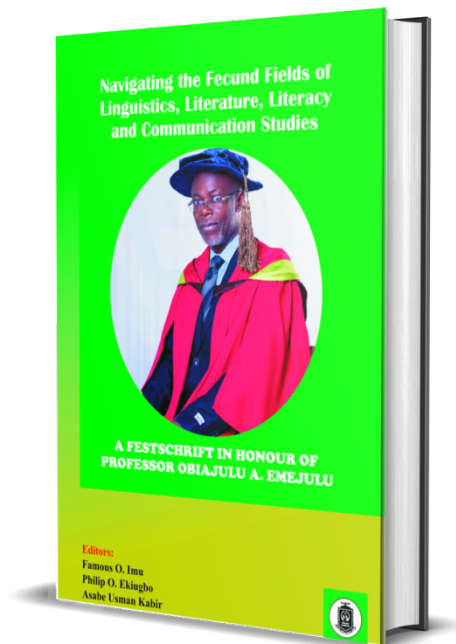


## **Navigating the Fecund Fields of Linguistics, Literature, Literacy and Communication Studies: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Obiajulu A. Emejulu**



### **Editors:**

Famous O. Imu, Philip O. Ekiugbo and Asabe Usman Kabir

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## **Chapter Thirty**

### **The Mass Media and the Rest of Us in the Digital Information Age**

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#### **Introduction**

"Globalization of Media" in the context of this paper (Understanding Media and Culture), discusses how technology affects the globalization of the media industry. The paper is about conceptualizing cultural globalization by connecting the global and the local cultures that affect conceptions of culture and cultural studies. Globalization of Media centres on key issues and dimensions of the paradoxes of globalization in media and culture. Globalization in the 1990s was impacted by information and communication technologies have remained the key factors in broadcasting. They have revolutionised the way we seek and receive broadcast information over the years. Digital tools magnify the ability that is unique in the world: the ability to think, the ability to articulate our thoughts, and the ability to work together to act on those thoughts (Gates 2000; p. 415). Broadcasting has benefited from the contributions of several international scientists and inventors, whose ideas provided the base for the developments in broadcasting. The broadcast media have had its share of the new technologies in all its processes. Global virtual families have developed as a result of the revolution in communication technologies. Based on the new media concept, friendship is no longer developed based on local geography, but rather, people are getting closer like in a family through the digital world of interactive media, based on shared needs and interests rather than geographical location.

#### **Newspaper Audience in a Digital Age**

The mass audience for newspapers still exists for major metropolitan, national and regional dailies. There is also a considerable audience for weekly newspapers, such as local entertainment or shopping-oriented weeklies. However, with the advent of new media technologies giving rise to online newspapers and highly specialized electronic media, people tend to read newspapers quickly and selectively spending less than 20 minutes on a 30-page newspaper. Therefore, to attract more readership, newspaper pages are becoming more graphically and visually designed.

### **Radio Audience in a Digital Age**

In order to cater for the diverse needs of the teeming population of radio listeners, stations have started increasingly to apply specific formats. For FM stations which in the 1980s were dominated by the music-oriented formats, there is now the need for audience segmentation using programme formats. In Nigeria, the coming on board of many Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) FM radio stations in almost all the 36 states of the federation has led to improved audience segmentation. Since the FM stations were designed for community broadcasting, there was a need to reach the rural communities with programmes that were aimed at solving their felt needs. Not long after, these federal government networks of FM stations started competing with state-owned radio stations. This competition has definitely enriched the content of the programmes offered by both FRCN stations (short wave) and FM affiliate stations and those of the state-owned FM stations.

The audiences have choices to make, especially, with the introduction of private FM radio stations in many states in Nigeria. Some private radio stations like Ray-Power and Silver-bird are setting up FM stations in many states other than Lagos and Abuja. Since the web radio has not fully taken off in Nigeria, audience radio experiences, for now, are limited to the wireless transistor radio in homes, GSM handsets and car radios. This is against the backdrop that FM radio experience for audiences in the USA and Britain goes along different formats representing different programme stations. Each genre or radio station has a fairly distinct listening audience.

### **Music Audience in a Digital Age**

The change in technology in the music industry and the marriage between music technologies and computer technologies has made it possible to extend the music listening experience beyond the conventional boundaries and formats of radio, television, compact discs, digital video discs, or Digital Versatile Discs. Most recently there is music on iPods, iPads, MP3s, GSM phones and computers (websites). The audiences are definitely, enjoying the experience of having to play music in different forms from different media. This has not only led to audience fragmentation and segmentation but has brought out the fact that we have music audiences for different music genres.

