

MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN IRELAND: AFRICA-CENTRED SATELLITE TELEVISION STATIONS ON SKY

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ABSTRACT

The 1990 Broadcasting Act in the United Kingdom (UK) facilitated the expansion of minority owned and operated satellite television stations, especially in London that create and broadcast content aimed at immigrant communities' resident in the UK, France and the island of Ireland (north and south). These diasporic media outfits are part of a wider and gradually-evolving media-sphere that mirrors the shift towards multi-racial composition of media audience across Western Europe and beyond. This study investigates how minority groups, particularly people of African origin, resident in the Republic of Ireland engage with and appropriate media content on Africa-centred satellite television stations on the British Sky Broadcasting (Sky) platform. Using questionnaires and semi-structured interview research methods, the study found that viewers of African channels on Sky in Ireland not only engage with media content for political and cultural purposes but also consume entertainment broadcasts. The study recommends that in today's competitive media market, mainstream as well as minority television stations can increase their ratings and market share by offering interracial and multilingual audience-centred content both on time and on demand.

Keyword: Minority media, audience research, Ireland, Media content, television studies.

INTRODUCTION

In the last five decades, migration trends into the UK in general and the Republic of Ireland in particular have produced transnational groups that are related by origin, culture, language, ethnicity and religion (Shobha & Ramaswami, 2006). These groups (mainly from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean Islands) are conceptualized as comprising members of an ethnic group who reside in their home land and in a number of countries where they or their ancestors may have arrived as immigrants (Levitt, 2009). Communication within these minority groups was mainly through small and independent media platforms, producing and distributing weekly newspapers and magazines to meet the information and entertainment needs of their somewhat, far-flung community members. However, the deregulation of media and communication industries in the UK in 1990, and the introduction of satellite broadcasting technology has enabled these communities to expand their communication activities to a much larger scale.

One of such areas of increased media activity among transnational groups is in the use of Direct Broadcasting Satellite (DBS) - a multi-channel system, powered by highly efficient satellites that transmit television signals to home subscribers with small antenna. And with its digital video compression techniques, the technology is not only cost-efficient for operators, it also has the potential to improve programme diversity to the extent that it expands viewers access to existing diversity on one hand while stimulating commissioning of new content on the other hand (Johnson & Castleman, 1991). Importantly, DBS allows, by reason of the low operational cost, small and medium-sized television stations easy access to enter and exit the television broadcasting market.

In addition to technological revolution in the broadcast industry, the limited representation of minorities in the programming content of mainstream television and minority television operators within the UK and Ireland partly account for the early adoption and use of DBS by a growing number of minority media operators. Immigrant communities found satellite television particularly appropriate in maintaining active links among their members through news, information and entertainment. They also engage the technology to solve myriads of peculiar challenges including but not limited to acute access to resources, shortage of opportunities and partners, insufficient funding, institutional stereotypes as well as the economies of scale. Rather than directly challenge mainstream networks, these outfits now utilize available technology and market dynamism to create, sustain and increase their community's communicative capacity.

Since the 1990 Broadcasting Act deregulated the broadcasting media-sphere and consequently liberated minority media in the UK, there has been increasing research into the experience of immigrants, in terms of audience studies in Ireland (Cunningham 2014; Titley ; and O'Neil & Titley, 2011). This paper seeks to expand existing knowledge on how people of African origin domiciled in Ireland engage with and appropriate the content of Africa-centred television stations on Sky. Inward migration into Ireland since 1999, as opposed to emigration has not only changed the structure of Irish society but has also changed the composition and demography of media audience within Ireland. This study examines the dynamics of media consumption, especially in minority communities to investigate how new content, targeted at minorities have shaped viewers preference. This study challenges the one-way traffic, hypodermic needle theory which asserts that media audience are passive and dormant which seem to have given way to a more robust encoding and decoding theory, which asserts that media consumers in Ireland as elsewhere are engaging, active and able to negotiate television meanings from their televisual experience.

