

## **JOURNALISM AND NEW MEDIA IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

**BEN U. NWANNE, Ph. D.**  
Department of Mass Communication,  
Delta State University, P. M. B. 1  
Abraka, Delta State, **NIGERIA**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses journalism and new media in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects. It builds its postulations on the technological determinism theory which argues robustly that the communication technology prevalent in any age has a profound effect on the way the people think and believe. The paper highlights some challenges of Nigerian journalists in using the new media to include poor finances, inadequate power supply among others. Despite the challenges, the media people have coped well, leading to what has been described as media convergence. The paper recommends among others that government should urgently and effectively address the power situation in the country, provide a knowledge economy while employers and employees of the media industry should engage in constant training and retraining.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Journalism in Nigeria has continued to grow immensely in line with global trends despite strong infrastructural challenges. Communicating with a mass audience is not totally strange in Nigeria. As far back as 1859, the first newspaper Iwe Irohin made a triumphant emergence on the stage with the entrepreneurial but religious Henry Townsend. He had exploited the relatively high literacy rate in Abeokuta and its environs in South West Nigeria, to introduce a newspaper. From its rudimentary or crude stage, the newspaper grew rapidly. Even though the newspaper did not last for too long, it had made an important statement about the fact that newspaper should be published. Indeed, it became an encouragement to other newspapers which followed in quick succession. More than one hundred and sixty years after the Iwe Irohin experiment, newspapers have become quite popular in Nigeria. In fact, Nigeria is credited with perhaps the most vibrant press in Africa. This is not for nothing because the press had played essential roles in Nigeria's chequered history. The press played a crucial role in Nigerian's struggle for independence and was instrumental in the fight against oppressive military rule in Nigeria which came to an end in 1999.

Although Nigeria's economic and political development cannot be said to be excellent, the modest achievements in those areas must be largely attributed to the relentless and vibrant press in Nigeria which has made it impossible for the political class to entirely take Nigeria in their pockets

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this work two terms – journalism and new media - will be defined for conceptual clarity.

**Journalism:** Agee, Ault and Emery (1979) have defined journalism as “a report of things as they appear at the moment of writing, not a definitive study of a situation”. They further

claimed that historically, the journalist has been identified by society as carrying out two main functions, reporting the news and offering interpretation and opinion based on the news...

Journalism has to do with bringing the news of the day quickly to the attention of an impatient audience. The newspaper reader is usually in a hurry as he/she has other issues to address. But the reader needs to know what is happening around and other places to understand his world and probably make the best out of it. That probably explains why journalists must present their news in an easy and digestible manner. Indeed, the professional journalist must ensure that the news comes to the reader quickly and in a way that makes meaning.

Given the nature of journalism, there is a tendency for any writer to claim to be a journalist but for our purposes, a journalist is one who is employed either part time or full time, in a medium of public communication such as newspaper, magazine, television, radio, wire service, news agency or other adjuncts of the media.

## New Media

The expression 'new media' is no doubt a buzzword on account of its widespread usage. In fact, it is socially and academically dignifying to be associated with new media McQuail (2007) described new media as "disparate form of communication technologies that share certain features apart from being new, made possible by digitalization and being widely available for personal use as communication devices". Essentially, the term new media suggests the opportunities of improved communication.

The emergence of new media has no doubt positively affected the quality and rapidity of communication to the eternal delight of mankind. In doing this, there seems to be convergence of both the old and new media. Such a synergy has improved the way we communicate. The result has been a wonderful expansion of communication possibilities across the world.

**Internet:** According to Severin and Tankard Jr. (2001) "the internet is a worldwide network of computer networks that grew out of APRANET, a dense related communication system developed in the 1960s". Such a composite and consolidated communication has been of immense benefit to humanity. Again, Severin and Tarkard (2001, p. 366) assert with clear justifications, the fact that:

*The internet has grown phonemically both in the member of hot computers and number of users over the past few years. One of the best measures of the size of the internet is the number of host computers. A host computer is a computer storing information that can be accessed through the net. From 1995 to 1999, the number of host computers from 5.9 million to 43.2 million (Network Wizards, 1999).*

Without doubt, not only is the internet a new medium in itself it facilitates the operations of other new media because every success in this regards is built around the availability and efficiency of the internet.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This paper derives a theoretical anchor from the technological determinism theory. The concept of technological determinism expresses McLuhan's belief that the nature of the media technology prevailing in a society at a given point in time greatly influences how the members of that society think and believe". (Defleur and Ball – Rokeach, 1984, p. 184; Anderson & Ross, 2002 p. 270 and Danesi, 2002, p. 6).

In its easiest form, technological determinism theory suggests the influence of technology on the society but more importantly, it is interested in how the journalist operates within a given technological era. Obviously, the emergence of the wonderful ICT infrastructure has far-reaching influence on the knowledge expected of journalists and how such knowledge is deployed in achieving a timely and credible presence on the newsstands for print and airtime for broadcast channels.

