

THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF THE NEW MEDIA IN PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The advent of broadcasting in Nigeria has brought a new lease of life to the communication sphere in Nigeria as it ushered in a new medium of expression and communication for the people of Nigeria. With the introduction of new media technologies came more opportunities to the broadcasting sector in the area of media convergence. The challenges brought by these new media are so immense that no part of the world could afford to be left out in the turn of events. This paper therefore highlights the challenges and prospects of the new media faced by the public service broadcasting in Nigeria. It therefore becomes expedient for the Nigerian public service broadcast sector to avail itself of the opportunities which the new media herald. The paper recommended among others that government as a matter of policy must ensure that there is total removal of all barriers militating against the acquisition of new media facilities for broadcasting in public service broadcasting.*

KEYWORDS: New Media, Public Service, Challenges and Prospects

INTRODUCTION

The public service media in Nigeria aims to produce high-quality content, make it available across widely used devices and platforms, and reach all audiences. The means of attaining this however, has meet with some challenges over the years. The place of modern day new media technology makes it impossible to imagine our contemporary society without them. This is so because; the new media brings us together in variety of ways that would have been thought as impossible (Sehl, Cornia, & Neilson 2016). For instance, a few generations ago, it took several hours for a message to be transmitted from Nigeria to North America. Today however, information can be transmitted in seconds. Surmounting one of the greatest challenges to information posed by distance with the internet today, means that people can communicate and access information anywhere in the world regardless of where they are located in the globe. As such, the distance barrier does not exist anymore; the world has become a global village (Severin & Tankard, 2001).

About five decades ago, media world relied principally upon print and analogue broadcast models, especially the ones used by television and radio stations. But the last twenty years have been a transformation period, as rapid transformation in the sector has been witnessed; this rapid transformation in the media which is largely predicated upon the use of digital computers, such as the Internet and other portable digital devices like mobile smart phones, tablets and so on. However, these examples are only a small representation of new media technologies. For instance,

the use of digital computers has transformed the remaining old media, as suggested by the advent of digital television and online publications and propelled by the need for media convergence in a digitalized world.

The new media rely strongly on digitally powered technologies, allowing for previously separate media to converge. Media convergence is a phenomenon of new media and this can be explained as a digital media. According to Flew, (2002:11), "The idea of new media captures both the development of unique forms of digital media, and the remaking of more traditional media forms to adopt and adapt to the new media technologies". This obviously accounts for the reliance on computers, smart phones, tablets, and other medium instead of the previous analogue means of information gathering. The most prominent example of media convergence is the Internet, whereby the technology for the streaming of video and audio has now changed the face of broadcasting and movies rapidly.

It becomes pertinent therefore to know what the new media is. According to McQuail (2005: 136) "the new media are disparate set 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". This implies that the new media are advancements of the traditional or old media through digitalization and convergence, and these have made the new media to have an edge over the old (analogue) media. The new media has drastically changed communication in some fundamental ways over the traditional media especially in information dissemination. It is imperative to note that many newspapers and broadcast news operations now have websites from which they dispense news. Furthermore, using the internet as a platform, the e-mail and videoconferencing have also become veritable tools in this new dimension (Fitzgerald & Dennis, 2005: 60).

The New Media has become a significant element in public service broadcast. The global network of the Internet, for instance, connects people and information via computers (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003:77). In this way the Internet, as a communication medium of New Media, overcomes the gap between people from different countries, permitting them to exchange opinions and information. Diverse means for this exist even within the context of the Internet, including chat rooms, Instant Messaging applications, forums, email messaging, online video and audio streaming and downloads, and voice-over-internet telecommunications. New Media is defined not only as a communication tool, but also as a tool for the commercial exchange of goods and services (Barr, 2002:167).

NEW MEDIA AND BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA

Public Service Broadcasting 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 (Nwanne, 2016). The use of these new media technologies in the broadcast industry in Nigeria today can be largely attributed to the deregulation of the industry by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1992. According to Udejah (2004:164) the deregulation of the broadcasting sector was a landmark achievement in Nigeria as it gave

constitutional backing to the private ownership of broadcasting stations which was formerly an exclusive right of the government.