The study represents an almost unprecedented exploration of a great diversity of African voices articulating a variety of views on televisual African images and experiences which will provide useful insight into television reception studies in Ireland. Specifically, the study explored the role African channels on Sky play, if any, in forging connections within the African community in Ireland. To what extent do these channels fill particular voids: cultural, political, economic, religious and social that mainstream media, especially Ireland's national broadcaster- *Raidio Teilifis Eireann* (RTE), TV3, TG4 as well as other major media outfits fall short to accommodate? Equally, it examines the opinions of African viewers in Ireland about content, quality and professionalism of African channels on Sky. These diverse research questions are of key importance for the role that minority media play in processes of identity deconstruction and community construction and for participating in increasing or decreasing social exclusion and participation.

Minority Media: An Overview

In general, minority media can be local, national and global; and can use conventional, old technologies, new technologies, or a combination of the two to reach out to their communities. Georgiou (2009) notes that the content they communicate can be produced in the country of origin or in the country of settlement; and can reach or address a specific ethnic group or a collection of ethnic groups. Increasingly, minority-media are flexible, adaptive, broadcast/publish material from different places around the globe and experiment with their own identity as media and as representative cultural institutions of specific communities (Husband, Charles, Beattle & Markelin, 2000).

Characteristically, all diasporic media address an audience imagining itself as a specific community, sharing specific identities with extensive diversity (Husband, 1994). They might operate as commercial, community, public, municipal or other organizations and can adapt a role as the mouthpiece of a community or identify as independent and commercial institutions and their output

can be in the ethnic language(s), in the language(s) of the country of settlement or in a combination of languages just as their output can be information or entertainment centred or a combination of both (Riggins, 1992). Husband (1994) again notes that they use media images to connect local experiences with each other and hence provide meaning to would-be disparate and apparently unconnected events and programs. The diversity of the minority media field makes it difficult to draw singular and all-inclusive conclusions about their character, their output and their far-flung audience.

The regulatory framework within which the media in general operate in the UK is largely shaped by prevailing state policies, social factors and the dominant political philosophy of the ruling elite- an increasingly liberal system that promotes free enterprise and equal opportunity (Gillespie, 1995). Equally importantly, social and economic forces and the overall public perception about integration and assimilation all inform and influence public policy. Added to the mix are regional and international forces including globalisation, commercialisation, technology, changing global geopolitics and the emergence of transnational media organisations that exert pressure on national structures. With these contending national and international forces in context, Cottle (2006) observed that successive UK governments since 1979 have worked relentlessly, via legislation and policies to encourage the growth and spread of the media in general, and the minority media in particular such as the 2003 Communication Act (Ofcom) that lifted restrictions on cross-media ownership.

The context described above, along with the resilience of transnational groups have transformed the UK's media landscape significantly. As indicated in the Parekh Report (2000) minority media outlets have not only increased but have had to transform and become more commercial in content and more professional in operation. The Social Exclusion Unit report (2000) noted that the adoption of modern communication technologies and worldwide web networks have radically transformed the reach, content and influence of minority media in the UK with London as its main hub. Cost-effective and efficient technologies that allow narrowcasting to target specific audiences are now in use.

Immigration, Minorities and Ireland

The economic boom of the 1990's in Ireland as well as direct state policy geared towards attracting multinational organizations with low corporation tax (12.5%), further incentives, including zero (and later low) export taxes opened up the space for inward migration. This measure, coupled with the introduction of the Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF), made Ireland an investment paradise for the multinational companies. In addition, the state embraced multiculturalism, leading to increasing migration into Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and other urban centres. Although, migrants, especially highly skilled workers from mainly England, the United States of America and mainland Europe had always settled in Ireland for work and other purposes, immigration into Ireland in the late 1990s and early 2000s were unprecedented.

According to CSO data, previous migrants into Ireland were mainly professionals and citizens from Western countries, however, migration in the 1990s included asylum seekers and refugees from outside the European Union- Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America. Economic and political turmoil in these geographies provided push factors for outward migration. Until the late 1990s, asylum seeking in Ireland was almost insignificant. In 1992, there were 424 applications but in 2000, the figure rose to close to 11,000 applications. The 2011, census figures indicated that about 65,000 people of African descent resided in Ireland out of a total population of 4.5 million (Census, 2011).

