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PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM, ICT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
This work examined the place of mass media and ICTs in national development. The mass media is the purveyor of information. It keeps the people in the know as to what is happening around them. ICT as a strong instrument in the field of communication when employed by media practitioners, activists and government has the tendency of ensuring development. National development demands a participatory action. The use of traditional media technologies which are not only capital intensive but limited in accessibility and void of citizens' participation is the major reason for the backwardness experienced in the developing countries. There is the need for the country to adopt the new media technologies. This new media technology opens door for participatory governance which is what is required for development, hence the purpose of this paper. Anchored on the democratic participation Theory and Development Media Theory, the study adopted the content analysis methodology. Conclusively, ICTs aids participatory journalism and bring about national development. Among other things, it was recommended that the use of ICTs be encouraged as its relevance in national development is not negotiable.

Keywords: ICTs, Traditional Media, Participatory Journalism, New Media and National Development

INTRODUCTION

Over the years the place of mass media in national development cannot be over emphasized. The media, outside other of its functions is an agent of development. Media in all its form and nature is a core institute of the society upon which the society and institutions depend and develop…. (Ndubuisi, 2022). The traditional media that is the print which includes newspapers, magazines etc, the audio media like radio, audio tapes etc, and the audio-visual media like television, films etc have in no small measure contributed immensely to national development.

However, it is important to note that national development is a participatory act. No government or leader can bring in totality enabling ground for development. There must be participatory efforts of the nation's citizenry. Hence, national development without the citizens' contributions and opinions will only amount to a failed venture. Participatory ideas and opinions from the citizens is what is referred to today as citizen journalism. And this cannot be achieved without the use of ICTs.

With the use of ICTs, people are able to contribute meaningfully to the developmental issues of a nation. After all, what is the need for development without the people? Every national development is for the people. They wear the shoes and they know exactly where it pinches.

The use of modern technologies like emails, twitter, WhatsApp etc through our smart phone allows people to throw in ideas on economic, political, financial issues etc. Gone are the days when current issues are decided by opinion leaders. With the advent of ICTs, everybody is an opinion leader and everybody has a say on issues that borders on the nation.

This approach makes possible, participation from local community for self development by communicating from bottom-up perspective. Servaes and Malikhao (2005) explains that participatory communication has been used to support development by gaining communities pride of its own resources and culture, education and stimulating people to be active as change agents.

News gathering and dissemination is gradually leaving the traditional means. Interestingly, a number of media professionals have argued that the use of blogs to facilitate citizen journalism is not necessarily disadvantageous to professional journalism but can re-invent the professional operations of the news media (Okerie, Oyedepo, & Usaini, 2012). Edward (2006) has observed that the advent of citizen journalism has refocused the news media by making them a more interactive product. He explained further that a reader who posts comments, articles, and photos on their local newspaper's website might feel a stronger connection to the paper and more likely to read the print version than the online version of the newspaper.
With the advent of the internet, there are better opportunities for individuals to indulge in gathering and disseminating of news thereby promoting citizen journalism.

Objectives of the study
The research has the following as its objectives; to

Identify the prospects of information and communication technology in promoting digital growth and national development in Nigeria
Ascertain the role of ICTs in promoting governance and national development.
Show that participatory journalism is possible through the use of ICTs.