Much of what is known on the technological determinism perspective has its origins in the work of Innis (1950) before the intervention of the media iconclast Marshall McLuhan in 1964. According to Ekeanyanwu and Edewor (2009, p. 17) citing Innis (1950):

*The nature of media technology prevailing in a society at a particular point in time greatly influences how the members of that society think, act and behave Books and other print media, for example, are said to promote causes-effect thinking in societies where print dominate, because the technology of print forces a linear form of presentation either across or up-down a page.*

In building on Innis theory of technological determinism, McLuhan as articulated by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982), state that "television should be characterized as a 'cool' medium because of its capacity for rich configuration of audio /visual stimuli, which elicits put passive audience participation". As an out flow of the technological determinist view point, Defleur and Ball – Rokeach (1982) assert that the most important characteristics of the audience media encounter is the technological properties of the medium, hence McLuhan's perhaps best known expression "the medium is the message". This suggests that invariably, the medium through which a message is being put across invariably affects the message and the impact it has on the audience.

## Technology and Media Development

There is an obvious symmetrical relationship between technology and development. This perhaps explains the fact that countries with advanced technology are often described as 'developed' or advanced countries. Besides the issue of advanced technology is the question of appropriate technology. According to Stewart (1978) 'appropriate technology is the set of techniques which make optimum use of available resources in a given environment'. Indeed, the emergence of new media is concomitant to advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In order to be able to access and effectively use communication technology, journalists are expected to possess competencies, skills and knowledge in different aspects such as computer literacy, information literacy, media literacy, visual literacy and others (Adum and Uche, 2011).

## **Journalists and the New Media**

Communicating with the masses has been with mankind for centuries. The nature and content of communication depend on the society and time in question. Also, available technology has so much to do with the quality of communication journalists are able to project to the society.

As earlier discussed, the technological determinism theory, as originated and developed by Innis (1950) McLuhan (1964) and DeFluer and Ball Rockeach (1982) is quite relevant in dealing with journalism and the new media. McLuhan has described print as 'hot' media while television is described as 'cool' media. The authors have stated that print media have the tendency to make people think in a linear way which may suggest that 'cool' media may lead to non-linear thinking.

If we were to accept the argument of Innis (1950) and McLuhan (1964) about the fact that 'hot' media which the print media represent would lead to linear or predictable, one-dimensional thinking. It means everybody would 'think in the same way. That, definitely, would be extending generalization too far. It is possible that different media have different effects on different audiences. It is also expected that different journalists would embrace the different communication technologies to different extents. Indeed different journalists can only exhibit different levels of competence in the use of ICTs. No matter from what perspective this issue is viewed no one can deny the pervasiveness of media technology and its influence on society. Indeed, despite some unintended drawbacks, communication and information technology have had great possibilities for mankind.

Indeed, it has great influence on the way traditional journalism was practiced. From the time of the ancient Greece, one of the cradles of civilization, public communication took place in different forms or ways. History recalls how Phidipids had to run from battle field to announce the success of the Greek army during a military campaign. Having to cover a long distance, the messenger (call him a journalist) did not survive. In the modern communication scene, all he needed do was just put a call across to appropriate quarters. Again, previously a reporter must meet a news source face to face to be able to interview him or her. But with the availability of modern communication facilities a journalist could interview a news source thousands of kilometers apart.

Through the e-mail and other communication technologies, a reporter does not have to physically submit a copy to his news editor. The news-editor receives the story through appropriate technological intervention, in addition to being assisted in editing and page planning.

Interestingly too, printing technologies have improved tremendously. From the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century when Gutenberg invented printing, printing technology has improved almost breathtakingly. The result is faster, cleaner and more exiting printed copy, with a whole lot of possibilities, depending, of course, on the purse of the consumer and his level of technological savvy. Hasan (2014, p.770) puts the issue in proper perspective with his observation that: "The digitalization of the news production and the diffusion capabilities of the internet are challenging the traditional journalistic professional culture".

This is inevitable under the current internet 'invasion'. In the short-run, this may pose a serious challenge, but in the long-run, this has made print media organizations to be more creative leading to the establishment of blogs where they can have a more interactive

relationship with consumers of their product. Indeed as Hasan (2013) observed that “the growth of blogs as a source of news has changed journalism forever.

### **Relationship between Internet and Print Media**

Although, internet impacts other media, it seems from all intents and purposes, that print media are the greatest casualty of the internet onslaught. Part of the problem is that print media are described as ‘hot’ media with all the suggestions of linearity. Not that television is totally insulated from the internet invasion. Not minding the well founded fears of an endangered print media, the reality appears to be different in developing countries particularly Nigeria, where digital knowledge is still at a relatively low stage. The print media have also been proactive as many now have on-line versions to take care of the internet buffs. In that context, therefore, the introduction of the internet is a blessing to print journalism. The broadcast medium has not been left out in this connection. With the introduction of digital broadcasting, sound and images are clearer for the comprehension and appreciation of the audience.

