

New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and World Communication Problem: a Proposal to the Nigerian Government

Stephen Kenechukwu

*Department of Mass Communication
Madonna University Okija, Anambra State,*

Abstract

Communication is fundamental to human existence and helps to define a given race and people. Pathetically, information is not evenly distributed as the West has control of global media. The result is that the developing nations depend wholly or partially on the media of developed nations for information. This paper clearly looks at the nature of communication imbalance and tries to find out the role of New World Information and Communication Order (NIWCO) in ensuring balance in information flow. The paper attempts to explain the concept of ethno-communicology and by extension, the villagisation of the media. This concept holds the idea that Africans can design their own media system, form and technology in order to export their indigenous communication and ways of life. The paper argues that besides implementing the tenets of NWICO through the use of modern technology, there is still need to employ traditional means of communication in turning developing nations into media-creators rather than media-consumers. The study equally proffered some recommendations on the way forward.

Keywords: *New World Information, Communication Order, Ethnocommunicology, Villiagisation, Information.*

Background to the Study

Communication has remained a vital tool of political and economic control whether as a conscious or unconscious attempt by the developed nations against the developing nations. Okunna and Omenugha (2012) aver that from inception, communication has been related to social structure, culture and the economic organization of society. Because of this, communication has all through the ages been an inescapable part of the existence of human beings as social animal. The fact is that nations with greater control of information and information technology remain powerful than nations with lesser control of information. The result is that there is a communication imbalance between the developed countries of the West and the developing countries of Africa and Asia. The aftermath is that countries continue to experiment on the best ways to improve on the techniques of collection, processing and dissemination of information. MacBride (1981) points out that throughout history, human beings have sought to improve their ability to receive and assimilate information about their surroundings and at the same time to increase the speed, clarity and variety of their methods for transmission of information.

As in other African countries, Nigeria has equally had her taste of information imbalance with its attendant socio-cultural implications. In the film industry, for instance, the Nollywood industry is faced with the challenges of portraying the cultural values of Nigerian against Western values. In this direction, Wilson (2015) advocates for a traditional approach to communication encapsulated in his articulation of *ethnocommunicology* which explains that beyond the mumbo jumbo of some of the technical language details of modern communication, Nigerians can understand communication better through the use of trado-modern approaches.

Statement of Problem

Communication is inevitable in life and forms the basis of human interaction. There is, however, disparity in the nature and degree of collection, processing and distribution of information. At the international level, there is apparent communication imbalance in the collection and distribution of information between the developed nations of the West and developing nations of Africa and Asia. This domination of global media by the West has created avenue and platform for system domination thereby justifying the proposition that the ruling class (the developed nations) which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production so that generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental product are subject to it. This assertion recognizes the fact that ideas or mental productions are not adequately distributed thereby recognizing the gap between the developed and developing nations in terms of information collection, processes and distribution.

Against these communication challenges, this study attempts to focus attention on the outcome of world deliberations on communication imbalance by revisiting the role of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include:

1. To examine the nature of communication imbalance in global media.
2. To examine the role of New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in addressing world communication imbalance.
3. To proffer viable options for addressing the problems of communication imbalance between the developed nations and developing nations.

Review of Related Literature

Understanding the Debate on Communication Imbalance

The complexity and sophistication of human communication has led to the understanding that communication is an instrument of political domination. According to Ekeanyanwu (2015), in international communication, imbalance refers to the unequal flow of mass media messages from the First World or the industrialized countries of the West to the Third World also known as the underdeveloped or developing nations. Imbalance in the flow of global news and information is at the root of the call for a New World Information and Communication Order geared towards ameliorating communication realities in Africa. The nature of communication imbalance is that there is apparent inequality in the collection, processing and distribution of information. In this regards, Marx and Engels cited in Murdock and Golding (1977) observe that the class (The West) which has the means of material production (including information) at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subjected to the background so that they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch.

A critical study of the world communication shows absolute domination of the media system of the developing nations. News on the West is always presented in a form and manner that portrays the West as civil, development-oriented while news on Africa (including Nigeria) is always portrayal of strife, poverty, terrorism and endless cases of child abuse and violation of human rights. The picture is presented in a lopsided manner to belittle Africans and glorify the West. Baran (2009) raises the case of the implications of global communication imbalance which he argues may lead to cultural imperialism through media technology and programming.

Two major areas that paved easy way for Western domination in information-flow are advancement in media technology and media programming. In terms of media technology, the West has remained media-creator nations and the developing nations of Africa and Asia are media-consumer nations. The argument is that media-consumers are at the mercy of the media-creators in matters of media technology and programming. Kenechukwu (2014) argues that indeed, there is an imbalance between the developed nations and developing nations in terms of media content and distribution. The developed nations are regarded as media-producers while the developing nations are seen as media-consumers because they depend on the media-producers for media equipment, production and distribution except in local programming. This communication gap between the two worlds of media practice brings about an absolute control and subjugation of media content of the developing nations.