In Ireland, inward migration since the turn of the century is yet to significantly alter the composition and content of mainstream Irish media institutions; neither has it led to the emergence of a vibrant and thriving minority media sphere. In spite of the Celtic Tiger years and increasing number of immigrants both from within and outside the European Union representing 10% (CSO, 2016) of Ireland's

population and the consequent reconfiguration of the ethnic make up that now characterise the "new Ireland". Titley (2011) found an absence of corresponding plurality and diversity within all sectors of the Irish media. His studies on mapping cultural diversity within the Irish media suggests that immigrants are under-represented, if at all represented, in most media offering on mainstream broadcasting platforms. While it appears that increasing portions of the media in Ireland have somewhat responded to this changed social context through some form of inclusive policies and initiatives geared towards multiculturalism, inter-culturalism and integration; these efforts are perceived as both insufficient and inadequate representation of a mixed population. It appears that the definition and interpretation of diversity in Irish media contrasts sharply with immigrant's perception (Titley, 2011).

Within the immigrant community in Ireland, there is a clamour for plurality of sources, perspectives and foci in all sectors of the Irish media. It is believed that programming content within the media in Ireland does not represent or accommodate the internal diversity and differences of migrant populations. Although his study included migrants from China, Poland and Nigeria (the largest immigrant groups in Ireland), the findings suggests that the national horizons of Irish news were often understood as local or parochial, and the scope of international news as being similarly limited (Titley, 2011). As noted by Ugba (2011), some mainstream newspapers (The Irish Times) and the national broadcaster, Radio Television Eireann (RTE) have introduced columns and programs that are presented by members of the minority community (Bisi Adigun from Nigeria and Shalini Sinha, a Canadian of Indian ethnicity), these efforts are often too little and largely inadequate.

The presence of UK-based diasporic and transnational media in the public sphere in Ireland through the Sky satellite broadcasting platform is notably important in many ways. Ugba (2011) observes that Africa-focused channels on Sky not only serve the commercial and expansionist agenda of several of London-based minority media outfits but also fulfils lingual, cultural and economic purposes of media audiences in Ireland. Ugba also suggests that entertainment, news and informational content on these channels are consumed regularly and critically in Ireland as these media content resonate with migrant communities in the Republic.

This present evidence-based study through a systematic investigation of the televisual experiences of Africans in Ireland aims to delineate the role and importance of the media in general and how diasporic communities, particularly people of African origin appropriate its use in their daily experiences with implications for content creation and consumption in mainstream and minority media in Ireland, the UK and beyond.

Audience research: a theoretical framework

Audience research has its roots in attempts to understand the core requirements of a functioning media in terms of revenue, reach, consumer demographics, psychographic analysis, and in determining audience content preference (Devereux, 2013). Audience research is centred on media consumers: who they are, where they are, what they want, how and why they engage with media content and what effect media content have on them?

As indicated by Alasuutari (1999), three generations of audience research stand out. The first generation of audience research featured the hypodermic needle theory which asserts that the public can be controlled and manipulated through media content. The media was viewed as an all-powerful medium used by corporations, governments and politicians to influence and shape the opinion and perception of the population. The audience was thought to be passive, dormant, vulnerable from consuming media content and as such can be easily controlled. This theory, made popular by Adorno and Horkheimer (1970) asserts that media messages are all powerful and can inject ideas, values and

information directly into each media consumer's mind, conceived as powerless, thereby producing direct and desired effects. The audience is seen as incapable of making their own minds and unable to negotiate media meanings.

The second generation, according to Hermes (2007) took off when studies of reception, especially of romantic serials paved way for what became known as qualitative audience reception studies. The Two-Step Flow theory which became popular during this era, noted that the public formed their opinion from the opinions of opinion leaders, some of whom are influenced by the media. It therefore suggested that there are opinion leaders and opinion followers and through social persuasion, influence is exerted. Scholar in this school of thought note that media content influence and is influence by experts and opinion leaders who in turn influence the public. The two-step flow of communication was introduced and made popular by Lazarsfield (1955). Unlike the hypodermic needle theory that claims the media is all-powerful, the two-step flow incorporates human interaction and interpretation of media content in negotiating meanings and rejects the view that viewers are passive and incapable of navigating media content.

