

CHANGING ROLES IN THE NIGERIAN MEDIA INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF MULTIMEDIA JOURNALISM

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Abstract

The practice of journalism has always been at the cutting edge of technology. Every changes in technology has always impact journalism; from printing press to telephone; from radio technology to television; from satellite technology and now to internet. Change has always been the lot of journalism, yet, there is no technology that has radically alter the practice of journalism like multimedia technology. The paper adopted exploratory technique to interrogate the impact of multimedia technology on the practice of journalism. The author concluded that multimedia technology has redefined the traditional role of journalist, the practice of journalism and the dichotomy between print and electronic media.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional role of the mass media in any society revolves round four basic roles: surveillance, correlation or interpretation, transmission of cultural heritage, and entertainment. Surveillance function of the media refers to news and information gathering and reporting, while interpretation function involves providing information on the ultimate meaning and significance of events that has happened, is happening or is yet to happen.

Just as the media survey the environment, the media also interpret the news. The media offer various explanations correlating and interpreting information to make the reality clear. The transmission of values and entertainment functions is even more relevant in the Nigerian media industry as more people rely on the media for entertainment. Daramola (2005:204) sees this function as 'media's ability to present messages that provide escapism and relaxation.' By implication, entertainment is necessary to provide relief to the audience from the stress he/she

had undergone during the day's work, the consequence of this, as observed by Dominick (2002:27) is that, "it is now quite easy for audience to sit back and let others entertain."

Arising from the above one may argue that for a society to exist and function properly there must be a functioning media and this can only be the use of technology of communication. Thus, one may submit here that the media is a technology-driven industry; that the developing technology is affecting the way and manner information is designed and communicated to audience; and that at the rate at which technology is developing, the role of the media will have to expand to accommodate the changing technology. Little wonder Briggs and Burke (2003:5) submitted that the media need to be viewed as a system, a system in perpetual change in which different elements play greater or smaller roles.

This study is therefore guided by the technological determinism theory which assumes that technology shapes how individual communicate, relate and interact in the society. Postman (1992) observed that the printing press, the computer, and television are not simply machines which convey information but rather metaphors through which we conceptualize reality in one way or another (Adelabu, 2014). Postman's view resonate Adelabu (2014) summation that journalism is a technology driven profession "from the time of Gutenberg printing press till now, journalism has always been at the forefront of embracing technology innovation."

The Role of the Media in Society

There have been debates on the role of the media and the influence the media can have on the society. To some scholars like Klapper (1960), the media has limited effect. His limited effect theory of mass media assumes that mass communication does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences (Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso, 2008). By implication therefore, the mass media is a contributory agent and not the sole cause of influence.

Klapper's theory is in fact in direct opposite with scholars that believe that the media has great and powerful effect on the people. For instance Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence predicts that the media provide people with words and phrases they can use to defend a certain point of view. In his contribution to the role of the media in society.

On the other hand, scholars like Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 proposed the role of the media through the agenda setting function of the media. According to them, the facts which people know about public issues tend to be those which the mass media presents to them. Asemah (2009:37) affirms the role of the media as agenda setters when he observed that:

The media, whether electronic or print often set agenda for the public to follow; they monitor trends and events in our society and raised their agenda based on what they have monitored....
Whatever issue the media raised becomes an issue of public concern.

The libertarian theorist identified the role of the media to include public enlightenment, servicing the economic system, servicing the political system, safeguarding good liberties, profit-making and providing entertainment (Daramola 2005:179). Their opinion is based on the premise that truth will always prevail in any free and open encounter of ideas. In Asemah (2009) view, the media performs seven functions; namely:

- The media act as binding influence by integrating the members of the society together;
- The media through programmes like drama, music etc. can entertain the audience;
- The media can act as agents of development;

- The media messages are designed to induce receivers to buy a particular product or idea. That is the media are used by the consumer industry to inform people about their products and services through advertising;
- The media collect and distribute information;
- The media act as interpreter; and
- The media communicate social values, norms, knowledge and other cultural components to members of the society.

