



Audrezara Journal of Communication and Social Research (AJCSR), Vol. 1(1), 84-94, 2025.



AUDREZARA JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH (AJCSR)

Vol. 1, Issue 1, pp. 84-94, November, 2025.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17658600>

The Role of the Media in Promoting Even Development in A Multi-Ethnic Society: A Study of Bayelsa State Nigeria

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History: Received: September 30, 2025; Revised: October 19, 2025; Accepted: November 07, 2025.

Abstract

Communication is central to every form of development in the society and the media ensure that information of development is assessable to the larger society by disseminating information capable of fostering economic, political and social growth and positive attitude and behavioural change in people. As an agent of development, the media prioritized programme that ensure even development in a multi-ethnic society. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered online to 375 respondents from residents of Yenagoa. Findings revealed that ethnicity strongly shapes development outcomes in Bayelsa State, as political leaders often prioritise projects along ethnic lines, leading to marginalization, infrastructural imbalance, and rivalry. While issues of ownership influence and ethnic bias in reporting were identified, Respondents acknowledged the potency of the media in fostering ethnic harmony, hold leaders accountable, and encourage equitable development when guided by ethical and inclusive practices. The researchers conclude that although ethnicity largely exerts a negative influence on development in Bayelsa State, the media serve as a transformative tool for promoting unity and equity.

Keywords: Mass Media, Communication, Development, Ethnicity, Even development.

Introduction

The mass media institution is an indispensable force in national development. The media possess the power and ability to initiate change within a society. Aside of the cardinal function of informing,



educating and entertaining the society, the media also perform diverse functions to include; socialisation, mobilisation, social integration, promotion of unity, advocate for development of man and the society.

According to Akinwalere (2022), development is multifaceted in nature and it's occurs in a gradual and continuous process, its cut across sectors in the society. It involve a progressive and transformative change in the economic, social, political, cultural aspect of the society. Development in this context goes beyond mere economic growth. It encompasses the provision of infrastructure, social services, political stability, and the improvement of citizens' quality of life (Sanusi & Omotade 2023). Every government have an agenda they promote and policies are form to achieve such objectives. However, policies on development most often are influence by certain factors, either to foster equal and quality development or downplay and hinder rapid development programme of a given political administration. Factors that interplay with development in the society include; corruption, politicisation of economic interest, insurgency, cronyism and nepotism, idiosyncratic pursuit, ethnicity and religion divide etc. Bayelsa state is a multi-ethnic state and have produced leaders from the different ethnic groups of the state. For the purpose of this study, attention is channeled to ethnicity factor on development and how the media help to ensure even development amidst ethnic divides.

Over the years, ethnicity has played a major role in terms of selecting who become the leader in the political systems in Nigeria, Bayelsa state not an exception in this practice since its creation in 1996. Bayelsa State, located in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, is predominantly inhabited by the Ijaw ethnic group, but there exists a multiplicity of sub-ethnic identities such as Nembe, Ogbia, Epie-Atissa, and others, each with distinct histories and cultural backgrounds. Ethnicity plays a significant role in shaping development discourse, resource distribution, political appointments, and social cohesion. Ethnicity is a deeply rooted social construct that shapes identity, political affiliation, and economic interactions across Nigeria. This ethnic plurality, while a rich cultural asset, often becomes a source of division when politicized, especially in the competition for developmental projects, political representation, and access to state resources.

The pervasive influence of ethnic sentiments often skews the allocation of developmental initiatives. In Bayelsa, projects are sometimes prioritized based on ethnic affiliation rather than objective developmental needs, leading to unequal development and persistent feelings of marginalization among certain communities. Recent reports and analyses highlight how the role of the media has influenced the public's perception of governmental actions and the allocation of state resources (Nnamani, 2022).

