

GLOBAL MEDIA: ANALYSIS OF ITS IMPLICATION ON AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

Joseph Obi Ngwokor, Abusadiq Abdullahi Loko, Dr. Oluwasegun Michael
Babatunde,

Department of Mass Communication,
Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, Nasarawa State.
Email: Joezinger2005@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Communication is an imperative component of human survival; and this singular factor of human existence can be found occurring at many different levels- intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, intercultural, etcetera. Because of the rate at which technology was being developed and improved, Marshal McLuhan in 1964 predicted that the world would soon become a “global village”, a prediction which many doubted its possibility of coming to pass, since it was difficult to comprehend then. But with a near speed of light, his prediction has come to fruition in our time. With the communication paraphernalia at the disposal of the western world, especially the USA and the United Kingdom, there is a wide gulf existing between the rich information North and the poor information South in terms of information sharing. This paper looks at global media and its implication on Africa’s cultural heritage, as well as its corollary effects on Africa’s development agenda. Adopting the discursive approach, contributions of several scholars on the theme of the paper were examined to establish the centrality of the subject matter at this point of Africa’s history. It concludes that there is an imbalance in the nature of global communication flow, a condition which is considered inimical for those societies at the receiving end-developing countries. It recommends that African leaders must first tackle the hydra-headed problem of corruption which would then set the stage for an objective assessment of the need for establishing global media outfits, capable of providing the true African narratives, in order to also put in place a contra-flow to the unbalanced existing model.

Keywords: Media Culture Globalization

INTRODUCTION

Right from 1964, when Marshal McLuhan first predicted that in no distance time, the world would become a global village, many skeptics may have doubted the possibility of such a prediction coming to pass. But

today, the reality of that prediction is certainly staring humanity in the face. Some of us have received it with an open mind while some, with nostalgia. Many aspects of the world economy have gone global, leading to the envisioned concept of “global village” metamorphosing into what we know today as globalization. As a result of development in technology, several aspects of man’s life have improved, with the consequence for some to gain while others as losers. There is also the issue of North-South dichotomy in terms of media rich and media poor. What is worrisome is that in this 21st century, most of the media products are produced and sent to the less developed countries of the world for consumption, with particular reference to (captive) audiences in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The fact that the countries in these regions still cannot provide a contra-flow, to challenge the wholesome dumping of these media products still makes it more disturbing. This reality has snowballed into what is generally referred to as cultural imperialism, a situation whereby a country is cowed into adopting the cultures of other countries because of perceived inferiority of her own culture. The cultural homogenization thesis has also received popularity among media and cultural scholars, because of the impact of media, especially television on man’s life generally. One factor that has accentuated this trend is the growth of global media.

Hachten & Scotton (2007) note that the world is already sharing a common popular culture. A good amount of the diversity of the world’s culture and languages of expression have gone into extinction. This experience is part of a long-term historical process that commenced long before the advent of the modern media, with space accelerating in recent times. The modern society requires a sizeable amount of news and information from the news media to survive, especially in spheres such as economy, society and governance. The fallout of this is the internationalization of western culture, as Africans and other indigenous values were trampled upon as irrelevant, unprogressive, backward, primitive, conservative, traditional and unscientific; compared to the assumed modern, civilized dynamic and scientific values of the Europeans and her allies (Igwe, 2010, p.159).

Conceptual Clarification

Global Media

Global media described as those media that are positioned to reach out to most parts of the world with their contents. What is germane to the

discussion and comprehension of the concept of global media is that in the course of disseminating their contents, global media also market the culture of their countries of origin, as such cultural traits are usually infused into those programmes. Baker (2004) writes that the concept of global media refers to the increasing multi-directional economic, social, cultural and political channels of communication at the international level. For Thussu (2007), we are now in a digitally connected globe, where there is the flow of all kinds of information ranging from political, discourse, scientific research, corporate data, personal communication and media entertainment that circulate round the globe at unimaginable pace. Chalaby (2005) sees global media as transnational media or trans-border media that lies at the heart of the current regional and global reshaping of media industries and cultures. Global media offers audiences opportunities to overcome spatial boundaries and to enable trans-cultural identities (Toepfl, 2013). Harman & McChasney (2003) argue that the crucial change for global capitalism which laid the foundation for the rise of the global media was the emergence of the Transnational Corporations (TNCs). Transnational Corporations are corporations that maintain facilities in many countries and plan their operations and investments in a multi-country perspective. The modern TNC's emerged out of the steady growth of corporate enterprise at the beginning of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. (Harman and McChesney, 2003).