In Nigeria today, there is no doubt that the stiff competition in the broadcast industry is as a result of the private broadcast stations trying to effectively compete with the public or government owned stations with their modern sophisticated digital broadcasting equipment. The government stations on their part have started to take the lead by digitalizing their stations to modern world standards with a view to facing the challenges of modern broadcasting propelled by the new media technologies. This also affirms the stand of the National Broadcasting Commission in stipulating that by the year 2017, all broadcasting stations and equipment still in analogue, must be phased out of the country; as such, Nigeria transited from analogue to digital television viewing on April 30, 2016 in the city of Jos, the Plateau State Capital when it launched the pilot phase of the Federal Government's digital transmission project that kick started the digitisation process in Nigeria. The reason for this may not be unconnected with the idea of the regulatory body to ensure that the opportunities which the new media technologies herald as well as the challenges they pose on the broadcasting industry are taken and maximized for the optimum use of the citizens of Nigeria.

Challenges of New Media in Public Service Broadcasting in Nigeria

Despite all the outstanding roles of new media, certain barriers still militates against their effective and efficient use especially in Nigeria. It therefore becomes imperative to examine these barriers. Today, in Nigeria, a number of barriers are militating against the effective use of the unique benefits the new media in broadcasting. Some of these problems arise because of the features and characteristics of some of the new media technologies, some, are economic while others, arise out of ignorance.

Absence of Clear-cut Policies

It is the policy of many developed and developing nations to place much emphasis on modern Information and Communication Technologies as a way of remaining relevant in the global village of today. In the case of Nigeria, much effort is now paid to the development and usage of these modern technologies. Although the Information and Communication Technology Policy of the Federal Government states this, it is sad to say that it has remained a paper policy ever since it was adopted by the government. ICTs are now one of the characteristic of world powers and many nations are making efforts to develop this sector but Nigeria is still politicizing her policy. It is sad that the Nigerian government is yet to fully define the purpose, principles and values which should animate her communication system. Perhaps this is the reason why Stein and Sinha (2006:425) advised that making these social choices (having a clear-cut ICT policy) would allow these decisions to be incorporated into technology and industry as they develop rather than forcing expensive and inefficient changes later.

Cost of New Media Technologies

A challenge in using the new media in public service is the fact that new media technologies are very expensive. This is a major limitation to the use of the new media technologies as advertising channels in digital television as it increases the cost of producing and running commercials. In developing countries like Nigeria, the high cost of exchange rate is affecting the cost of these new media technologies because majority of them are from Europe and Asia. In Nigeria for example, the current exchange rate of about N560 to \$1 in the parallel market (as at the time of writing this

paper) is simply alarming. This alarming rate obviously affects the purchase of new media technologies.

Low Level of Technology Penetration

Generally, less developed countries like Nigeria have low level of technology penetration including new media technologies and lack of availability of these the basic postulates of these technologies. This has made the use of new media technologies to move on a slow pace. For instance, the revolution in digital television is progressing slowly in developing countries like Nigeria for a number of reasons. First is the lack of or unavailability of digital receivers for signal reception even though many of today's television set are sold as digital. The vast majority of digital television sets advertised and sold at retail stores do not allow viewers to access local stations; Fritts (2002: 2) sees this as "over the air digital stations". Moreover, viewers wanting to receive digital stations must either incur the additional cost of a set-top digital turning box or pay more for a true digital receiving set than they would for a more typical set (Baran, 2009).

Power Supply

There is no refuting the fact that the epileptic power supply in Nigeria remains a hydra headed monster which the Nigerian government is yet to conquer despite the huge sums invested in the sector. The sad part of it is that most of the new media are dependent on power supply as they either need power to be operated or in some cases, charged. Power supply is so epileptic that public service broadcasting houses are dependent on power generating sets which are also dependent on fuel and diesel. The constant electric power outages in Nigeria, poses a serious threat to the survival of Information and Communication Technologies in public service broadcasting (Danaan, 2006:117). The public broadcasting sector sometimes has to shut down their equipment abruptly as a result of power outage.

Lack of Expertise

Many public broadcasters as far as the knowledge of Information and communication technologies is concerned lack the requisite knowledge and knowhow. Basic computer knowledge still erodes many public service broadcasters. This basically explains why many public service stations still run on analogue equipment. Today, many public service broadcasting station's staffs are still grappling with the challenges posed by new media technologies in the industry and because of this, any effort at ensuring the adoption and usage of these new media technologies is normally frustrated by these.

The above stated challenges faced by public service broadcasting in Nigeria goes to show that public service broadcasting in Nigeria may not meet up to global standards in broadcasting in the nearest future if these numerous challenges which still weighs the adoption of new media technologies today by public service broadcasting are not looked into with a view to solving them. Again, the demands of modern global broadcasting is such that the Nigerian government cannot afford to lag behind when other developing countries in her group are making serious effort to use technological advancement in getting out of the developing nations tag.