This study is anchored on the understanding that development cannot thrive in a context of ethnic polarization and inadequate flow of information. A critical analysis of media content, its role in policy dissemination, and its engagement with different ethnic groups can help identify areas where ethnicity supports or hinders development in Bayelsa State. Hence, the pertinent role of development communication. To this end, it is unarguable that the media, plays a vital role in the attainment of change and sustainable development in a society, most central in ensuring inclusive development in a multi-ethnic society.

Traditionally seen as a watchdog and a platform for public enlightenment, the media played an essential role in the promotion of even development hence, advancing development. This is achieved by fostering inclusivity, transparency, and hold leaders accountable to all regions irrespective of ethnic affiliations. In this capacity, the media can bridge ethnic divides by highlighting developmental needs across communities and ensuring a more balanced narrative. However, traceable practice suggest that ethnicity has increasingly influenced the developmental direction of various administrations in the society. Political leaders, driven by ethnic loyalty or electoral support bases, often prioritize projects and policies that favor



their own ethnic or regional constituencies. This is alien to true democracy, leading to the realities of marginalization among other communities, fostering resentment, mistrust, and developmental imbalance. To this end, the media becomes an advocate to ensure that development is even within a multi ethnic society by making sure that government is accountable to the well-being of the society, ensuring that government policies on development reflects the collective interest of all region.

It is on this premise that this study become imperative to investigate the role of the media in promoting even development in Bayelsa state Nigeria. To achieve this, the study will also investigate ethnic factor on development projects in Bayelsa State and examine the role of the media in highlighting or downplaying ethnicity-related development challenges in Bayelsa State.

Theoretical Framework

This study finds expression in the Development Media Theory propounded by McQuail in the year 1987. The theory was spore from the concern of the non-applicability of the other four theories to the reality of the developing and underdeveloped nations especially, countries that is transitioning from colonial control in the third-world nations and now independent lacks the prerequisite traditional/cultural resources/material, technological, economic, professional, and human resources to sustain media institution. To compete favorably with the standard of those in the developed nations, the media is expected to promote development and economic change through their programme. The theory underscores the idea that there is no absolute development in the absence of communication. To this end the media is meant to promote development from the perspective of political, economic, social and cultural needs of the society. The media achieve this by aligning their reports on the national development objectives while also ensuring positive behavioral change and participation in view to engendered development

Though development is in the absolute control of the government however, the role of the media is to complement the efforts of the government by facilitating the process of development at all level; economic, political, social, cultural growth also upholding national unity and sovereignty. While the media is expected to be free from every form of control, in development goal, the government can exert a form of control on the media to achieve their goals; economic development and nation building.

This theory is relevance to this study as it pictures the media as a vital instrument and player in the attainment of development. Prioritizing development agendas in news and information dissemination for the independence and cultural identity of the nation (Asemah et al., 2017).

Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey research method which is an aspect of quantitative research design. The survey method is employ when there is need to get a numerical data from people opinion, attitude and view as it concern a particular issue under investigation. To achieve this, a structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data from respondents. The purpose is to obtain measurable data on perceptions of the role of the media in promoting even development in Bayels state, Nigeria. The population of the study is centered specifically on the entire residents of Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Yenagoa is the state capital and administrative centre, serving as the hub for political, economic, and cultural activities. Going by the 2006 National Population Census, Yenagoa Local Government Area had a population of 352,285. Based on projections by the National Bureau of Statistics, this figure grew to approximately 524,400 by 2022. These projections provide a credible estimate for understanding the scope of the population in this area



The sample size of 384 was drawn from the study population of 524,400 (2022 projection), using Cozby's (2004) sample size determination, it states that a population of above 500,000 figures at a margin error of $\pm 05\%$ should have a precision of 384 figures. This study adopts purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, avails the researchers to sample respondents equipped with the necessary characteristics or knowledge relevant to the research topic. Purposive sampling is considered appropriate because it allows the researchers to intentionally target individuals who are directly involved in or affected by the interaction between ethnicity, development, and media roles in Bayelsa State. These respondents are selected based on their expertise, involvement, and ability to provide informed perspectives on the subject matter.