Global media is media for the purpose of international communication. Omenkukwu (2011) defines international communication as the process of disseminating information, messages, values, and attitudes for the promotion of new behavioral patterns between two or more countries, with a view to influencing attitudinal changes necessary for enhancing a conducive environment with particular focus on politics, culture and socio-economics. In international communication as well as in international relations, two or more countries come together to share ideas, opinions, exchange cultures, and intelligence. In an ideal situation, this is expectedly carried out without any form of egocentrism. But today, the reverse is the case, as a few nations of the world have dominated the global cultural landscape with the aid of their transnational media. Knowing that global media is the gate way to cultural domination, the advanced countries of the West, especially the United States have not relented in her effort at ensuring that they remain the leader in the global media industry.

Culture

Culture is a term that is used to describe the way of life of a particular people, practiced within their geographic contiguity. It is an attribute that separates a people from other cultures. The culture of every nation is an integral as well as a critical component of that nation which should be cherished and preserved by them (Nwaolikpe, 2013). It should be made crystal clear that no two cultures, when objectively juxtaposed, are absolutely identical as informed by ethnographers. In order for a society to operate functionally and effectively, they must ensure and maintain strict and constant adherence to the various components of their culture. Culture is made up of the totality of a people's ways of life, reflected in their socio-political and economic system. Culture is more effectively understood when we consider a people's mode of communication. (Wahab, Odunsi & Ajiboye, 2012, Ayedun-Aluma & Adenle-Tijani, 2014). Taylor as cited in Wahab, Odunsi & Ajiboye (2012) writes that culture is an all-embracing term that describes a people's ways of life; such as: knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs, laws and other capabilities which are learned and shared among members of the society, and transmitted from one generation to another.

Okorie (2010) notes that all available definitions of culture point towards the fact that culture is a learned behaviour, while the creation and maintenance of common culture is promoted through communication. Culture defines the conditions of how people relate with each other, as well as how to abide by social and cultural norms which separate them from other cultures. Ayee (2013) explains that culture influences and determines who you converse with, topic of such conversation, how you hold such a conversation, when interrupting a conversation is acceptable, how much of eye contact is admissible, and how much distance should be maintained between people while communicating. Local cultures are usually accosted by a continuous transformation and reinvention which are offshoots of the influence of global factors and actors. The world is made meaningful through culture; it is socially constructed and maintained through communication. It unites as well as liberates us; it differentiates as well as unites us. It defines our realities and thereby shapes the way we think, feel, and act (Baran as cited in Okorie, 2010, p. 35).

The Nature of Global Information Flow

There is an imbalance in the global information flow as the west; especially the United States of America and the United Kingdom are the key actors when one thinks of global media and information flow. It is this obvious imbalance, which is still holding sway till date that prompted the agitation for the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Bamidele as cited in Alao, Uwom and Alao (2013), explains that NWICO is a campaign by the United States Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to counter media imperialism, in order to create an information flow that gives a more balanced view of the entire world. It was on the basis of the foregoing that Fiske (2003) writes that inter-cultural communication is fundamental to a peaceful planet, because where there is any kind of relationship between two parties, each party should have some degree of control over the communication aspect of such a relationship. Each party should have the opportunity to say what he wants to say, and be given an audience. On the contrary, the reverse is the case, as most of the countries in the third world lack the technology and other communication gadgets to engage in effective communication with the West who are the dominant force in the global media arena.

The importance of global media has been emphasized by Appadurai (2003) under what he calls *mediascapes*. According to him, the term explains the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information- newspapers, magazine, radio and television as well as film production studios. These media create their own respective images of the world. Appadurai (2003) laments that unfortunately, almost all the transnational media corporations are owned by the rich West while Asia, Latin America and Africa have nothing in the form of global media that could provide a counter-flow. Thanks to Al Jazeera, the only media from the poor south, that is living up to its billing.

The Leading Global Media and their Countries of Origin

It is widely known that the news of the world is today, still under the control of five international news agencies- Reuters Group Ltd (Reuters) founded since 1851, having its corporate headquarters in London (Ugande, 2013), Agence France Press (AFP), a French news agency that started operations in 1835 and is the oldest news agency, initially named Agence Havas (Atime & Obaje, 2013), Associated Press (AP) founded in 1848 with its headquarters in the United States of America (Dike, 2013),

The United Press International (UPI) established over 104 years ago and it is another US based news agency (Ogwuche, 2013).

