Community Journalism in Nigeria: Global Technological Reflections

Asan Andrew Ate, Joseph Omoh Ikerodah*

1. Department of Mass Communication,Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji – Arakeji, Osun State, Nigeria.
2. Department of Mass Communication, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Nigeria
   *E-mail: ikerodah@yahoo.com

Abstract

Community Media is community owned, peoples' oriented and less profit driven. It has the capacity to facilitate and smoothen effective communication in places where the presence of Mass Media is not well felt thus fostering development in other media marginalized communities. Through community Media, crimes at grassroot level can be prevented while civil education, cross-gender dialogue, cultural literacy among other   things can be harnessed for developmental purposes. This paper holistically takes a look at community media and new media technologies with particular emphasis on Nigeria. The discourse which specifically pays particular attention on community radio seeks its marriage with new media technologies with a view to bringing   development to information ex-communicated communities. The paper recommends a highly hybrised and integrated media approach among other things.

Keywords: Community Media, New Media, Technologies

1. Introduction

Community media is a staggering concept viewed from the perspective of its application in the Nigeria's context. Looking at the issue from the standpoint of community radio, Konkwo (2010 p. 173) bemoans the scenario with historical and current appraisals:

> …the historical development of broadcasting in Nigeria reveals that community/local/ rural radio was never taken into consideration as an integral part of it up till now, the situation has persisted, because no where in Nigeria is the phenomenon of community radio currently being felt. So far the location of broadcasting stations has remained in the same pattern established by successive Nigeria government in the concentration of infrastructure which favours the urban centre to the neglect of rural areas.

Until April 21, 2009, when a clarion call was made on the inevitability and desirability of community broadcasting in Nigeria through a one- day policy dialogue on the matter in Abuja by stakeholders, broadcasting in Nigeria was urban conceived and urban delivered in all its ramification. As opposed to other countries in Africa where community broadcasting has been embraced, Nigeria in just a toddler in rural broadcasting. Apart from some campus radio stations been run by some higher institutions in the country which have some nuances of community broadcasting, there is virtually nothing concrete on ground beyond rhetorics and policy framework. Ajijola quoted in Moemeka (2008) puts the number of community radio stations in some countries in Africa as follows; Mali, 120, Senegal 44, Burkina Faso 27, Niger Republic 24, Republic of Benin 22 and Ghana 8. Furthermore, Quarmyne cited by Konkwo (2010) states that South Africa   has 92 community radio stations while Mozambique boasts of 25.

In Ghana for instance, the role of community radio has been clearly stated in their 1995 legislation. According to Alumuku (2006, p 17) Ghana's legislation "stipulates that community broadcasting should be non- sectarian, non-partisan and not-for-profit but add that commercial advertising is permissible on community broadcasting stations for the purposes of sustainability …" He added:

> the legislation points out that at least 70% of programmes on all community broadcasting stations should be in local languages and 80% of the programmes should be produced by the station itself. At least 20% of programmes should be of national interest, which could include relays of national broadcast news from the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC).

In Zambia, the National Broadcasting (Licensing) Regulations Act of 1993 from a legal back up for establishment of community radio. It is an independent authority with the powers to licence, regulate and allocate frequencies as an essential element to liberalization process (Alumuku, 2008).

Equally in South Africa, the promulgation of the Independence Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act of 1993 as pontificated by Alumuku (2008, p 17) "paved the way for the licensing of community radio stations and the government's white paper on broadcasting published in June 2001 outlined the government's first ever policy on community radio."

While the blames of ex-communicating the rural populace in Nigeria through community broadcasting lies squarely on government, some experts believe that journalism educators and mass communication researchers should also be held responsible for their negligence in promoting community broadcasting. Konkwo (2010) and Claussen (2008).

While Konkwo (2010) specifically accused Africa Journalism educators for partly been responsible what he described as "cheerless situation" Claussen (2008) bemoaned the fact that journalism educators and mass communication researchers in Africa are almost ignoring community radio (which is) increasingly important worldwide.

The mass media are technologically driven. Technology has changed the tide of news reporting in our society. Ate (2008, p. 73) confirms this assertion with particular emphasis on satellite:

> As the society becomes more complex by the day, media practitioners need to technologically position themselves in a vantage position to effectively perform their social responsibility function to members of the public. In those days, somebody could accept the definition of news as an account of what has happened. And for any event to be defined as new, it must be reported. But today, with the technology of satellite, the process of news gathering and dissemination has been re-shaped. People can watch events anywhere in the world as they are happening.

He further argued that technology is an aspect of culture and that the nature of society depends largely on the type of technology it acquired.

This paper examines community media and new media technologies with particular emphasis on Nigeria.

2.   **Theoretical Framework**.
This study is built on Development Media theory on the grounds that community media, if well positioned, could facilitate remarkable development in the society.