In terms of programming, Baran (2009) explains that regardless of the particular concept guiding media systems in other countries, those systems produce and distribute content, in other words, programming. In most respect, radio and television programming throughout the world looks and sounds much like that found in the United States due to (a) the United States is a world leader in international distribution of broadcast fare, and (b) very early in the life of television, American producers flooded the world with their programming at very low price. This facilitated the spread of American values and culture to other countries.

On media programming, it is evident that most news agencies in the developing nations depend wholly or partially on the Western news agencies such as Associated Press, Reuters, Cable News Network (CNN) or British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for global information. Almost all major news stories are obtained by monitoring the big news agencies. This dependence may pave way for dissemination of distorted information or news tilted in favour of the West.

Other scholars have instead argued that the communication imbalance is just an offshoot of colonialism in Africa. Ekeanyanwu (2015) avers that the root cause of the communication imbalance is traceable to the colonial period when the present industrialized nations forced themselves on the people of the developing nations. During the scramble and partition of Africa, imperialism superseded mercantilism as an economic and political philosophy for the further exploitation of resources of the developing nations. In a rather subtle manner, the West introduced the concept of globalization, which was another deliberate drive to keep the developing nations perpetually dependent on the West and the rest of Europe.

Debates about the nature and development of globalization in world communication have remained controversial issue. While some scholars see globalization as an imposition of (media) culture by the West on the rest of the world, other scholars prefer to view globalization as a giant step taken to remedy communication imbalance. Scholars such as Schiller (2000) cited in Graeme (2005) holds the view that globalization of capital serves as a battering ram that relentlessly attacks working people's living standards. Also, Ekeanyanwu(2015) remarks that with globalization, the world became a single market with no regular traditional boundaries. This sounds all right except for the fact that African remains a consumer and supplier of raw materials for the industries in Europe and America while the rest of the West and Europe remained producers. On the other hand, scholars such as Giddens (1990) and Moran (1998) shared optimistic views about globalization in bridging the communication gap between the West and the developing countries. These scholars argue that globalization is, in a positive sense, a sign of the declining grip of the West over the rest of the world, exemplified by phenomena such as the spread of the ubiquitous curry meal to the stream of immigration into the West (Graeme, 2005).

Finding Solutions to World Communication Imbalance: The Emergence of New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)

The increasing communication imbalance between the West and developing nations necessitated the call by the developing nations for a change in the international economic and political order dominated by the developed nations of the West. This call stems from fear of the developing nations that given an unchecked influx of Western culture and values, the African socio-cultural heritage faced outright extinction.

The New World Information and Communication Order, popularly referred to as NWICO is a conceptual framework that attempted to galvanize the debate which was provoked by the cries of marginalization by the developing nations on how global communication resources are being managed and distributed (Ekeanyanwu, 2015). Baran (2009) opines that NWICO became necessary because at that time, the developing nations were concerned that international news coverage was dominated by the West, especially the United States and that Western-produced content was overwhelming the media of developing nations which lacked sufficient resources to create their own quality news programmes.

The fundamental issues of imbalance in global communication had been discussed for some time. The American media scholar Wilbur Schramm noted in 1964 that the flow of news among nations is thin, that much attention is given to developed countries and little to less-developed ones; that important events are ignored and

reality is distorted (Schramm, 1964).

Wikipedia (2015) identifies a wide range of issues raised as part of NWICO discussions. Some of these involved long-standing issues of media coverage of the developing world and unbalanced flows of media influence. But other issues involved new technologies with important military and commercial uses. The developing world was likely to be marginalized by satellite and computer technologies. The issues included:

1. News reporting on the developing world that reflects the priorities of news agencies in London, Paris and New York. Reporting of natural disasters and military coups rather than the fundamental realities. At the time four major news agencies controlled over 80% of global news flow.
2. An unbalanced flow of mass media from the developed world (especially the United States) to the underdeveloped countries. Everyone watches American movies and television shows. Advertising agencies
3. in the developed world have indirect but significant effects on mass media in the developing countries. Some observers also judged the messages of these ads to be inappropriate for the Third World.
4. An unfair division of the radio spectrum. A small number of developed countries controlled almost 90% of the radio spectrum. Much of this was for military use.
5. There were similar concerns about the allocation of the geostationary orbit (parking spots in space) for satellites. At the time only a small number of developed countries had satellites and it was not possible for developing countries to be allocated a space that they might need ten years later. This might mean eventually getting a space that was more difficult and more expensive to operate.
6. Satellite broadcasting of television signals into Third World countries without prior permission was widely perceived as a threat to national sovereignty. The UN voted in the early 1970s against such broadcasts.
7. Use of satellites to collect information on crops and natural resources in the Third World at a time when most developing countries lacked the capacity to analyze this data.
8. At the time most mainframe computers were located in the United States and there were concerns about the location of databases (such as airline reservations) and the difficulty of developing countries catching up with the US lead in computers.
9. The protection of journalists from violence was raised as an issue for discussion. For example, journalists were targeted by various military

dictatorships in Latin America in the 1970s. As part of NWICO debates there were suggestions for study on how to protect journalists and even to discipline journalists who broke "generally recognized ethical standards". However, the MacBride Commission specifically came out against the idea of licensing journalists.