### **Challenges of Journalism and New Media** **Acquisition of Knowledge and skill**

At a stage, Wolfe (1975) came up with the idea of new journalism. At that point he was not thinking of media technologies, he was rather concerned with how to make journalism more exciting for the readers. However, with the introduction of new media, journalists now have to worry about their knowledge and skill in the digital age. Many journalists do not have a digital knowledge background. Many were trained using the old abandoned typewriters which were manually operated. The introduction of computers has necessitated an entirely new set of skills and knowledge. This partly explains the springing up of computer training centres in many parts of developing countries. It seems that younger people are better placed to acquire such knowledge, given their open mindedness and their digital backgrounds.

### **Financial Demand**

Besides the challenges of pursuit and acquisition of relevant technological knowledge and skills, is the ever-present issue of financial difficulties. Poverty is a major challenge in Africa and other developing countries. Nigeria presents a pathetic case, where more than half of the population lives in poverty and misery despite abundant natural resources. Many observers have linked this unfortunate development to poor leadership over the years which have failed to harness the country’s resources for the common good.

Many journalists are unable to purchase good computers in order to do a good job. Many computers, like other products which are allowed into the country, are poor and substandard in quality with the result of buyers putting ‘good’ money on ‘bad’ products; on the other hand, there is a dearth of competent hands to service and repairs computers with the result that soon after they are bought, many computers pack up to the chagrin and financial loss of the purchaser.

### **Poor Power Supply**

It is a well known fact that electricity supply in Nigeria is abysmal, perhaps the worst in the entire world, for a country with a large population and natural endowments. At the prospect

of a democratic setting in 1998, one of the frontline candidates, Olusegun Obasanjo, who eventually won the election and was sworn in as President on May 29, 1999, promised Nigerians adequate power supply. At the end of his eight-year reign (1999 – 2007), Nigeria had sunk into greater darkness. This is notwithstanding the fact that over 16 Billion Dollars was said to have been spent trying to provide electricity.

Angered at the development and determined to do something about it, Nigeria's lower chambers, the House of the Representatives, empanelled a committee under the chairmanship of Hon. Ndudi Elumelu to look into the matter. The committee's effort to determine how such a huge sum was spent was resisted from high quarters with the result that the committee's findings could not be released. As usual, tax payers funds went with the winds. The Umaru Yar'adua's administration which unfortunately was short-lived due to the sudden death of President Yar'adua could not achieve much despite the administration determination to make a difference. The immediate past president, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan thought that privatization of the former Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) would be a panacea to the problem. Privatization has happened but enhanced power supply has remained far-fetched. The policy of the current administration of former Military Head of State, President Muhammadu Buhari is at best, foggy.

Without adequate power supply all efforts of journalists who require access to the internet are in vain, besides the Fact that internet connectivity cannot be taken for granted in any part of the country.

### **Uncoordinated Cyber knowledge**

Internet knowledge or cyber skill is not common, especially in the developing countries where there does not seem to be much premium on knowledge. Again, it does not seem that much research is really going on in the universities because of lack of encouragement. Even the few research findings that are coming out of universities are hardly used by government and the industry. Specifically as Hosan (2013, p. 770) has noted, "cyber journalism has created a big vacuum in journalism education and training since it is a recent development in journalism and journalism educators are caught unprepared. This may not be the entire truth as some journalism teachers have made commendable efforts to catch up with modern ICT knowledge trend.

Essentially, the emergence of the new media has given journalists more access to different media and also a wide variety of media content to the consumers. This development appropriately handled in media convergence is therefore to the advantage of consumers and producers of media content.

### **SUMMARY**

Journalism practice has grown phenomenally over the years across the world. While admitting that more growth and development has taken place in developed countries, developing countries have not been entirely quiet. In Nigeria for instance, journalists have made efforts to catch up with the rest of the world. This presentation was backed up with the technological determinism theory which argues that the media technology in any society affects the environment profoundly. Also, the availability of the internet and new media have naturally led to different challenges in the developing countries especially Nigeria where the



problem of power supply remains unaddressed as well as the general complaint of lack of funds to acquire technological devices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are being put forward for consideration by relevant authorities.

1. The power situation in Nigeria is embarrassingly poor, requiring urgent and effective reaction from government. The current situation where excuses are constantly proffered should be jettisoned. A more realistic approach to solving the problem should be embraced.
2. There is need for the establishment of a knowledge economy where the acquisition and use of knowledge are promoted as a matter of government policy. So doing, citizens are encouraged to pursue and are encouraged to pursue knowledge and make it available for society.
3. It is necessary for journalists who seek funds to obtain current media technology to be in a position to do so. Government should endeavour to organize a loan scheme that addresses such financial needs.
4. Essentially, employers and employees of the media industry should make it a point of duty for continuous training and retraining. Man hours spent improving staff is definitely time well spent.

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