About the late 1980's, researchers began to question audience ethnography. In so doing, there was a wave of rethinking of the role of the mass media and of how media messages were integrated in the daily lives of consumers as well as the concept of audience preference and power. Blumer and Gurevitch (1974) were central in the Uses and Gratification theory that emerged. The theory asserts that media audiences find and use media content for personal needs. The audience is viewed as active, engaged and responsible. Similarly, Stuart (1980) asserts that individuals receive and interpret media content based on gender, education, nationality and cultural context. Specifically, through encoding and decoding, individuals read text and give meaning to it through preferred reading or the dominant reading, negotiated reading (partly agree) and oppositional reading (disagree) of the content. A key feature of several contemporary reception studies is a rejection of the view that the meaning of a text can be accessed merely through a detailed study of the text itself. An alternative view that has emerged consequently is one in which audience make meanings. Boyd-Barrett (2001) refers to it as a form of interpretive knowledge that counters the institutional perspective. This places the audiences in the driving seat of their understanding and negotiation of media content and narratives based on individual situations and societal forces.

Methodology

To gather data required to address the research questions set out in the introduction, mixed research method (questionnaires and interviews) were employed to elicit the opinions and perception of partakers. The familiarity of participants with the study objectives and the cost-effectiveness of the method (questionnaire) provided justification for its use as a research tool. The questions were uniformly presented with no middleman bias, almost eliminating the researchers influence that may prompt respondents to answer questions in a certain manner. Questionnaires also proved to be less intrusive; allowing respondents to reflect on the questions appropriately and fill and return accordingly at a time and place appropriate and convenient. For the purpose of this research, over 100 questionnaires were sent out to specific participants based on two criteria: their country of origin and their consumption of television content on Africa-focussed channels on Sky.

Questionnaires are not without shortcomings. Participants generally are often reluctant to fill out open-ended questions due to efforts required to attend to the questions. When participants do, open-ended questions mostly generate large amounts of data that might take time to process and analyse. Equally, open-ended questions could be a disincentive to participants thereby leading to poor response rate. Respondents may also be few and could also answer superficially, especially as many generally view questionnaire as burdensome and time-consuming. While questionnaires have the capacity to reach

broad participants across geographical divides, it is impossible to determine the identity of respondents as well as their level of sincerity.

To limit the impact of these shortcomings on the validity of gathered data and its corresponding analysis, personal interviews were conducted to generate qualitative data for the research. A total of 20 semi-structured interviews, each lasting over half an hour were conducted in specific locations in Ireland. The interviews were not only far more personal, qualitative and interactive; they also allowed the interviewer to work directly with and probe further using follow-up questions. In general, interviews are cost-effective; especially as what was sought were the perspectives and individual opinions of viewers' televisual experiences. Interviews however can be very time consuming and laborious to transcribe. Importantly however, both research tools proved to be quite useful in gathering the required data adequate to address the study objectives.

Figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2015) in Ireland indicate that approximately 10 percent of the population of Ireland now comprises of foreign born residents both from within and outside the European Union. Of this percentage, 65,000 residents of African origin live in Ireland. To gather data (interviews and questionnaires) from the largest selection of African immigrants that reside in the four constituting regions (Munster, Leinster, Ulster and Connacht) and capture an equal sample of the target population, stratified sampling methods was employed. In all, 13 geographically diverse counties were selected. These included: Leinster- (Dublin, Kildare, West Meath, and Carlow), Munster- (Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Waterford, and Tipperary), Connacht- (Galway, Sligo, and Roscommon), Ulster- (Donegal, Cavan)

Mytton (1999) posits that the justification for employing stratified sampling is that dividing the population into distinct, independent strata can enable researchers draw inferences about specific subgroups that may be lost in a more generalized random sample. Approximately 100 individuals were targeted and contacted through questionnaires. Similar to UK demographic patterns where majority of non-nationals reside in England in general and London in particular; a high percentage of African immigrants in Ireland reside in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford (CSO, 2016). Importantly, Nigerians, South Africans and Congolese constitute the majority of immigrants in Ireland and as a consequence, participants from Nigerians and South Africans are slightly higher in the study. This notwithstanding, robust effort was made to engage as many Africans, including but not limited to Ghana, Zimbabweans, Cameroonians, Rwandans and Angolans.