ICT in Mass Media
The use of internet supports lifelong learning. Learning is a continuous process and the human existence is one that continuously asks for knowledge. On a daily basis, people are exposed to facts, figures, information, and details that benefit them and lead them into the affairs of the nation. This ordinarily would have been impossible without the aid of the ICT. The act of participation starts from knowing. The extent of a thing you are exposed to is the extent you know. And the extent you know is the extent of your participation.
Internet Communication Technology supports citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is referred to a wide range of activities in which everyday people contribute information or commentary about news events. Salawu (2007) has described citizen journalism as the democratisation of the multi-media technologies by the people and for the people. He added that the tide has changed in the modules of disseminating or receiving information. He described citizen journalism as a secular process of passing information.
With the help of the mass media, ICTs have really proved a more promising communication platform that is timelier and tangible in this 21st century. ICT makes communication fast. Real time reporting and live events are now made possible through ICTs. With ICTs, communication is fast, precise and well targeted. Without ICTs, gathering and dissemination of information will be impossible, communication would be taken back to the use of papyrus, conventional newspapers, tradition TV and radio, and there will be no communication tools as internet, websites, blogs and social media.
Without ICT mass communication would not have been as effective and viral as it is today. Message transmission has been made a lot easier with the aid of ICT. Communication is now able to reach the masses. It is technology that has opened the world and made it easy for information to flow from one corner to the rest of the world. ITC diversifies communication. The traditional methods of getting news have given way to technologically enabled news gathering and dissemination methods. ITC makes sure that communication achieves its intended objective of reaching the masses.
This makes news gathering and dissemination easy, cheap and affordable. With the internet connection, anybody can pass information to the world. This is where citizen journalism comes to play. The use of twitter, face book and other social media networks are technological tools to connect with people around the world. It would have been almost impossible to have people contributing to the process of communication without the use of ICTs. ICT enhances free access to information. Technology has taken the centre stage in advancing and creating communication messages.
Fakunle and Ayodele (nd) highlights the major benefits of ICT services as follows;

- Acceleration of human resources development and reduction of poverty.
- Making transparency in government possible.
- Active participation of citizens in governance.
- Faster and better delivery of public goods and services.
- Sustainable development of natural resources.
- Provide more effective governance.

According to Fakunle and Ayodele (abcit), ICTs have the capacity to increase productivity, that is, to create more cost-effective output with the same or less input. The value of information and accumulated knowledge within developing countries is an important aspect of their future growth potential. A nation's growth or level of development is a function of information available through the information communication technologies (ICTs). Only a very few developing countries have succeeded in narrowing the production or use of ICTs to their development goals (Fakunle&Ayodele, nd).
They further added that these technologies do not offer a magic portion that can be expected to provide a cure for the sick, to prevent environmental degradation, or to create jobs. However, if these technologies can be combined with domestic and external human resources, they can be instrumental in achieving major changes in the organization of industrial activity and the conduct of everyday life.

Participatory Journalism and National Development
Participatory journalism otherwise known as, "citizens, "democratic", "gorilla", or "street" journalism is the concept of members of the public playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information (Glaser, 2008). Participation of the citizens of a nation is very important when it has to do with development issues. Development issues affect everyone both young and old, educated and non-educated, government and the governed. It cuts across tribes, religion, affiliations etc.
A case at hand is the recent flood disaster ravaging so many states in Nigeria. It has affected everyone living within the affected areas. The citizens of those areas will tell the stories better than visiting journalists hence involving them in the reportage.
With the advent of the internet and digital technologies, people now have unprecedented access to the tools of production and dissemination. Citizen journalism is becoming an increasing large influence on the mainstream media; they help the traditional media access and report some issues that they may not be able to report on especially when it affects the government. Issues on end SARS agitations, police brutality, political corruption etc are stories that are better told by the eyewitnesses with first hand information.
Citizen journalism is an evolving form of journalism practice. Adelabu, 2008; Adum&Ekwugha, 2010, posits that basically when any common man in his capacity as a citizen of a nation takes up the initiative to report things or express his views about happenings around him then the occurrence is termed as citizen or participatory journalism. In many cases, the only eyewitness reporters on the scene have been citizens who see news happen and are driven to act. This has created a new dimension to news reporting which wasn't in existence before now.

Traditional mass media
The mass media represents the methods by which information is transmitted or exchanged between the source and the receiver. They include all the media used in carrying out media functions such as newspapers magazines, journals, periodicals, press agencies, books of reference and paper bags, cinema, radio, television, video CDs, vehicular media as well as traditional modes of communication (Nobbs et al. in oputa, 1985, Wilson 2003).
The media is so prominent to human existence that some communication scholars write that it is almost impossible for man to do without the media. It is in line with the view of Nwachukwu and Onyekwere

(2012) that it is recognition of the potential of the media to make invaluable contributions in the society that government and change agents adopts them as tools for propagating policies and programmes that can inculcate designed attitudes and behaviours in the people.

Citizen media and journalism have gradually taken over the traditional or mainstream media and journalism. This is why according to Allen (2012) in public criticism if not outright cynicism about the quality of news provided by the main stream media institution is widespread. Journalists themselves are more often than not seen to be troubled, some quietly lamenting the lost traditions of a once proud profession. Others loudly resisting market-driven obsession with bottom line profitability (P.11).