To ensure that the items of the questionnaire help to achieve the objective of the study, two communication expert and one sociologist validated the research instrument. Their assessment was to check for content, comprehensiveness and relevance to the research domain. Their input adjudged the instrument valid for the study. For reliability of the instrument, prior to distribution of the link to the questionnaire, a pilot test was carried out on a single test basis. the link to the questionnaire was sent to 30 respondents to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability of the items for the final study. The response was analysed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was generated. This result indicate a considerable high reliability of the research instrument and was adjudged high enough and positively reliable.

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics using frequency and percentage to present the findings for clarity and easy understanding. The data was collected through an online survey platform (such as Google Forms), which allows for wider coverage, ease of distribution, and timely responses. A link to the questionnaire was shared through social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram), and civil society group forums. This approach was chosen because of its cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and ability to reach a broad spectrum of respondents across different LGAs without physical limitations. The study was carried out following strict adherence to ethical research standard. Prior to the data collection, the purpose of the research was clearly explained in the first part of the research instrument, capturing participant's right to response or decline to the research instrument. Hence, Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and all participants willingly contributed without any form of coercion, manipulation, or undue influence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study.

Findings

Of the 384 sample size expected to participate in this study, 375 respondents responded to the online questionnaire that was circulated and found valid for this study at the end of the survey period. 375 is considered adequate for the analysis of the study. This high response rate underscores the efficiency of the online distribution strategy and provides a reliable dataset for examining the research objectives.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the 375 respondents represent the various heterogeneous feature of the sample. Though it is slightly skewed towards younger, more educated, and a slightly gender balanced participants.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency (N=375)	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-25	95	25.3
26-35	140	37.3
36-45	85	22.7
46-above	55	14.7
Total	375	100
Gender		
Male	210	56.0
Female	165	44.0
Total	375	100
Educational level		
SSCE	65	17.3
OND/NCE	80	21.3
HND/B.Sc.	150	40.0
M.Sc./PhD	80	21.3
Total	375	100
Occupational		
Journalist	70	18.7
Government Official	85	22.7
Community Leader	60	16.0
Student	110	29.3
Others	50	13.3
Total	375	100
Ethnicity		
Bayelsan	285	76.0
Non-Bayelsan	90	24.0
Total	375	100

Age: The largest proportion of respondents falls within the 26–35 years bracket (37.3%), followed by the 18–25 years group (25.3%). This shows high youth participation in the study,

Gender: gender representation showed a slightly equal distribution. The male respondents (56.0%) slightly outnumber female respondents (44.0%). This representation, which is important for capturing diverse perspectives on ethnicity and development issues. It also reflects the inclusive nature of the study's sampling strategy.

Education: a significant number of respondents held HND/B.Sc qualification showing a (40.0%) hold HND/B.Sc. while 80 (21.3 %) held OND/NCE and 80 (21.3) held Masters and PhD qualification respectively. this suggest that the respondents are well grounded to provide insightful feedback to the topic of study

All demographic data has been combined into a single, comprehensive table for clarity and conciseness.

Table 2. Perceive Role of the Media in Promoting Equal Development

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
The media disseminates government projects across all ethnic communities.	150	120	70	35	3.05	Accepted



Media messages on development reaches larger portion and all ethnic groups	160	110	70	35	3.06	Accepted
Media coverage helps raise awareness of ethnic inequalities in development.	145	125	65	40	3.03	Accepted
The media has helped to reduce ethnic tension through inclusive reporting.	135	120	80	40	2.93	Accepted
Ownership and control of media outlets influence how ethnicity is reported.	155	115	65	40	3.02	Accepted
Grand Mean					3.02	Accepted

Source: Survey 2025

Bench-Mark: This is a 4point likert-scale, the criterion mean of 2.5 is used to interpret the item and this form the basis to accept or reject anitem. A mean score below 2.5 is rejected while a mean score from 2.5 and above is accepted.