As the fourth estate of the realm, the media monitors the conduct of government by reporting their activities in the media. They are also the watchdogs that we rely on for uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those who we elected into power. Again, the media can reaffirm and shape attitude and behaviour of people in the society. This, the media do by showing what happens to people who act in a way that violates societal expectations. By so doing the media can change the future of a nation.

On the other hand Paul, Singh and John (2013:36) aver that the mass media has a prominent role to play in modern society. The media according to them can bring about radical changes and improve social situation as it influences our social, civil, cultural, political, economic and aesthetic outlook. They identified the three major roles of the media to include:

- ***The media can expand the horizons of thought:*** The media has helped people recognize the developing countries of other people's lives so that they gain a new outlook in life. The mass media can be a bridge between traditional societies transition toward a modern society.
- ***The mass media focus attention:*** according to Paul, Singh and John (2013), traditional society moving toward a modern little by little began to hang up his knowledge on the mass media so that the things about what's important, which is dangerous, what is interesting and forth from the media. As a result, over time people began to leave the customs or culture and assume that culture as something ancient and modern. Therefore, the mass media should be able to decide exactly what information or rubric that will be delivered because the media can influence in public mindset and raise people's aspirations.
- ***Media raise Aspirations:*** the media present information on a daily basis many of which are new and helpful to dreams and aspirations of the people. Therefore, through media people can learn many things that can change their lives positively.

Going by the five guidelines submitted by Hutchins Commission on the role of the media, the media is to:

- i) Present a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning;
- ii) Provide a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism;
- iii) Give the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society;
- iv) Give a presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society;
- v) Give full access to the day's intelligence (Severin and Tankard, 1987).

The idea that the media is accountable to the people perhaps motivated Owens-Ibie (1994) to see the role of the media in an ideal democratic setting as being expected to:

...inform the citizenry of what goes on in the government, which, in a way, keeps rulers in check. Also, the media should be reporting on and promoting discussion of ideas,

opinions and truths toward the end of social refinement; acting as a nation's 'bulletin board' for information and mirroring the society and its peoples just the way they are, thus exposing the heroes and the villains.

According to Ows-Ibie (1994), the media is responsible to both their audience and government in the following ways:

- a. To their audiences, to whom they owe correct news reportage, analysis and editorializing.
- b. To government, to which they owe constructive criticism, a relay of popular opinion and adequate feedback from the populace.
- c. To their proprietor, to whom they owe the survival of the media organization as a business venture as well as a veritable source of education, enlightenment and entertainment.
- d. To themselves, to whom they owe fulfillment in their calling, satisfaction and an entire success story. When any of these "judges" of journalistic responsibility is shunted, accountability is dented and automatically, responsibility is affected adversely.

Just like other mass media across the world, the Nigerian mass media plays vital role in national development. As identified by the memorandum submitted to the government committee on review of national communication policy in Nigeria, the media plays three vital roles. The media, the memorandum concludes, helps to build and sustain a participatory, transparent and accountable governance structure. The functions are:

- 1) Informs citizens on matters of public and politics by presenting and debating alternatives to dominant options that might be failing.
- 2) It acts as a watchdog by uncovering political, economic and corporate corruption, alongside other forms of abuses of power or inept policies.
- 3) The media helps empower readers/listeners/viewers to be aware of civic and political rights, and how to exercise these rights.

Understanding the Concept of Media Convergence

Mass communication is the transmission of information to vast and varied audiences through different communication platform such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, multimedia involves more than one medium working together to accomplish a single goal. By implication a multimedia content presentation will contain text, pictures and music. According to Tapscott (1998), "the traditional media of the fourth estate are converging with computing and telecommunications to create nothing less than a new medium of human communication with the net at its heart"(Folayan, 2004:1). Thus, it is assumed that multimedia journalism is the convergence of the traditional press with the internet that is called online journalism.

The traditional media places enormous power in the hands of reporters and editors multimedia journalism on the other hand, according to Harper (1998) "opens up new ways of story telling and because it has the potential to provide outlets for non-traditional means of news and information" (Folayan, 2004).