PROSPECTS OF NEW MEDIA IN PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA

Enhance Two-way Communication

The new media like the internet and mobile smart phones among others make for two –way communication which is the core aim of good media relations. Public service broadcasting can make use of chat rooms for virtual discussion where viewers or listeners have opportunities to contribute on-line during a programme. A message typed and sent within a chat room appears almost at the same time on the computers of other users in the same chat room, 24hours daily. Thus, new media encourages feedback and interactivity. For instance, mobile smart phones provide the means for members of the public to interact with reporters and get immediate feedback as the case maybe (Rodney, 2005). Furthermore, Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) state that new media give users the means to generate, seek and share content selectively, and to interact with other individuals and groups on a scale that was impracticable with traditional means. The quick responsiveness and social presence of interaction in most new media constitute a huge opportunity for media relations practice for the public service broadcasting.

Enhance the Development of a Positive Image

The mere fact that a media organization has a website, and it is well organized and constantly updated can boost the image of that media organization. Moreover, having a website encourages international recognition. For instance, an active web site of a public service broadcasting station in Nigeria would definitely be recognized globally. People and other media organizations would tend to associate more with organizations recognized in a positive light globally. Moreover, considering the nature of the internet that helps to open the world up thereby reducing the world into a global village, there is a tendency that more people would come across the media station profile which has a website than the ones that do not.

Ease Assessment of Current Corporate Image Position

New media provides public service broadcasting with a platform for feedback mechanism from the audience; and in addition, also provides the media house with the platform to justify their actions and also explain their mission as well as their reactions on issues (Adedina, Adeniyi, & Bolaji, 2008). The new media make it easier for public service media organizations to be aware of what their publics think about their corporate image so as not to face the danger of having false assumption that they are favourable disposed to their public. Since most new media have this feedback mechanism they can be used to relay to organizations what their public really think about them. This in turn can assist in pre-empting and eliminating misunderstanding and crisis that could have arisen.

Make Planning and Implementation of Media Relations Easier

New media make the media relations process easier, faster and cheaper to a large extent. The e-mail and electronic bulletins board for example can transmit message back to the source in a matter of seconds (Rodney 2005). The media relations practitioners can use the Internet to carry out quick and cost effective research. After implementing media relations policies, those involved in the

process can use new media to get feedback on how well the process is progressing. News releases can be sent to the media houses through new media technologies like the e-mail, mobile smart phones and so on. All these are done faster, easier and cheaper with the aid of the new media than the traditional means. Furthermore, new media eliminate the problem of distance and time.

CONCLUSION

Broadcasting is a worthwhile venture if creatively and tactically managed. This management of modern broadcasting in Nigeria's public service broadcasting can be successful if channelled through the right new media technologies with a blend of the old media. As a result of the new media, there is the need to determine whether Practitioners in the Nigerian public service broadcasting sector understand the new media technologies as an indispensable tool meant for their effective operations, find out what really constitutes the new media technologies in the broadcast industry, unveiling the advantages the new media technologies hold for the broadcast sector in Nigeria, as well as ascertaining how public service broadcast practitioners in Nigeria perceive the new media; and to know those problems militating against the acceptance or acquisition of the new media in Nigeria.

The most public service broadcast stations in Nigeria are still transmitting on analogue broadcast equipment. There is the need to urgently equip the public service broadcasting stations with new media facilities which are capable of placing them in the same pedestal as their counterparts in Africa and other developing countries of the world if properly utilised.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made:

- i. Nigerian public service broadcasters should fully embrace and adapt to the use of new media technologies in order to fully remain relevant in the industry.
- ii. That for the dream of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) on the phasing out of analogue broadcasting equipment to be realised in 2017, the commission must step up efforts geared at ensuring that broadcasting stations acquire standard facilities capable of putting Nigeria's broadcasting industry in the same pedestal as its counterparts globally.
- iii. To ensure effective and maximum utilisation of new media technologies in the public service broadcasting, efforts should be made by the relevant stakeholders to ensure that broadcasters in the public service are trained properly on how to use digital broadcasting equipment.
- iv. Government as a matter of policy must ensure that there is total removal of all barriers militating against the acquisition of new media facilities for broadcasting in public service broadcasting.
- v. Public service broadcasters, directors, producers and other key personnel in public service broadcasting should be trained on the recent technological innovations with regards to the use of Internet, computer and satellites; and have a grounded knowledge of the New Media.

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