Theoretical Framework: This study is anchored on Democratic-Participatory, and Development Media Theories.

Development Media Theory: The four normative theories propounded by Siebert, et al none were able to take care of the development need of the third world countries. The classical theories also could not provide for the development needs of developing countries such as poverty, illiteracy, violence, ethnic, religious difference, etc. this gave rise to another theory that will bridge the gap that exist between developed and developing countries hence, the propounding of the development media theory by Dennis McQuail, in 1987. This is to cover areas that the classical theories did not take care of. According to Ukaegbu (2017, p.14), development is the totality of change in human conduct, altitude, behaviour, values, beliefs as well as his physical environment and quality of life in general.

Ndimele and Innocent (2006) posits that in order to tackle this problem, proponents of the development media theory of the press suggest that media messages can be deliberately designed to enable members of the audience to acquire the needed skills to transform their society. It is believed that media messages can be packaged in such a manner as to stimulate a systematic socio-economic transformation of the developing nations in the direction of the model of the industrial society.

How then can we be talking about national building and development without a responsible press that is credible and ready to report objectively without bias? According to Daramola (2003), the right to communicate "as well as" the need to use communication to achieve social change and better life is the bedrock of development theory of the press. In this theory, the media are seen as partners in progress. The researcher therefore sums up that; news commercialization which is the negative aspect of media practice can be corrected only by a media that is geared towards development. This media therefore is objective, credible, void of sensationalism, brown envelop syndrome etc which is what news commercialization stands for.

Participation Media Theory: This theory propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987 conceptualizes the need to decentralize and democratize the media so as to allow for easy access to channels of communication and the active participation of media audience in programmes. It looks at the media as a very vital tool in enhancing free flow of information which is significant in a democracy.

This theory posits that communication process should be horizontal stressing the need for feedback theory as the basis on which this study stands is predicated on the fact that Nigeria is in a democratic dispensation, as such the dissemination of information is very valuable to meaningful growth. In the words of Ndubuisi (2024), this means that inadequate feedback or lack of it can hinder participation in media programmes, and can in the long run affect the political terrain of Nigeria's democracy.

The theory stresses that needs, interests and aspirations of the active receiver in a society has to do with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back and the right to use the means of communication in small-scale settings of community, interest group and subculture. The theory demands that the media be interactive and participatory. It therefore suffixes that a communication process is complete if the audience is allowed to participate by sending in feedback.

The theory proposed that people in the society should be involved in information exchange instead of being recipients of communication from especially the government. The theory provides for horizontal

media relationship and not vertical/top-down communication. Therefore, communication ought to be democratized. According to McBride, et al (1981, p.166), media democratization guarantees the following:

The individual becomes an active partner, and not a mere object of communication (media programmers need to plan with not just for the audience).
The variety of messages exchanged increase.
The extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication are augmented.

The media institutions created by the Participation Media Theory should be closely related to social life and under the control of media audiences. This will provide the audience the opportunity to have access to the media and fully participate in information dissemination in line with their needs, rather than the interest of media controllers.

It is generally accepted assertion globally that the mass media do not operate in a vacuum. This prompted a study to determine the relationship between the mass media and national development.

Conclusion

The participatory nature of media programme brings leadership to the public by helping to establish a public sphere which creates avenue for the exchange of ideas between leaders and masses. This leads to integration in the society and at the same time satisfying the educational and information needs of masses.

It is very pertinent to note that journalism profession and its practice is one that the society cannot do without. Bringing to the door step of the masses the day to day happenings, championing the course of the citizenry, political emancipation, among others. To achieve this however, objectivity, accuracy and fairness, credibility, balance and other ethical conducts are sacrosanct.The potency of the content of any media information, be it news or commercials, is a direct reflection of the government in power. Worthy of note is how technology is facilitating audience participation. As technology continues to evolve, there are more and more ways for people to engage with programmes, such as through live streaming, chat boats, and other interactive features which can be used to allow people to participate in a programme by asking questions or providing feedbacks. This can help to create a more personal and engaging experience for the audience. Live streaming can help the audience watch the programme live in real time and interact with other viewers. All these, well harnessed and put together will lead to national development.

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