Again, media convergence combines the power of radio and television to give the audience opportunity to enjoy the features of radio, television and newspaper in one bouquet. The Internet has created what is today described as media convergence. According to Krotoski (2011) the Internet is the clearest evidence that this is a revolutionary technology on journalism. Journalist and media houses today now make use of different social platforms to connect with their

audiences across the world. Kaplan and Heinlein (2010:61) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

As a result of these applications journalists and media houses now have the opportunity to interact with users. Interactivity does not only benefit the readers, it also allows journalists to combine different kinds of information in both new and different ways. The internet provides an interactive component that is lacking in the print media and even in television. While the print media carries picture and the story as written by the reporters, the internet version may carry will carry in-depth interview along with audio of the news maker. The Chicago Tribune provides how it works:

The Tribune is one of the few newspapers in the country that has reporters who work exclusively for the Internet edition. The reporters write stories, take pictures, operate video cameras, and create digital pages. The Tribune Internet edition, which debuted in March 1996, contains most of the information from the print version--news, sports, job listings, real estate and automobile advertisements, weather, stocks, and television listings. For its readers, the Internet edition offers in-depth stories, special technology reports, games, discussion groups, and everything someone would ever want to know about the Chicago Bears and the Chicago Bulls. The Internet edition also provides audio interviews and information from the company's radio station, and video from the Tribune's 24-hour-a-day news service, Chicagoland Television. Harper (2014)

With the availability of the Internet and its applications, freelance journalists and citizens can make use of different new media to produce multimedia pieces for their news stories and by constantly feeding their sites have many followers. In his explanation of the role of a multimedia producer, Martin (2014) states that multimedia producers are responsible for telling stories using video and still photography, video and audio editing, Web design, graphic arts and animation, scriptwriting and interactive media. He advise reporters and editors to incorporate multimedia elements into their stories and generate original content themselves. He gave the following as the basic skills of a multimedia producer:

- Love computers, cameras, digital software
- Good storytelling skills
- Able to collaborate with other reporters/editors
- Willingness to constantly learn new skills, computer programs, gadget functions

Role of the Nigerian Journalist in the Age of Media Convergence

According to Krostoski (2011) the process that happens before a story is published has also been transformed. In other words, not only is the reporter expected to reports facts, his writing style is also expected to be more interesting and entertaining. Krostoski (2011) writes further:

The web has become the go-to point for the globe when it comes to getting information; it's the same for reporters...more generally, technology has improved the process of identifying stories that are newsworthy. Feeds from social networking services such as facebook and twitter provide a snapshot of events happening

around the world from the view point of first-hand witnesses, and blogs and citizen news sources offer analytical perspectives from the ground faster than print or television can provide.

The strength of digital journalism lies in the ability to integrate various media. This means that with internet technology, journalist can now multitask using the World Wide Web which can provide news stories, photographs, audio, and video. Thus, by viewing a site/platform an audience is enjoying the world of print and audio-visual. The role of journalists in digital age, according to Gentry (1996) differs for different media. According to her:

There are differences in how reporters react to digital journalism and the future. Researchers have found that reporters follow three different tracks concerning their views about the use of computers in the newsroom. The first group, called the "the benevolent revolutionary," is enthusiastic about new technologies. The second group, described as "the nervous traditionalist," is not. A third group, known as "the serene separatist," does not fear technology but sees little impact on the role of the journalist.

Gentry (1996) insist that journalists must embrace traditional news values and a non-linear storytelling approach on the web to report stories. Explaining the concept of storytelling, Harper (2014) says a non-linear storytelling on the World Wide Web is the "ability to link from one computer page location to another. Sometimes, stories must be broken into their component parts. Sometimes, the same story must be told from several points of view. That means the reporter may provide a smorgasbord of viewing options."

Journalists who embrace the World Wide Web will do "solid reporting, careful editing, compelling writing, and visual storytelling, using the latest tools available, tell their stories in whatever medium people use. But the tenets of the industry will remain the same" (Gentry, 1996). Harper (2014) lists a set of factors that often determine what news gets into the media. These factors are according to him, what journalists and online editors applies to online journalism. The factors are:

- **Intensity of threshold value.** Events are more likely to pass through the media gates if they are of great magnitude or if they have recently increased in magnitude.
- **Unexpectedness.** Even online users want to read and see on usual things and would seek out such information.
- **Socio-cultural values.** According to Shoemaker (1991) values of both the gatekeepers and their readership can also influence selection.
- **Continuity.** According to Harper (1996), if an event or news story passes through the media gate once, it is likely that it will pass through the gate again.
- **Cultural proximity or relevance.** The media are most likely to accept news events that have close cultural relevance for the audience.