2.1   Development Media Theory
Development media theory was put forward as a means of paying for the imbalance in development and information flow of the third world countries and a solution to the technological problems facing them. The third world countries are beset by problems that make development of mass communication system difficult (Daramola, 2003).

In order to deal with peculiar developmental challenges facing third world countries, this theory was put in place with emphasis on the right to communicate and the need to use communication to galvanize social change. The tenets of Development Media Theory as enunciated by McQuail (2000) are:

i.   Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with naturally established policy.

ii.   Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.

iii.   Media should give priority in the content to the national culture and language.

iv.   Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

v.   In the interest of development, the state has a right to intervene or restrict media operation.

Folarin (1998, p.31) argues that development media theory seeks "to explain the normative behavior of the press in countries that are conventionally classified as "developing countries" or "third world countries".

He pontificates that there were (and are still) peculiar circumstances or characteristics of developing countries that make the application of other normative theories difficult. These according to him include:

1. Absence or inadequate supply of requisite communication infrastructure;
2. Relative limited supply of requisite professional skills;
3. Relative lack of cultural production resources;
4. Relatively limited availability of media-literate audience;
5. Dependence on the development world for technology, skills and cultural products.

3. Community Journalism

Community journalism or civic journalism is a new area of focus for mass communicators all over the world. Because of the strength of the rural press to mobilize people to participate in the art and science of governance at the grassroot level where majority of the people live especially in Africa, community journalism is endorsed by many as a soothing balm for advocacy and developmental journalism.

Kurpius (1999, p.3) outlines some of the major benefits of civic journalism. These are "increased diversity, greater depth and context of the news coverage, and a stronger understanding of the various communities that make a particular viewing area."

Moemeka (1981), Myers (2000), Kurpius (1999)   and other experts highlighted the relevance of community media in different spheres of human endeavour. For example, community journalism according to experts encourages journalists and news managers to find ways to capture citizen priorities, concerns and perspectives on different issues of importance to many different communities. As part of the process of creating connections to citizens, news managers are now finding ways to hear and understand the greatest diversity of voices and communities in their viewing and listening areas. Practicing community journalism helps both news content and source diversity by encouraging a discussion of citizen views and issues using a wide range of community perspectives.

The best reason for practicing community journalism is to create a stronger community understanding by news organisations and the journalists who work in these newsrooms. Inherent in this increased understanding is an ongoing conversation between journalists, citizens and public officials on issues facing their communities. The result of this conversation is larger file of community sources for stories and an increase in story ideas from various communities. These connections and the resulting coverage can help strengthen the value of your news product for citizens in your market (Kurpius, 1999).

The experiment on community newspapering in the 70s and 80s in Nigeria gives a clear picture of the potentials of community press in changing the fortunes of rural dwellers. For instance, through the Moribund *Community Concord* then owned by Late Chief M.K.O Abiola, Nigerian rural dwellers were journalistically blessed in different spheres of life.

Historically, the late sages, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe played crucial roles in the establishment of community newspapers in Nigeria. The duo established provincial newspapers which marked the beginning of the recognition of the role of community journalism and national development. The newspaper established by these leading nationalists, sociologically brought into limelight the cultural artifacts and ideo-facts of rural people in print journalism. They painted the sorry picture of abject poverty and backwardness in rural areas and that drew the attention of the government to the plight of rural dwellers. These papers informed the rural dwellers of great things or issues within their domains and those in cities. Through vernacular newspapers, village dwellers were wooed and mobilized to participate in developmental programmes of their communities, thus engendering social change. (Ate, 2008).

The establishment of the rural newspapers fine-tuned the world view of the down trodden and brought them closer to decision making process at the central level. The community newspapers established at the time in questions serve as a springboard for the establishment of radio and television stations in the 60s and 70s. It is important to point out that the localization of radio and TV in Nigeria took a cue from community newspapers. Today, both TV and radio do broadcast to the people in their predominant local dialects. (Duyile, 2005).

Some decades ago, some few newspapers were packaged for exclusive audience. There were *Udoka* (Ibo), *Amana* (Hausa) and *Isokan* (Yoruba). The mass media are potent tools for social change and community journalism if well harnessed and husbanded by the appropriate stakeholders.

Community media has the powers to evolve social change that could lead to rural transformation in different areas. Even though there are some few of community newspapers in Nigeria today, these papers are too insignificant to take care of the large and heterogeneous audience at the grassroot level.

In terms of broadcast media, though most state-owned radio and television stations in the country do broadcast in local languages, the establishment of full blown community broadcasting in Nigeria is still a matter of debate. A veteran broadcaster, and one of the leading apostles of community broadcasting in Nigeria, Chief Taiwo Alimi at a workshop on "Curriculum Guidelines for Improved Journalism Education in Nigeria" organized by the Nigerian Press Council in October, 2007 argued that the country will not make any meaningful progress without community broadcasting. The time to embark on comprehensive community journalism according to him, is now.