Item 1 showed that a significant proportion of respondents with a mean score of 3.05 accepted that the media disseminates government projects across all ethnic communities, underscoring its role in public awareness and inclusivity. Respondents accepted that media coverage helps raise awareness of ethnic inequalities in development, reflecting the watchdog function of journalism. Importantly, respondents believed the media contributes to reducing ethnic tension through inclusive reporting, though this view is some worth slantedindicating a skeptical opinion with a mean score of 2.93, pointing to gaps in conflict-sensitive journalism. Finally, a mean of 3.02 accepted that ownership and control of media outlets influence how ethnicity is reported, emphasizing structural challenges tied to media pluralism and independence. The 1-5 item in table 2 showed a mean score that is above the criterion mean of 2.5 and a grand mean score of 3.02 highlighting the pivotal role of the media in shaping development narratives in Bayelsa State. Overall, the findings reveal that while the media has a strong positive influence on promoting inclusiveness, concerns about bias and ownership dynamics remain significant barriers to its full potential.

Summary of perceived Ethnicity factor on Development in Bayelsa State

Table 3: Ethnicity Factors on Development in Bayelsa State

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Ethnic identity plays a significant role in the development agenda of Bayelsa State.	150	120	70	35	3.05	Accepted
Political leaders favor their ethnic communities in the distribution of development projects.	160	130	55	30	3.15	Accepted
Ethnic rivalry hinders infrastructural development in Bayelsa.	140	125	80	30	3.00	Accepted
Development in Bayelsa is often influenced by ethnic politics.	170	110	65	30	3.10	Accepted



Equal distribution of state resources is hindered by ethnicity.	155	135	60	25	3.13	Accepted
Grand Mean					3.09	Accepted

Source: Survey 2025

Bench-Mark: This is a 4point likert-scale, the criterion mean of 2.5 is used to interpret the item and this form the basis to accept or reject anitem. A mean score below 2.5 is rejected while a mean score from 2.5 and above is accepted.

The table indicates that ethnicity shapes development outcomes in Bayelsa state, which is traceable to political official ethnic bias leading to unequal distribution of developmental project across regions. Respondents noted that equal distribution of resources is hindered by ethnicity. The 1-5 item in table 3 showed a mean score that is above the criterion mean of (2.5) and a grand mean score of (3.02) suggesting that ethnicity is widely perceived as a critical factor undermining fairness, inclusiveness, and equity in the development process of Bayelsa State, highlighting the urgent need for policy and media interventions to mitigate its negative effects.

Summary of perceived Media in highlighting or downplaying ethnicity-related development challenges in Bayelsa State.

Table 4:

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
The media promotes balanced development across all ethnic groups.	140	125	70	40	2.99	Accepted
Media platforms can help hold leaders accountable for selective development.	155	120	65	35	3.03	Accepted
Inclusive media coverage can promote ethnic harmony and national integration.	150	130	60	35	3.05	Accepted
Media should intentionally include all ethnic voices in development discussions.	160	120	60	35	3.06	Accepted
Media framing of ethnic issues influences public perception of development equity.	145	125	65	40	3.01	Accepted
Grand Mean					3.03	Accepted

Source: Survey 2025

Bench-Mark: This is a 4point likert-scale, the criterion mean of 2.5 is used to interpret the item and this form the basis to accept or reject anitem. A mean score below 2.5 is rejected while a mean score from 2.5 and above is accepted.



The findings in Table 4 reveal widespread agreement among respondents on the positive role of the media in fostering inclusive development in Bayelsa State. The implication of the item 1-5 suggests that the media promotes balanced development across ethnic groups, hyperperforming the watchdog role of holding leaders accountable for selective development. In a multiethnic society, the media through inclusive coverage can effectively promote ethnic harmony and national integration, underscoring the unifying potential of fair reporting. Furthermore, media can be democratic by deliberately including all ethnic voices in development discourse, highlighting the expectation for participatory and representative journalism. Respondents affirmed that media framing significantly influences public perceptions of development equity, reflecting the agenda-setting power of the press. Collectively, these results indicate that respondents perceive the media as a vital instrument for promoting accountability, inclusiveness, and harmony in development, provided that its operations are guided by ethical and balanced practices.