In his contribution to the role of a journalist in modern journalism, Owens (2008) agreed that the role of the professional journalist is changing. He identified six roles the modern journalist should serve:

- **The Ethical Roles:** there debates on regulating the Internet base on the amount and nature of information flowing from blogs to blogs the role of the media/journalist in the digital age is to raise the bar on professional ethics, as well as provide ethical guidance to today's participatory audience. Harper (2014) is of the opinion that journalists should

deal more swiftly and transparently with ethical errors within the profession, and also provide teaching tools on information ethics, what ethics means and why it's important, and how to spot compromised ethics.

- **The Guide/Filter Role:** Editors and reporters should assume some responsibility for providing their audiences with pointers to the best stuff on the web, be it the best-reported of the important news or the most interesting and entertaining articles and videos. The role of a journalist is to help audiences sift through the glut of information assaulting them daily by providing pointers. This is the value-add role, and if done right it can help overcome the digital-age tendency for people to focus too narrowly on their own interests. If done well, it will bring more people to the respective journalist site or publication site.
- **The Understanding and Context Role:** Journalists should have blogs, and they should serve readers better by taking the news of the day and putting it in context, combing articles for the tidbits that need to be weaved together to make a bigger whole, and explaining what it all means.
- **The Conversation Leader Role:** It is important that the today journalist should guide the conversation his story generated by providing insights and supplemental knowledge to any conversation he/she finds. Today's journalist should be full participants, not just the lurking overlords of top-down media.
- **The Aggregator Role.** In this role, a journalist should aggressively gather data related to the communities he/she serve. While in the Guide/Filter Role, Owens (2008) avers that a journalist might provide pointers, but in the Aggregator Role, he/she makes data available and let people find it for themselves. This is a role that serves the long tail of information, because the journalist never knows what other individuals might find useful, important or necessary.
- **The Straight News Role.** Owens (2008) believes that journalists should not cede their professional responsibilities to uncover news. In addition, the modern day journalist must know about everything important going on in the communities that they serve, and should strive to be the first to tell our communities about the important news of the moment. Meaning that news on station website should be uploaded as even breaks (this is also applicable to old media).
- **News reporting and editing:** the job of every journalist is to report news and possibly edit same before submitting it to the editor on duty; however before the advent of Internet, traditional media journalists must physically report at the office to submit stories, but with Internet, reporters can upload stories to their blogs or websites.
- **Interactive broadcasting:** According to Ergul (2007), the term interactivity implies "the presence of a return channel in communication system, going from the user to the source of information. The channel is a vehicle for the data bytes that represent the choices or reaction of the user." By implication therefore, interactive broadcasting or interactive television (ITV)/Interactive radio gives room for a two-way communication between the sender of a message and the receiver of the message.
- **Citizen Journalism:** the key point in citizen journalism is participatory journalism in which members of the public are encouraged to report news events happening around them. To Deuze (1999) online journalism is characterized by three dimensions; interactivity, personalization and convergence (Folayan, 2004:16).

- ***The role of the journalist in society outside the daily operations in the news room:*** Journalism has created a role in society both as actor and an arena in the democratic processes, and as narrator of contemporary history. Each journalist is a carrier of this role, and it is an important part of the values influencing professional decisions (Krumsvik, 2008).

Conclusion

The emergence of internet and its associated applications have redefined the practice of journalism. No longer are the traditional journalists the sole purveyor of information, it now have to work with the audience as they jointly scan the environment for information of interest. Technology has merged different roles of journalist and media institutions to create multimedia outlet for news gathering, processing and dissemination. Many media organisation have converged their operation online to provide the audience news online and real time round the clock.

Journalists and their media organisations are constantly been challenged by technology to innovate and renovate their system to meet the changing taste of the audience they serve. This has also called for redefinition of who is a journalist and the dichotomy between print and electronic media.

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