4. Community Radio

Community radio broadcasting is designed and structured by the local, rural community to meet its expression are enlightenment needs. (Konkwo, 2010). Megwa (2011) added that community radio has demystified Radio as Community dwellers take pride in it and consider it as their own. Alumuku (2006, p.27) contends that "community radio is emerging as one of the best forms of local community communication." Such a grassroot communication approach according to Traber (1986) can become an agent for change in religious, socio-economic development, and in the struggle for human rights.

Alumuku (2006 pp 33-34) identifies two aspects of community radio. These are geographic community radio and community of interest radio. He argued that geographically defined communities are "those communities which exist in a specific locality and which construct meaning from a common language and symbols and therefore share an identity by virtue of these."

Conversely, communities of interest as reasoned by him are not defined by where people live geographically but "rather by what they are interested in. Their interest could be music or local language or their involvement in adult education at various levels."

As promising as community radio is, it is just trying to find its feet on Nigerian media firmament. The Nigerian Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) on April 21, 2009 urged the Federal Government to empower Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to speed up the process of issuance of community radio license to prospective broadcasters. Community radio broadcasting in Nigeria is dwarfed by unprecedented challenges ranging from policy misdirection, lack of legislative backing, official red typism to mention only a few. Konkwo (2010, PP 178-179) captured the unfortunate and abysmal trend:

> It is important to note that many years after the Federal Government embarked on a policy reform process which involved the review of the 1990 National Mass Communication Policy and design a National Radio Policy, it is yet to conclude this process as the final documents have not been released to the public.

> Similarly, the Broadcasting Reform Law Bill introduced to the National Assembly by the executive branch of government is yet to see the light of the day. While the regulatory body, the NBC, has made provision for community broadcasting with its regulatory framework, it is still disturbing to note the agencies lethargic attitudes towards the licensing process.

While community radio in Nigeria is still at the gestation period, it is necessary for stakeholders in the industry to integrate community radio with new media technologies for effective and efficient result

The 1996 Pan-Africa meeting in Abuja, Nigeria considered the issue of deregulation of community radio and raised some critical issues that need to be addressed. The Abuja Chapter observes that:

i   Although deregulation is commendable, there were fears of the possible adverse influence on African culture and family values.

ii.   Although electronic media has been used in some cases to aggravate   national crisis, it has greater potential for resolution of crisis and the promotion of social, political and economic development.

iii.   The altitudes of Africans towards locally manufactured products has   hampered indigenous initiatives.

iv.   The rights of broadcasters in the performance of their duty are not adequately protected in several countries in Africa.

5. New Media Technologies

The term new media according to Musa (2009, p. 13) "encompasses the emergence of digital, computerized or networked information and communication technologies in the later part of the 20th century."

Technology as reasoned by Rogers (1995) is an important aspect in the diffusion of an innovation. This innovation according to him is best communicated using the new media in order to reach the widest audience in the shortest frame. Joshi cited by Musa (2009) argued that modern communication must serve as a means to societal development.

Rice (1984) defined the new media as communication technologies that enable or facilitate user-to-user interactivity between user and information. Flew (2002) contended that as a result of the evolution of new media technologies, globalization occurs. Croteau and Hoynes (2003:p.11) explained that new media "radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making physical location much less significant for our social relationships."

Carely in Flew (2002) refers to the shortening of distance between people all over the world as "death of distance" The New Media has the ability to connect like-minded worldwide. Monavich (2001, p. 41) remarked that the new media follows the logic of the post industrial or globalised society whereby "every citizen can construct her own custom, lifestyle and select her ideology from a large number of choices".

Megwa (2011) believes that hybrised media – Community Radio and Information Communication Technology can lead to poverty reduction. In a study he conducted in South Africa on community radio, community conversation with stakeholders, face-to-face interviews with management and workers of community radio; focused group interview and observational study were used as data collection methods. It was conceptually established that technology can be good or bad depending on the usage.

The importance of technology in the mass media cannot be underestimated. Rupert Murdoch cited by Ikiebe (2011, p.4) establishes this fact:

> To find something comparable, you have to go back 500 years to the printing press, the birthplace of the media. Technology is shifting power away from the editors, the publishers and the media elite. Now it's the people who are taking control.

The people are taking control. Community media is about the people and the new media also empower the people to take their communication destinies into their hands. That takes us into the concept of media convergence. Media convergence as a change force according to Ikiebe (2011, p. 4) is "producing borderless world, and is posing new regulatory, ethical, cultural, social and geo-political challenges."