In summary, all computed means are above the criterion mean of 2.5, indicating that respondents generally agree that the media plays a significant and positive role in promoting equal development and addressing ethnicity-related issues in Bayelsa State.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research questions, using data presented in Tables 2, 3&4

In the context of development, the mass media plays diverse roles and such roles are multidimensional such as development. The cardinal function of the mass media in the society is the dissemination of information to citizens. This is to ensure an informed citizen, create awareness and build knowledge about development. Communication is as essential aspect of development because without communication, there will be no absolute development hence the pivotal role of the media in development communication. Response from the items in figure 2 showed a grand mean score of (3.02) indicates that the media's effectiveness in bridging information gap by the disseminating information, promoting equal development in a multi ethnic society, reduce the negative effect of ethnic identity by been pluralistic and inclusive in their reportage. The media champions development by ensuring messages of development projects gets to all and sundry, create awareness by drawing citizens attention to government development plans and fostering a shared understanding for the execution of such projects. The media is important in development as the information shared has the potential to birth new development idea, direct the decisions of policy makers, legislative actors and government at one end, on the other hand, can birth a participatory culture and positive behavioral change among the people. This is linked to the important role of effective communication. This is why McQuail 2010, Choudhury 2011, argues that communication facilitate development. no development can take place without communication and the media wield the power to effect growth within the society which can be achieve through disseminating information in a balance scope. This is to mean, ensuring that information on development get to a larger portion of the society.

Ownership and control of the media is another issue of media objectivity. In table 2, A mean score of (3.02) indicated where respondents showed high affirmation that ownership and control of the media outlets influence how ethnicity is reported in the society. Suggesting that the media can be cut in the web of reporting propaganda, sensationalism and been bias. For Choudhury the media has been accused of promoting such reportage that is alien to democracy and detrimental to national growth. In a democratic and diverse ethnic society, the role of the media is to serve the interest of the people by upholding a high democratic principles, good ethical standard, and free from all forms of control in their reporting thereby promoting objectivity and gaining the trust of the people.



Ethnicity when used in the right approach can fosters development. To Dunu et al (2017) ethnicity biases can influence positive development as it is potent to “serve as agent of socio-political mobilization, tool for healthy rivalry that can promote better living, nationalism and patriotism.” Conversely can be alien to development when politicized by key actors. This submission align with the findings from the items in Table 3 reveal that ethnic identity plays a significant role in shaping the development agenda of Bayelsa State. A large proportion of respondents showing a means score of (3.15) suggests that ethnic identity strongly influences how projects are planned and distributed, it is often reflected on how political leaders tend to favor their own ethnic groups in resource allocation and distribution showing a means scores of (3.00) This findings is in tandem with the study of Ekpu and Ibaba (2019) the authors identified a strong link between ethnic identity, marginalization, and underdevelopment. The research showed that elite actors often manipulate ethnic sentiments to justify uneven distribution of infrastructure and political appointments. Such political sentiment foster ethnic rivalry, from the findingsa means score of (3.10) suggesting that ethnic rivalry undermines infrastructural development in a society where development in the state is influenced by ethnic politics. Consequently, hindering the equal distribution of state resources with a mean score of (3.13)the authors identified a strong link between ethnic identity, marginalization, and underdevelopment. The research showed that elite actors often manipulate ethnic sentiments to justify uneven distribution of infrastructure and political appointments

Collectively, these results suggest that ethnicity exerts a largely negative influence on development outcomes, creating patterns of favoritism, marginalization, and unequal infrastructural spread. This supports earlier scholarly argument, Dunu et al (2017 p. 208) argue that “across the world, development has been enhanced or hampered by the nature and degree of ethnic identity in different climes and time”. While ethnicity can foster group solidarity and cultural identity in some contexts, the dominant effect in Bayelsa is one of division and imbalance in development.