These news agencies are owned and directed by the media conglomerates situated in Western world, with none from Asia, Latin America or Africa (Fiske, 2003). Herman and McChesney (2003) contend that from the very onset, global news services have been oriented to the needs and interests of the wealthy nations which provide their revenues. These agencies remained the global media until well into the twentieth century. Even after the early beginning of broadcasting, their relevance in the field of global journalism was unmatched, and it was their near monopoly control over international news that ignited the better part of the resistance to the current global media regime by Third World countries in the 1970s. For Fiske (2003) "people live in places, the power to control places is always the power to control people. Power is never exerted only through technological control, but always through the discursive control as well". Similarly, all the powerful trans-border television broadcasters are also owned by the West. They are: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Cable News Network (CNN), France 24. The only transnational media corporation from the developing countries of the world that is providing a contra-flow in the international news arena is *Al Jazeera*, owned by the state of Qatar and is headquartered in Doha, Qatar. From the preceding submission, it would be observed that the rest of the world depends on the West for their global news, and such reportages are not usually balanced.

Global Media as Conduit for Cultural Imperialism

With global media comes the concept of cultural imperialism. Global media is a product of globalization, and globalization itself according to Tomlinson (1999) means the rapidly developing and 'ever-densening' network of interconnections and inter-dependencies that characterize modern social life. For Khor (1995), globalization is what countries in the third world have for many years called colonization. Barth (1998) writes that many societies, particularly indigenous people view culture as the richest heritage, without which they have no roots, history or soul. Its value to the people is other than monetary. To commoditize it is to destroy it. A twin concept in the discussion of cultural imperialism is media imperialism, which Asemah (2011) sees as a concept that explains the over concentration of media outfits from richer nations, and in which the smaller nations are negatively affected, resulting in loss of identity due

to news homogeneity without reciprocation of influence by the country so affected. Huntington (1993) regrets that the expansion of trade in cultural products is increasing the exposure of all societies to foreign cultures. Similarly, Barber (1992) laments that one of the principal concerns about the new globalization of culture is that it not only lead to homogenization of world culture, but also that it largely represents the "Americanization" of world cultures. In this regard, former Canadian prime minister had observed that images of America are so pervasive in the global village that it is almost as if, instead of the world immigrating to America, America has immigrated to the world. Consequently, Mazrui (2001) avers that one of the negative effects of globalization is that the world today is getting to be more and more the same in every sphere of peoples' culture leading to cultural homogenization, but that at the same time, in the process of this homogenization process, power is more and more being concentrated in the hands of a few countries, leading to hegemony. The foreign description of media imperialism implies that the information only flows in from a one-way traffic which is usually from the developed countries, with no significant response from the peripheral countries.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the **media imperialism theory**. The theory was propounded by Herbert Schiller in 1973. The major claim of the theory is that information flow from rich information areas of the West to the developing countries of the world. The theory further explains that this information flow is channeling the cultural identities of the developing nations (Asemah, 2011). Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso as cited in Asemah (2011) summarizes the cultural imperialism thesis as:

The western countries are technologically developed in television and motion programmes. The developing countries that are not technologically developed depend on the programmes from the developed countries which portray their own cultures, and such cultures will be imbibed by the developing nations. The media messages from the developed nations come to us with their cultural values. This western culture will dominate our local cultures because we are consuming their mass media messages. This is cultural imperialism. The relevance of media imperialism theory to this study is obvious, as it explains further the domineering impact of western media in global information flow, which in turn leads to cultural hegemony.