Media convergence produced conversed journalists in the digital age. Dominick (2009) explained that the convergence reporter is one who can write stories for a print or a website, shoot and post photos online, and a video as well. The concept presupposes the convergence of the print journalist and video journalist to produce the 21st century version of the news correspondence. This feat cannot be possible without the use of digital and cell phones, video cameras and high speed internet access. Convergence media is about technology.

6. **Types of Media Technology**

Generally, Information Technology (IT) which is the study or use of processes especially computers for storing, retrieving and sending out information of all sorts has turned the world into a global village today. Technology, like the mass media is an instrument of social change in a society.

We live in a world of automated computer dominance of communication in both private and public sectors. The mass media as an institution has been making use of informatics, a fundamental tool of the age of computopia. That is, the process of making use of computers and other electronic devices in information gathering, storage and processing in all aspect of life.

Technology has revolutionized communication during the past decade. Access to people and information – practically anywhere in the world has become quicker, cheaper and easier – (*Awake! May 22, 2002*). Let us examine some few types of media technology.

    i.   **Satellite** – A satellite is a chain-link of equipment used for sending out or receiving electronic microwaves or signals. Nigeria's first communication satellite was launched on May 13, 2007 by China. With the launch of NIGCOMSAT, Nigeria has become a member of the space community. The critical issue here according to Ate (2007) is that of technology. According

to him, during the launch of Nigeria Sat – I in 2003, the country relied on Russia for the project. Also, during the 2007 launch of NIGCOMSAT, the giant of Africa depended solely on China for the unprecedented project. This, indisputably, is worrisome.

ii.   **Internet** – Microsoft Encarta cited in Umechukwu (2001:69), defines internet as "a global matrix of interconnected computer network using the internet protocol to communicate with each other. It is an open connection of networks that enables connected computers to communicate directly." A*wake!* (2002), puts the number of new users that get connected to the internet every week at 300,000.

iii. **Television** – Most people in the world now have access to a television, even if they don't own one. By 1995, there were 235 TV sets for every 1000 people worldwide, almost double the number in 1980. Just a small satellite dish can enable people who live in remote areas to receive broadcasts from around the world. "Today, no country can ever truly cut itself off from the global media," points out Francis Fukuyama, a professor of political economy. (*Awake!* May 22, 2002).

iv.   **Telephone** – A good number of people are using mobile phones all over the world. Many of these users are having access to the internet through their phones. What an information revolution!

v.   **Microchip** – Through this device, much information could be stored in the little space. Media practitioners who have access to this technology are using it to effectively gather and disseminate timely information to members of the public.

7. Recommendations

Having discovered that community media and new media technologies can bring concrete developmental changes in the socio-political and economic lives of Nigerians, we hereby recommend as follows:

- That proactive acquisition and usuage of new media technologies be employed by all stakeholders in community broadcasting in Nigeria. This calls for full digitalisation of broadcasting industry in the country.

- That there should be training and re-training of community media workers in Information Communication Technology (ICT) in other to keep themselves abreast of current trends in the industry.

- That there is need for professionals to strengthen science and technology reporting in Nigeria at the grassroot level.

- That government at all levels (Federal, State and Local) should make it a priority to develop infrastructural facilities at the grassroot level. This will encourage and accelerate participatory community radio models in the country.

- That, journalists in Nigeria should partner with UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank to mention only a few international partners with a view to securing funds for the purpose of community journalism. All stakeholders in this developmental initiative should consider the establishment of civic journalism in the country as a social responsibility function to the society. The traditional institution in Nigeria should also be educated on the indispensability of community broadcasting at this crucial stage of our national life. This is because with community journalism, rural dwellers can become news makers thus bridging rural-urban communication gap.

- That, efforts should be geared towards making Nigerians to appreciate their roots and heritage. The National Orientation Agency, Non-Governmental Organizations, the mass media and religious organizations in the country should embark on aggressive campaigns to re-orient Nigerians to think the Nigeria way and also appreciate and uphold the positive values of their culture. The people should be re-packaged, information wise, to be proud to showcase the good

values and norms in their communities to the outside world. This, we believe, would promote the culture of community journalism and also engender the spirit of patriotism.

- That, journalists in Nigeria should work hand-in-hand with sociologists and anthropologists in the country with a view to identifying socio-cultural, economic and political areas that need urgent innovation and re-engineering for holistic development of the society in the area of communty media. In other words, there should be some elements of sociological and psychological journalism appeals to the community media audience.

If the above recommendations are sincerely taken into consideration, we are optimistic that the country will enter into a new era of technologically driven community media that will facilitate the needed development and social change in the nation's body polity.

8. Conclusion

This discourse establishes the fact that community media, especially community radio, has become a child of necessity for rural development in Nigeria. The paper concludes that this initiative can only be achieved in this digital age if there is an excellent marriage between community media and new media technologies in the country.

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