### **Television Audience in a Digital Age**

In Nigeria, just like most countries of the world, television has become the most

powerful and engaging medium of mass communication because of its ability to combine sound and pictures to recreate, maximum memorable effects. The advent of television became a challenge to radio broadcasting which lacks the visual capabilities of TV. As the most involving of all the media except for the rapt attention required to read newspapers, books and magazines, television has over the years captured the interests, enthusiasm and absolute trust of the audience, in its ability as a medium of mass communication. Television viewing experience all over the world has changed dramatically and progressively with each technological innovation in radio wave propagation and format. From black and white screens to colour, liquid crystal display (LCD) plasma, widescreen, a high definition television (HDTV) to an array of content improvements and programme formats, television has remained the heartbeat of communication technological improvements. To this effect, computer and optic fibre technologies have greatly improved television broadcasting. In Nigeria, the deregulation of broadcasting has introduced private ownership of television stations. Many television stations have improved and diversified content, and audience segmentation, especially with cable and satellite stations. With Pay-TV Service providers, audiences now have to access programmes from such foreign stations as CNN, Aljazeera, Fox TV, BBC Television, Discovery Channel, Magic Word, and African Magic. These stations are offering different types of television programmes and experiences to the audience.

These experiences have been wonderful and awesome. In some homes, with appropriate subscription arrangements family members can watch different programmes on different television sets on different channels thereby confirming the saying that audiences of mass communication are actually heterogeneous and diversified in their choices and tastes. These days, television content providers are actually seeking out the audience instead of allowing the audience to search for the media content of their choice. On subscription to a service provider, the TV audience can be presented with upward of 50 television programmes or stations to choose from. This has increased the tendency of the audience to switch from one channel to the other. Pay-per-view systems which allow the cable TV subscriber to order recent features, films, sporting events, concerts and other special events when scheduled have become part of our television-watching experience. After, the public outcry on the bath session of a Reality Show - Big Brother Africa, the cable station (DSTV) and the organizers devised a means of delivering the three-month live programme to only those who paid specifically for it.

Another area of improved television viewing experience is in the video-on-

demand arrangement which allows cable TV subscribers to order for recent feature films, sporting events, concerts, news items and special events at any time. In the USA, the format for television broadcasting includes web TV which provides viewers with immediate motivation to veer away from traditional programmes and onto websites. In addition to these, television viewing is becoming more interactive with opportunities to read text messages on television screens and check running programme information using the television hyper-text device.

### **Media Audience and Popular Culture in a Digital Age**

Invariably, the media have helped in introducing popular culture in music, arts and dressing. The divergence in *cultural* values has been submerged in a more realistic media-driven cultural synchronization and homogenization. The impact of the mass media world*wide* has brought closer many people and created more of a *global* family in recent times than the much talked about global village concept. People, now share media content via the new media as if they are members of one family. In the real sense of it, those that the media contents and tastes have brought together share in the same media programme irrespective of distance in a more interactive and intimate family style.

A typical example of this can be found in football or sports men and women fan clubs which tend to bring together thousands of people who belong to one sports club or the other. In Nigeria, youths are now united in their support for football clubs in Europe to the extent that it has become a rallying point, a family affair and a cult followership trend. All these are made possible by the direct broadcasting satellite (DBS) of these football leagues via cable and satellite television. Can we say these developments have wiped the concept of a mass audience in mass communication? The answer is a little bit confusing since the characteristics of the mass media audience include being heterogeneous and diversified in media content requirements and tastes. The atomization of the audience has not completely erased these characteristics even when media contents have been individualized. What we are witnessing is a market that is highly balkanized by the array of broadcasting organizations trying vigorously to secure a share of the market (audience) by offering specialized programmes.

Invariably, the term audience is still relevant in the present circumstance, in as much as it represents the aggregation of mass media target groups. In so far as there are still thousands or hundreds of people who are attracted to a programme and can subscribe and enjoy the broadcasting programme simultaneously,

(viewing/listening watching/listening), we will continue to use the term “the audience”. But whether the “mass” can be added to the word “the audience” will definitely be determined by the number of people that the programmes can attract within its broadcasting period (time belt). However, we must observe at this juncture that each technological improvement in mass communication tried to shrink what could be called the “mass audience”. For instance, the introduction of cinematographs reduced the number of audiences that would watch a live play on stage. Furthermore, the introduction of television and subsequently movies on television reduced the number of cinema-goers. Naturally, the invention of video tapes and compact discs further moved people away not only from the cinema halls to their homes but also from television dramas and soaps. In Nigeria, the cinema-going culture is almost dead, and the home movies have taken over.

