as entertainment, information, social interaction, and personal identity. By examining the motivations behind media consumption, researchers can gain insights into how individuals engage with media and the gratifications they derive from it. Applying the uses and gratifications theory to the development of media literacy skills can help individuals become more aware of their media consumption habits and motivations. By understanding why they consume certain types of media, individuals can critically evaluate the messages they encounter and make informed decisions about the media content they engage with. This can lead to a more critical and discerning approach to media consumption, ultimately enhancing media literacy skills. By using the uses and gratifications theory as a framework for studying media literacy skills, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how individuals engage with media and the impact of media consumption on their attitudes and behaviours. This can inform the development of interventions and educational programs aimed at promoting media literacy skills among individuals of all ages.

Methodology

The study employed survey design. The population of the study consists all 38 lecturers in the department of English and communication studies, faculty of Humanities, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt Rivers State-Nigeria. The census sampling technique was adopted. A researcher designed questionnaire was validated and used to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument for the study was subjected to face and content validity and the Pearson Moment Correlational Coefficient (PPMC) was used to establish a reliability coefficient of 0.76. The data collected from the respondents were collated, coded and analyzed using mean statistics.

Results

Research Question one: In what ways can media literacy skills be developed to enable media users make informed media choices that promote sustainable rural development?

Table 1: Mean statistics on ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users make informed media choices that promote sustainable rural development.

S/N	Assessed ways of developing media literacy skills for sustainable rural development	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	By inculcating skill that will enable media users to critically analyze and evaluate media content that promote sustainable rural development	3.41	0.19	Strongly agreed
2	By inculcating skills that will users make enable media informed decisions on the media platforms that contribute to sustainable rural development	2.89	0.17	Agreed
3	By teaching media users how to identify bias and misinformation and understand the impact of media on sustainable rural community development	3.31	0.18	Strongly agreed
4	By incorporating media literacy into school curriculum so students can develop the appropriate skills needed to make informed media choices that support rural community development agenda	3.28	0.18	Strongly agreed
5	By inculcating in media users, the skills to be able consume a variety of media sources such as news articles, documentaries and social media and be able to critically evaluate information presented that promote sustainable rural development.	2.72	0.17	Agreed
Grand mean		3.12	0.18	Strongly agreed

The result of the data in table 1 shows that lecturers' perceptions on the ways media literacy skills can be developed includes inculcating in media users' skills that will enable them to critically analyze and evaluate media content, make informed decisions, identify bias and misinformation and incorporate media literacy into school curriculum.

Research Question Two: In what ways can media literacy skills be developed to enable media users identify sponsored media contents that promote sustainable rural development?

Table 2: Mean statistics on ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users identify sponsored media contents that promote sustainable rural development.

S N	Assessed ways of developing media literacy skills for identification of sponsored media content that promote sustainable rural development	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	By inculcating common tactics used by advertisers and sponsors which will enable media users' better discern between unbiased information and sponsored content for sustainable rural development.	3.28	0.18	Strongly agree
2	By inculcating the skill to regularly consume a variety of media sources and critically evaluating the content for sustainable rural development	2.82	0.17	Agree
3	Train media users to be adept at recognizing sponsored materials for sustainable rural development.	2.72	0.17	Agree
4	Training media users to actively seek out diverse perspectives and questioning motives behind information presented for sustainable rural development	2.73	0.17	Agree
5	Inculcating in media users the skill of utilizing technology to aid the identification of sponsored content for sustainable rural community development	2.61	0.17	Agree
Grand mean		2.83	0.17	Agreed

Results in Table 2 indicates that all the assessed items were ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users be able to identify sponsored media contents that promote sustainable rural development.

Research Question Three: In what ways can media literacy skills be developed to enable media users create and share messages as social responsibility for sustainable rural development?

Table 3: Mean statistics on ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users create and share messages as a social responsibility for sustainable rural development.

