Chapter 4

Child Protection and Development in Nigeria: Towards a More Functional Media Intervention

Stellamaris Ngozi Okpara

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6374-5681
Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

It is unarguably true that one of the social institutions from which children need protection is the media. This is because some media content violates and poses a harmful influence on their development. The media has been accused of being weak in protecting the rights of Nigerian children from the standpoint of the content it disseminates. This chapter focuses on the power of the media to advocate for the child’s rights and shape the childhood process through its content. The study discovered that media outlets are not predisposed to reporting issues regarding child rights but rather place more attention on entertainment programmes that attract big sponsors. The study recommends that media content should focus on promoting child rights issues in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of the media on children varies from age to age. It enables children to gain the ability to grasp abstract ideas and metacognitive thoughts (Huston & Ripke, 2006). In addition, since the social context in which children develop cognitive
abilities is collaborative process which involves adults and peers, the cognitive shift from middle childhood to adolescence is marked by increased hypothetical reasoning and an ability to determine whether fictional media content is realistic or probable in real life (Flavell, Miller & Miller, 2002). Therefore, the media’s role in ensuring the protection and positive development of children cannot be overemphasised. The media has a strategic contribution as an agent of socialisation and offers the platform for identity development of children. Therefore, from the manner in which the media frames its contents, it is obvious that its influence shapes a lot of the experiences of children, their perspectives and perceptions of themselves and the world around them.

In view of the social role of the media in the development of the child, the media has been accused of not ensuring the protection of children’s rights from the standpoint of the content it disseminates to the public. There are indications that the media may advertently or inadvertently produce and show contents that may be harmful for children’s development. Furthermore, the media is castigated for its inability to perform its surveillance function in detecting harmful practices customs, attitudes and issues which negatively affect children (Sambe, 2005). As the Fourth Estate of the Realm, the watchdog of the society and the voice of the voiceless, it behoves the media to produce contents that are in the best interest of the child. The media has to ensure the protection of children, using ethical media frames, in the contents they produce and as well in how children and their interests are projected as subject or object matters. They are supposed to champion the cause of responsible governance, dignity and freedom of the human persons and make truthful, objective, accurate, ethical and fair presentations at all times (McQuail, 2007). This is because the media has a strategic contribution as an agent of socialisation and offers the platform for the identity development of children.

This chapter will place special emphasis on the power of the media in advocating children’s rights and in shaping the childhood process through its contents, which are readily accessible by these children.

**BACKGROUND**

Childhood is a significant period in human life, characterised by physical as well as poignant immaturity and susceptibility, unlike adulthood, resulting in a lack of autonomy and social dependence. The chronological age used in marking the boundary between childhood and adulthood is mostly set at 18 years, although social markers such as migration, labour, and physical markers such as height, facial hair, or the start of menstruation may be more important than age in signifying adult status in some locations (Evans, 2012). It must be stated that there are disparaging views on the concept of a child. Mosby’s Medical Dictionary (2009) avers that a child is
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