The total sample was spread more or less evenly across all age groups and employment categories. Of the 100 questionnaires administered, the response rate was 80 percent (42 were administered by post, 18 over the phone and 30 through face-to-face). In total, 10 interviews were conducted: Cork (2), Galway (2), Waterford (2), and Dublin (4). In terms of gender composition of participants, 35 were female while the remaining 45 were male. The employment status of participants indicates that 28 were in full employment (retail, security, contact centres and care assistants), 15 were unemployed, 25 were in higher and further education while the remaining 12 were self-employed (taxi drivers and beauty professionals). The age distribution of participants indicates that 13 people under the age of 20 took part in the study, 14 participants were in their 20s, 22 participants were over 30, 21 over 40 and 8 over 50. The most significant group to respond are participants in their 30's and 40's who together constitute half of all respondents. The gathered data was therefore representative of the sample population.

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that African channels on Sky including: *Ben TV (182)*, *AIT International (183)*, *OpenHeaven TV (199)*, *ABN*, *African Channel (209)*, *VOX Africa (218)*, *eNCA Africa (518)* *LoveWorld TV (586)* *KICC TV (592)* and *Nollywood Movies (329)* played and continue to play important roles in the lives of people of African-origin living in Ireland. Majority of questionnaire respondents and interview participants agreed that they not only watch African channels daily and regularly but they tune in constantly to maintain links through news with their homeland (Africa) and to a lesser extent, to stay up to date about fashion, music and entertainment within the African community resident in the UK (mainly). Consumption of Africa-focused television content within the African community in Ireland cuts across geographical, age, religious and socio-economic status. The viewing of Africa-oriented content is not only normal and prevalent but is largely integrated into the daily life routine of its viewers. This broad overview notwithstanding, there are dissimilarities and emerging viewing patterns based on age, gender, socio-economic status and level of education.

The findings indicate that African channels are viewed for a variety of reasons. The most profound is for music and entertainment, particularly Nollywood movies. Nollywood is Nigeria's version of Hollywood (America's major movie hub). It is defined as "the totality of activities taking place in the Nigerian film industry, be it in English (or any other Nigerian language)... Ayengho, 2012). A large majority of interview respondents agreed that Nollywood movies comes first on the list of their most watched programs on African Channels on Sky. This view cuts across ages, social status and gender. Participants during interview noted that movies from Africa present a different image of the continent that challenges the stereotypes often transmitted on Western and mainstream television- images of poverty, war and famine.

A significant majority of questionnaire respondents 88% agreed that they engage African channels to stay in touch with political and economic developments in their home countries. An overwhelming majority believe that watching African channels keeps them informed and educated. A participant added that while mainstream Irish media stations mainly report on disasters, diseases and debt; "*African channels present a more comprehensive picture of the continent. They therefore provide an alternative perspective of the positive developments within the sub-region without necessarily and overtly focussing on the negatives*". Other participants noted that watching African channels, especially the news analysis and discussions segments help them interpret emerging business and political trends and patterns on the continent from an African perspective. This, they added, helped them contextualised the economic situations of their family and friends just as it aided their business decisions around investing in their home country.

In addition to news content, a large minority of respondents, especially questionnaire respondents under the age of 30 claimed that they watch African channels for the entertainment content- African music and soaps operas. This is especially so among South Africa participants. Several interview respondents also commented that the music videos and comedy shows from several African countries, particularly English speaking nations like Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria and Congo (French-speaking) can compete favourably with those produced in Europe and North America. One questionnaire participant commented that "*many young Irish of African origin whose parents are first generation migrants totally identify with good music from Africa and have seen such music on talent shows like Britain's Got Talent and the X Factor in the UK.*"

The study found that across Ireland, interest in and consumption of Africa music both viewed on-line and on television has increased significantly in recent years. A questionnaire participant noted that: "*I feel more connected to African music!*" The preference for African music is not only prevalent among

the over 30's age group but also among teenagers and young adults of African origin. As noted during interviews, the improved lyrics, video quality, entertainment content and collaboration with international hip-hop artists particularly from Hollywood in the United States of America such as Akon, Chris Browne and others have endeared young African adults to contemporary African music.