S N	Assessed ways of developing media literacy skills to enable media users create and share messages as a social responsibility for rural development	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	Train media users on how to use media tools for positive social change for sustainable community development.	3.66	0.67	Strongly agreed
2	Organize training programs for media users about digital platforms that can be used to raise awareness about important issues in their communities for sustainable development	3.33	0.60	Strongly agreed
3	Training media users to imbibe a culture of media ethics and responsibility for sustainable	3.48	0.70	Strongly agreed
4	Teaching media users' ethical communication practices in being truthful, respectful and inclusive to build trust and credibility in media content for sustainable rural development	3.25	0.74	Strongly agreed
5	Develop in media users' skills for promoting social and economic progress for sustainable rural development	3.57	0.71	Strongly agreed

Data in table 3 shows that all the assessed items are ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users create and share messages as social responsibility for sustainable rural development.

Discussion

Ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users make informed media choices for sustainable rural development

The first finding of this study reveals that media literacy skills can be developed among media users in a number of ways which includes: inculcating skills that will enable media users to critically analyze and evaluate media contents; make informed decisions on the media platforms; identify bias and misinformation and understand the impact of media on community development; incorporating media literacy into school curriculum so that students can develop the appropriate skills needed for informed choices that support development; and skills that will enable media users be able to consume a variety of media sources such as news articles, documentaries and social media and be in a position to critically evaluate information presented that promote sustainable development.

The above finding is in line with the views of Mba (2024:82), where she posited that we need information as made available through the media to learn, keep ourselves abreast of our immediate environment and the world, and make informed judgments and decisions about societal issues and events. Human societies depend on information from the media to banish ignorance, and attain societal development. In similar vein, Sen (2023), had equally observed that for sustainable development to be achieved, information passed on through the media is truly needed.

The import of the present finding on sustainable rural community development lies in the fact that about 50% of or more dwellers in Nigeria reside in the rural communities (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020) and are mostly illiterates and therefore marginalized and deprived of the benefits of modern society in terms of development. They have less or no access to mass media channels, even where they do, they lack the requisite media literacy skills to make informed judgment. Within the context of the present finding, rural dwellers need adequate enlightenment in the form of media literacy education to be able to thrive especially in this 21st century where information rules the world. The present finding is equally corroborated by Akpor (2013), when he observed that no self-sustaining rural development can take place in Nigeria without the masses of our people being effectively mobilized, genuinely motivated and properly organized for productive activity. It is important to understand here that media literacy has the potency of increasing rural peoples understanding of their peculiar development challenges, take advantage of the use of media and build spirit of solidarity form a common development agenda and boost their capacity to take their development destinies in their hands.

Ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users identify sponsored media contents for sustainable rural development

The second finding of this study reveals that media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users be able to identify sponsored media contents by knowing common tactics used by advertisers and sponsors and be in a better position to discern between unbiased information and sponsored content; be able to regularly consume a variety of media sources and critically evaluate the content; be adept at recognizing sponsored materials; actively seek out diverse perspectives and questioning motives behind information presented; and be able to utilize technology to aid the identification of sponsored contents.

Sponsored media content is a form of social media, blog, video, or traditional media piece of posted content that a brand pays for to reach its key target audience online. Understanding of sponsored media messages will place rural dwellers in a better position to create and sponsor post for rural community development. They can take advantage of the presence of companies, organizations and corporate bodies found in the communities and ask for sponsorship in creating contents to boost community development effort in many ways such as health care and other related areas.

In line with the present finding of this study, Mba (2024), reiterates that several health media campaigns in rural communities of Nigeria such as drug abuse, vaccines and/immunizations, maternal healthcare, family planning and epidemic control and prevention etc were successful courtesy of the persuasive contents created using the media. Creating content using the media will sensitize people on the benefits of a given project towards community development. It is on record that media sensitization and advocacy played significant roles in rural dwellers knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS disease in rural communities in Nigeria through awareness, information spreading and knowledge sharing as made available through content creation using the media.

Ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users to create and share messages as a social responsibility for sustainable rural development

The third finding of the study reveals that the various ways media literacy skills can be developed to enable media users create and share messages as social responsibility for sustainable rural development include: to train media users on how to use media tools for positive social change; organize training programs for media users about digital platforms that can be used to raise awareness about important development related issues; to training media users to imbibe a culture of media ethics and responsibility; teaching media users' ethical communication practices

in being truthful, respectful and inclusive to build trust and credibility in media content; and to develop in media users' skills for promoting social and economic progress.

The present finding is reinforced by Nasir & Ciroma (2023), whose study found that media literacy education was instrumental to the ability of student to verify fake news either through a manual or automatic method in rural communities in Northern Nigeria. They were also able to create media content that promoted social development and cohesion in rural communities.

The present findings have serious implication for media literacy campaign as an aggressive instrument for sustainable rural development in Rivers State and indeed other states of the Federation. It means that if appropriate media literacy skills are imbibed by youths and indeed members of the society, it will help raise awareness about important development related issues; promote a culture of media ethics and responsibility; bring about ethical communication practices in being truthful, respectful and build trust and credibility in media content creation; and be able to promote social and economic progress in rural communities.

Conclusion

The study examined the development of appropriate media literacy skills for sustainable rural development in Rivers State using the opinions of lecturers in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The finding reveals that developing media literacy skills through media education could be achieved through a number of ways, among which include: skills to make informed media choices that promote sustainable rural development, skills that enables media users be able to identify sponsored media contents for sustainable rural development, and lastly, skills that enables media users create and share messages as social responsibility for sustainable rural development. In addition to this finding, some media scholars have extolled the role which media education can play in promoting media literacy for an informed society. Based on these findings, the paper concludes that if well-established media education curriculum such as currently exist in developed countries such as United kingdom, America, Canada etc are replicated in Nigeria education system, it will go a long way to promote media literacy and hence facilitate the process of rural community development in many areas.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by the paper:

1. Educational planners should as a matter of urgency introduce media literacy education as an obligatory curriculum in the school system from primary to tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
2. Media organizations and Associations should organize campaigns to enlighten the general public on the need to be media literate and the role of literacy in overall national development.
3. Media literacy programs should be regularly mounted by tertiary institutions to promote media literacy education among students
4. Media literacy for rural community development should form the theme of conferences organized in departments of Communication arts in tertiary institutions

References

- Akpor, E. D. (2013). Mass Media and Grass Root Mobilization in Nigeria. *Journal of Communication and Culture*. 4(3), 22-32.
- Claybourn, C. (2023). What is Media Literacy? What parents need to know. News and World Report.
- Hobbs, R. (2010). *Digital and Media Literacy: A plan of Action*, Aspen Institute. <https://libguides.aber.ac.uk/c.php?g=111111&a=111111> <https://www.igi-global.com>
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509-523.
- Mba, P. I. (2024). Media and Health Communication Campaigns for Rural Development in Nigeria. *AKSU Journal of Communication Research* 9, (2), 82-95.
- Nasir, M. J., & Ciroma, A. (2023). Impact of media and information literacy in Nigerian Colleges of Education Curriculum: A case of detecting fake news. *American Journal of Communication*, 5 (1), 28-37
- Nkenchor, I. C. (2024). Deploying Development Communication Strategies to Socio-Environment Constraints in Degema Community of Rivers State. *AKSU Journal of Communication Research*, 9, (2), 61-81
- Potter, W. J. (2020). Four Fundamental Challenges in Designing Media Literacy Interventions. *Media Literacy in a Disruptive Media Environment*. Routledge 57-74.
- Potter, W. J. (2010). The state of Media Literacy. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. 54 (4):675-696.
- Suleiman, Y., Aondover, E. M., & Sabiu, G. (2023). Media and National Development in Demographic Societies. *In Journal of Communication and Media Research*, 15, (1), 50-59 <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse>
- Ugande, G. B. (2012). The role of mass media in engaging private sector in th development of Nigeria. *Benue Journal of Communication and Development*, 2 (1&2), 107-114.