The media wield a great measure of influence in the society. As the fourth estate of the realm, the monitors the activities of the three tiers of government and ought to operate independently. The set agenda for public discuss and opinion, watchdog role to holding government official accountable to the people, force multiplier by encouraging collective ideas and participation and gatekeeper of the society by mirroring realities and experiences of the people by simply reporting development from the political, economic and social standpoint. Table 4 provides insights into how respondents perceive the media’s role in fostering inclusiveness. A mean score of (2.99) indicated that the media promotes balanced development across ethnic groups, while a mean score of (3.03) emphasized its ability to hold leaders accountable for selective distribution of projects. Furthermore, respondents affirmed that inclusive media coverage can reduce ethnic tension and foster national integration, showing a mean score of (3.05) and another (3.06) stressed the need for media to deliberately include all ethnic voices in development discussions. In addition, a mean score of (3.01) believed that media framing of ethnic issues significantly shapes public perception of equity in development.

In situation where ethnicity seem politicize and pose as threat to even development, the media roles in politic needs to focus on areas of societal interest to include; absolute democracy and good governance, ensuring accountability and transparency, emulating realistic foreign policy, upholding human rights, among others (Akinwalere 2022).

Viewing ethnicity from a socially constructed perspective and subject to change through institutional influences like the media. Respondents recognize the media as a powerful tool that, if guided by ethical and inclusive practices, can reframe ethnic relations, promote equity in development, and strengthen social cohesion. Media holds the potential to positively reshape the dynamics entrenched by ethnicity identity through balanced reporting, inclusive representation, and accountability-focused coverage. The



media can serve as a bridge between ethnic divides and an instrument for promoting sustainable and equitable development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ethnicity exerts a strong influence on development outcomes in Bayelsa State, with respondents overwhelmingly agreeing that ethnic loyalty shapes project distribution, fosters favoritism, and contributes to unequal infrastructural spread. From the perspective of development outcomes, this influence is largely negative, as ethnic politics perpetuates marginalization and undermines fairness in governance. Notwithstanding, the media as a powerful instrument of growth, can promote balanced development, hold leaders accountable, and strengthen inter-ethnic harmony when guided by ethical and inclusive reporting practices. The media plays an important role in disseminating information, raising awareness of inequalities, and fostering unity.

Though the public may hold concerns of mediabias and ownership control, the media is instrumental in ensuring equal distribution of developmental programme. The media may not be handy as to make decision on development programme and which group in the society primarily benefit from such development opportunities, however, the media can influence government decision, draw government attention to areas of needs that need urgent intervention, through the dissemination of information capable of opening door for new development programme in the society.

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The media should be active in promoting the need for equal development in the state by constantly prioritizing the dissemination of information that strengthen impartiality and inclusivity and drawing government attention of their obligation to the people
2. In a multi-ethnic society, the media should to be pluralistic in their reportage of developmental information and devoid of sensationalism or ethnic bias but report in such a way that will encourage the Bayelsa State government to adopt a needs-based and participatory planning approach to project allocation. Development priorities should be guided by verifiable data such as population size, infrastructure gaps, and community needs rather than ethnic or political affiliation
3. Ownership and staffing of media houses should reflect the ethnic diversity of Bayelsa State to ensure fair representation of different perspectives. Additionally, capacity-building programs should be institutionalized for journalists to enhance their skills in development-oriented and inclusive reporting.

Acknowledgements: The authors sincerely thanked all those who contributed to the success of this article.

Funding: The research was conducted without external funding and support

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest

How to Cite: Governor, R.E & Woko, V. (2025). The role of the media in promoting even development in a mult-ethnic society: A study of Bayelsa State Nigeria. *Audrezara Journal of Communication and Social Research*, 1(1), 84-94.



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