A high percentage of respondents over the 40 years' age bracket admit during interview that they consume more of movies than any other form of content. They also indicated interest in and engagement with religious and cultural content (festivals). One of the interviewed participant commented that African channels should "*devote their time to more culturally informative and historically educative content in order to show case Africa's diverse and rich heritage to the international audience*". This observation must have emerged from a perspective that African channels essentially exist to project Africa's manifold cultures on one hand while on the other it assumes that these channels are being viewed by an international audience, interested in seeing a different side of Africa. The comment however overlooks the primacy of balancing financial bottom lines which involved appealing to broad audiences and generating sustainable advertising revenue.

The study found no gender imbalance or distinction in viewing hours among participants. While the viewed content varied between gender and social economic status; the hours spent daily watching and consuming African channels were similar. Questionnaire data indicated that as far as gender is concerned, male and female participants that took part in the study spent equal amount of hours watching African television channels. On the average, men spent an average 2 hours daily viewing sports, new and current affairs content while women spent equal amount of hours on average viewing entertainment content, including soaps and movies. This finding contradicts widely held beliefs that African women engage more with television media content than men.

While no distinction exist between men and women as regards hours spent watching African television content; variations exist on the basis of socio-economic status and academic achievements. Interview data indicate that the higher the economic status of an individual, the lower television content they consume in general. And when the socio-economically well-off do watch television, they spend a higher percentage of their time viewing news and current affairs mainly. Participants who are either on social welfare, in-between jobs or out of employment engage with television content more frequently and regularly than participants in full or part time employment. While there are similarities between the viewing pattern of participants employed in low paying jobs and those in adult education, the study found a correlation between higher academic status (university degree holders), and lower television content consumption.

The most striking find to emerge from this study is linguistic diversity inherent within the African community in Ireland. Contrary to broad preconceived notions of the singleness and oneness of Africans in Ireland, this study found significant diversity among participants, not so much on the basis of country of origin, but significantly on the basis of language differences. Most respondents from non-English speaking African countries like Togo, Ivory Coast, Congo and Cameroon opine that African channels on Sky concentrate on English-speaking content. One participant noted that "*there is no single French speaking African television station dedicated to non-English speakers*." Although they admit that English is the lingua-franca in Ireland and the UK, they however strongly believe that they are somewhat "*under-represented and cut-off from Francophone programs*". An interview participant from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (French-speaking country in Africa) commented that:

A high percentage of television content from Africa-centred channels on Sky is in English. This not only excludes the French-speaking audience but also limits the range

of coverage on offer. News and current affairs programs happening in French speaking Africa are not adequately covered, leaving us with no choice than to source for French-speaking programs on the internet.

Similarly, respondents who are not from Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa strongly believe that *"most of the channels are not 'continental' enough in their content and not fully representative of the diversity that exist on the continent"*. They agreed that a large percentage of aired content is sourced mostly from Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana respectively. They (non nationals of these tripartite nations) therefore feel left out as they rarely see content made in their home countries being televised on Africa-centred channels. A participants noted that *"Nigerian made movies from Nollywood is over-represented on Africa-focussed stations on Sky leading to a somewhat marginalisation of content source, non-English programming, news and current affairs."* What this indicates is huge cultural and lingual diversity within the African community in Ireland. The current offerings on African channels adequately cater for English-speaking African audience, particularly, for Nigerian, South Africans and Ghanaians; however, a huge gap exists in the French-speaking market.

Aside from the lack of broad coverage of African issues, especially matters originating from and affecting non-English speaking countries, there is a huge preference for made in Nigeria content. The relatively few, and sometimes non-existence of French language content is not only a disincentive for French speaking Africans in Ireland but also a concern. A telephone questionnaire respondent indicated that *"... at times it appears as if my country is not in African because i have never seen any program from or on Burkina Faso on Sky channels."* It is difficult to ascertain if the scarcity of French language content on African Channels on Sky is deliberate due to market forces or a consequence of advertising preferences available to station managers but an increase in French language content could have significant and positive impact on ratings and advertisement, especially from French-speaking Africans and global multinational concerns seeking to tap into that market. This is more important as migrants from Congo alone constitute the third largest immigrant group from Africa in Ireland (CSO, 2014)