Implications of the Unbalanced Global News Flow on African Cultural Heritage

Africa is one of the continents classified as “third world”. The fact that no country in Africa has been able to establish a media outfit that can be regarded as transnational corporation means that the culture of Africa will continue to be eroded. Global media has enhanced homogenization of the world culture- same dress, same means of travelling, McDonaldization, same language and lots more. This goes to say that media consumers in developing countries are simply passive recipients of the outputs of global North. Zakkatoholde and Olanwan (1995) captured the Nigerian scenario as “where the vast majority of citizens have had relatively free access to the categories of capitalist produced media programmes, especially from the USA” which is inimical to the growth of her culture.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing submission, it would be seen that there is an obvious imbalance in the world information flow, since studies and available data have proved that media contents usually of global nature, originate from the rich North down to the poor South (developing countries), Africa inclusive. This imbalance is not healthy for any country or continent that wishes to have a stake in the committee of nations, as they will remain voiceless in world affairs. These accounts for the reason news about Africa, written by foreign reporters are usually capturing only the negative side of the continent-war, diseases, hunger malnutrition, kidnapping, banditry, ritual killings and other anomalies, without any attempt at reporting the positive side. African countries- governments or private investors in the media industry should invest in global media with the aim of providing a significant counter-flow against the Western originated media conglomerates that have dominated the world communication and information system. One anathema to the growth of trans-national media in Africa is corruption which has become endemic among most African leaders. Admittedly, corruption is the bane of Africa's development. Therefore, the continent of Africa requires leaders with the political will to confront corruption frontally. Consequent upon fighting corruption, monies earmarked for growing the media industry should be judiciously spent, in order to gain attention in the international media play field.

REFERENCES

- Alao, D., Uwon , O. and Alao, A. (2013). *Theory and practice of international communication*. Shagamu: Grail Graphix.
- Appadurai, A. (2003). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. In L. Parks & S. Kumar (Eds.), *Planet TV: A global television reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Asemah, E. S. (2011). *Selected mass media themes*. Jos: Jos University Press.
- Atime, S. Y. & Obaje, C. E. (2013). Agence France Press. In S. O. Idemili & T. T. Kajo (Eds.), *Topical issues in global media: Review of selected news organizations*. Makurdi: SAP.
- Ayedun-Aluma, V. & Tijani-Adenle, G. (2014). A critique of contemporary philosophies and practices of Yoruba language journalism in Nigeria. In L. Oso, R. Olatunji & N. Owens-Ibie (Eds.), *Journalism and media in Nigeria*. Ontario, Canada: Canada University Press.
- Ayee, E. S. A. (2013). Human communication revisited. A biblical perspective. *Koers-Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 78 (1), 549-552. Retrieved from <http://dxdoi.org/w.4102/koers.r78il.549>.
- Baker, C. (2004). *The sage dictionary of cultural studies*. London: SAGE
- Barber, B. R. (1992). Jihad vs McWorld. *The Atlantic monthly*.
- Barth, S. (1998). Cultural protectionism. *World trade*, 11 (3), 43-51.
- Chalaby, J. K. (Ed.). (2005). Towards an understanding of media transnationalism. *Transnational television worldwide*. London: Routledge.
- Dike, K. (2013). The Associated Press (AP). In S. O. Idemili & T. T. Kajo (Eds.), *Topical issues in global media: Review of selected news organizations*. Makurdi: SAP.
- Fiske, J. (2003). Act globally, think locally. In L. Parks & S. Kumar (Eds.), *planet TV: A global television reader*. New York University Press.

- Harmam, E. & Machesney, R. (2003). The role of the global media. In L. Park & S. Kumar (Eds.), *Planet TV: A global television reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Khor, M. (1995). *Remarks to the international forum on globalization*. New York: November Press.
- Mazrui, A. A. (2001). Pretender to universalism: Western culture in globalizing age. *Journal of Muslim minority affairs*, 21(1), 11-24.
- Nwaolikpe, O. N. (2013). Culture and Nigerian identity in the print media. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Oman Chapter)*, 3 (3), 56-69.
- Ogwuche, M. (2013). The United Press International. In S. O. Idemili & T. T. Kajo (Eds.), *Topical issues in global media: Review of selected news organizations*. Makurdi: SAP.
- Omenkukwu, O. (2011). Critical issues in international communication. Retrieved from www.sribd.com/doc/54177637 Critical issues in international communication.
- Okorie, N. (2010). Globalization, Africa, and the question of imperialism. *Journal of global Communication*, 3 (2), 1-7.
- Toepfl, F. (2013). Making sense of the news in hybrid regime: How young Russians decode State TV and an oppositional blog. *Journal of communication*, 63(2), 244-265.
- Tomlinson, J. (1999). *Globalization and culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Thussu, D. K. (Ed.). (2007). Mapping global media flow and contra-flow. *Media on the move: Global flow and contra-flow*. London, England: Routledge.
- Ugande, G. B. (2013). Reuters News Agency. In S. O. Idemili & T. T. Kajo (Eds.), *Topical issues in global media: Review of selected news organizations*. Makurdi: SAP.
- Wahab, E. O., Odunsi, S. O. & Ajiboye, O. E. (2012). Causes and consequences of erosion of cultural values in traditional African society. *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 7(2), 55-50.