This leaves us with a shrinking audience for television movies and theatric plays. Ironically, the internet audience is fast on the increase as millions of people hit Twitter, Facebook, U-tube, weblog or Google websites every month for various informative and entertaining programmes. Digital technology has allowed everybody to now become a mass communicator. This will eventually have an impact on who gets what news, opinion and entertainment. There is a great shift towards user-generated media content in the most individualized manner. The concept of collective consumption of mass communication products is giving way to an individualized, user-needs approach, where the media content tends to satisfy each media user by presenting programmes that appeal to them as individuals.

In a typical month, about 20 million people visit YouTube to watch videos posted by other people. That is a bigger audience than most hit prime-time TV shows attract. (Dominick 2009, P.78) There are over 60 video and news websites existing on the net bringing personalized and specialized news and information like never before. There are also over 6 million blogs on the internet. Bloggers are becoming popular and powerful news providers despite the fact that most traditional news audiences do not like their approach to news. For the younger generation of media users, these developments become veritable information sourcing and giving vehicles. The digitalized and internet approach to news has given voices to the voiceless majority and the opportunity to become part of the political and economic debates in their countries. The editorial voice that people find in blogging has enormously improved the citizen's ability to contribute to information and communication developments in their various countries. In politics, the digital age technologies have contributed to political information on party platforms candidates can use the text of speeches and

other political structures to enhance citizen's participation in political debate.

However, this aspect of individualization of the political media content has not taken proper root in Nigeria where party politics still depends solely on the traditional media approach. As new communication technologies are developed, the greater majority, especially in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, are being alienated from the media. This is because the cost and complexity of the new media have made them the reserve of a rich and technologically knowledgeable minority. In Nigeria, for instance, the cost of acquiring a personal computer is beyond the income of an average person. Generally, also, the cost of internet facilities is so high that only very few can afford to have these services at their beck and call. The greater majority of the audiences are left with very few public cybercafes, especially in major towns and cities. At the public broadcasting level, the cost of digitalization is so high that only very few government-owned radio and television can afford it. To this end, despite the international switch-off date of the 2015 world deadline and the 2013 African countries deadline, only very few stations are gearing up for the change over from analogue to digital broadcasting.

### **New Media and the Rest of us**

The new media involves a whole lot of information and communication experiences which revolves around. Computer-mediated process of information dissemination using such activities as e-mail, chat room, MUDs and MODs avatar-based communication forms including voice, image, the web and mobile telephone. It also will include new means of generating, distributing and consuming media texts which enhance interactivity and hypertext formats as in the World Wide Web, CD-ROM, DVD and computer games.

Also, it includes a new range of audio-visual experiences ranging from photography, animation, television, film and cinema. The elements of digital media (the new media) are ease of creating multimedia, interactivity, automation and the fact that digital is simply made up of bits, or electrons, rather than anything physical. (Ramanuyam 2008; P.VI). Digital media technology has the potential for exploitation in new kinds of media work. Music and video producers have benefited from access to relatively inexpensive, but good-quality equipment. In terms of media products, new media offers opportunities for new audiences to be discovered and reached. For example, online versions of movies and music are not really money-spinning but when cost is kept very low, this method of video and music distribution can prove to be viable and reduce the extent of piracy. These days,



circulating images, songs, jokes, and web links have become an integral part of internet culture. Hence, broadcast television networks are in a fight for survival with newer competing technologies, including cable, satellite, on-demand video, video games and the internet.

## **Conclusion**

When businesses use computer and telecommunications media, they expect profit to increase. New media can aid business growth. For instance, film studios can get an edge on competition by using electronic editing to get blockbuster films. Newspapers can create innovative products such as electronic versions of the newspaper on the web. (Baran 2002). Also, new media have increased productivity, hence in most cases, the rate of output relative to inputs-workers' machinery and other resources have expanded to create products. For instance, computer-assisted design/computer-assisted manufacturing (CAD/CAM) systems have helped designers visualize new products inside computer-work stations. For example, animated movies are now possible and are designed, directed and produced with the aid of CAD/CAM (Turow 1999). Hence, there are now more customized mass media products everywhere. These include Customized Publishing of books, specialized magazine and newspaper editions, and cable television pay-per-view movies.

In radio stations, automated CD systems or satellite-delivered network radio programmes are supplanting announcers and disk jockeys. Again, the common workplace is being replaced with telecommuting in which the employee's home office is linked to the workplace (Dominick 2002). The idea is to help the worker balance home demand and work schedule. Electronic commerce is becoming an important feature of the new media. It allows for complete purchases and financial transactions over computer networks through the Internet. In the media industry, newspapers and magazines are now charging fees for the online versions of their products, thereby allowing electronic commerce to make an in-road into the core mass media industry. What has aided electronic commerce greatly is the shift form of long-distance phone calls away from telephone networks to the Internet which has lowered cost to a great extent (Biagi 2003).

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