Another striking find is the unanimous agreement among participants that more needs to be done to improve the televisual experience of viewers of African channels, specifically in the area of audio-visual quality, program content and overall professionalism. While several interview participants claimed that watching African channels gave them an above average level of satisfaction and even admitted that a lot of progress has been made, especially in the area of content on offer; many more respondents believe there is *"ample room for improvement across the board in order to duplicate the standard of mainstream televisions stations on the Sky platform"*. A participant in Galway commented that *"While not playing down on progress made, more needs to be done to improve the standard of presentation as well as the quality of audio and video on offer on these channels."*

Participants identified three main areas of concern. While some of these challenges are specific and unique to certain channels, others cut across the board. Firstly, several interview participants noted conflicting program information guide as opposed to the actual program being aired. A participant in Dublin said: *"this mismatch has become routine. it is disappointing to see such shortcomings at this level."* Another respondent cited several instances where the program on BEN Television was about African football but the information guide focussed on *'drama that delves into the day to day activity of an African family'*. Secondly and similar to the above, a sizeable amount of returned questionnaires suggested an overwhelming lack of professionalism on the part of staffs; especially their presentation skills.

A participant at interview commented that: *"It is often the case that important signposts and announcement tends to get lost in transit leaving viewers to connect dotted lines"*. A final shortcoming relates to problems with programming and content. Several interviewed participants agreed on the lack of robust coverage of issues from an African perspective. A discussant noted that *"it is unfortunate that some African channels only re-echo the views of news media like BBC, CNN and Sky news. This is an injustice to their (African channels) very essence by lacking the capacity to generate original discussions from an African perspective."* Closely related to content quality are shortcomings associated with poor audiovisual quality. A Dublin based questionnaire respondent added that *"It is expected of these channels that a quality benchmark is set in mainstream media to ensure quality and standard."*

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that Africa-centred channels operating on the Sky platform should invest, on an ongoing basis in staff training and development. The maxim: "people are the assets" cannot be overemphasised. Additionally, it is recommended that content diversity be prioritised, particularly for French-speaking viewers. To confront this scarcity, African channels can either create content or network with French speaking content providers in Africa. In a similar manner, to balance the over-concentration of content emanating from Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa; it is important that African channels show case content from other parts of Africa, particularly from Central and North Africa.

A further recommendation, based on research findings is the need for specialisation in order to cater for the inherent diversity within the African community in Ireland. The thinking that audience fragmentation (division of audience into small groups) is the outcome of media segmentation is not supported by the findings of this study. This study found that audience fragmentation on the basis of language, religion, age and culture can offer ideas on how individual channels can re-organise their content offerings and cater for a niche group as no single television station can be versatile and all-encompassing enough to satisfy the need of all viewers.

The implication of this study for mainstream media operator in Ireland broadcasting broad and pervasive. From a policy standpoint, further legislation that will ensure the inclusion and adequate representation of Ireland's evolving, ethnically diverse, migrant population needs to be facilitated. Ireland cannot afford a two-tier system in which minority communities either invisible in media narratives or are not fairly represented, both by omission and commission, in national development. This recommendation corroborates Titley's findings that suggests that such under-representation may contains elements of institutional racism, social exclusion, bias and segregation.

CONCLUSION

This paper focussed on the perception of Africans in Ireland towards Africa-centred satellite television stations in the UK. The findings indicate that media audience are not passive, dormant and easily manipulated as suggested by hypodermic needle theory but are active, engaging, and can receive and interpret media content for their use and gratification. The study found that Africans in Ireland engage with African channels for multiple reasons. While there are variations in the viewing pattern of consumers based on age, gender and socio-economic status; French speaking viewers are however constrained, as noted by interview commentaries by language barrier. This apathy is especially prevalent among non-English speaking viewers. Additionally, the study found several shortcomings as noted during the interviews inherent in the operations of African channels on Sky.

In Ireland deliberate policy initiatives and legislation should be facilitated to fast-track the inclusion of migrant communities and media professional within the Irish media space. The current composition of mainstream Irish media at all levels requires broadening to include diasporic contributions, content and challenges as they relate to integration and inclusion in order for the media to capture, represent and facilitate media discourse on the dynamics and realities of the "new Ireland" in a holistic manner on one hand while on the other, counter institutional bias and segregation.

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