MacBride (1980) observes that the imbalance in news circulation is a complex and varied phenomenon. It may occur at different levels and in different forms: (a) between developed and developing countries, insofar as the information flow is governed by the existence or non-existence of appropriate infrastructures; (b) between countries having different political and socioeconomic systems; (c) between developed countries belonging to the same political system, economic and cultural life of countries battling with the ills of underdevelopment; (f) between what is conventionally called 'good' news and 'bad' news, i.e news of catastrophes, failures, conflicts, setbacks and excesses and finally (g) between topical news of current events and information dealing in greater depth with issues important in the daily lives of peoples and nations.

In the book, *'Many Voices, One World'*, MacBride (1980) aims at analyzing communication problems in modern societies, particularly relating to mass media and news, and the emergence of new technologies, and to suggest a kind of communication order (New World Information and Communication Order) to diminish these problems to further peace and human development. Wikipedia (2015) points out that among the problems the report identified were concentration of the media, commercialization of the media, and unequal access to information and communication. The commission called for democratization of communication and strengthening of national media to avoid dependence on external sources, among others. Subsequently, Internet-based technologies considered in the work of the Commission, served as a means for furthering MacBride's visions.

A Paradigm Shift from the Old Debate to the New Debate

The idea of entrenching equal information gathering and dissemination has remained a mirage. This is because the West does not see information simply as a necessity but an instrument of power in which they manipulate and subjugate the developing nations. Seen from this perspective, anti-NWICO scholars have argued that NWICO was just a mere window-dressing exercise by the West to pacify the developing nations or at least render a temporal alleviation of their communication challenges. Nordenstreng (2013) likened the NWICO debate to the old paradigm based on the following evidences:

First, the NWICO was more focused on politics than on media and communication. The anti-NWICO campaign waged by the Western countries serves as an instructive case whereas in reality the concept was designed to widen and deepen the freedom of information by increasing its balance and diversity on a global scale.

The second lesson is that the NWICO was more on debate than on changing media reality. In other words, the significance of the process lay mainly in the debate on media policy rather than in the actual phenomena of communication. The whole history of the NWICO offers little in terms of changing media structures and flows – except, perhaps, “in reverse” with increasing concentration, imbalance, etc. – whereas it offers a lot in terms of conceptual thinking and awareness about the role of the media and their relation to global forces.

On the other side of the continuum, the new paradigm or debate paved the way for the emergence of social media networks on international communication. The interactive nature of the social media makes it a veritable medium that provides unlimited access to information just by a click of the computer mouse. Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango and Peters (2012) remark that the social networks thrive on citizens or civic journalism whereby the liberalization of the new media, accessibility, production of content and its delivery on the World Wide Web have made a myriad of news and educational information available to more persons at a marginal cost than ever before.

A Proposal for Fresh Look at Communication Problems in Nigeria: A Case of Villagisation of Media of Communication

One of the instruments of the prevailing communication imbalance is the domination by foreign media system. The call for the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) was because UNESCO was worried that in spite of the long period of modern media had been used in the developing world, very little had been achieved by way of effective penetration of Third World society and message utilization. From the findings of MacBride and his team, it was discovered that there is no doubt that the Big Media have a pervasive influence on every society but this does not mean that they are capable of replacing the Small Media which are ubiquitous and perform clearly defined functions (Wilson, 2015). This implies that aside the modern mass media, the indigenous media of communication play important role in restoring order in the already existing communication gaps. In this respect, Wilson (2015) advocates that one of the factors which stand between Nigeria as a credible and visible participation in the burgeoning global communication industry is the presence of underdeveloped cultural elements which, apart from the need for them to be found in appropriate doses among the global audience they must also satisfy the cultural condition of being 'uniquely

positive and Nigerian.'

On a possible integration of the modern mass communication technology with the traditional rural-based systems, both Wilson (2015) and Chukwu (2006) share similar views. Chukwu (2009) argues that both the traditional and the modern communication methods should be combined for effective information dissemination. There is nothing wrong in retaining the town crier, the crowing of the cock or the convening of village meetings. Wilson (2015) shares similar view, however, warns that in the rhythm of change, the breathless leap from the seeming abyss of unfathomable wisdom to the sinewy trappings of modern technology would wreak great disruption in our communication system. It was clear then that our age of innocence had been passed. Indigenous communication could no longer remain a virgin in the unfolding experience. Even if it has wished to be so, Wilson (2015) argues that the dynamism of cultural change patterns would not allow it remain untouched and uninfluenced by the ravaging wind of new customs.

Wilson (2015) states that due to problems militating against effective media practice in developing nations such as Nigeria, most countries have opted for the following options adopted either as an individual option or adopted in combination:

1. A complete adoption of western communication technology, principles and practices though with its attendant problems.
2. Integration and accommodation by determining the manner and cost of integration and accommodation. This means creating a media mix between the western media system and indigenous media system.
3. It may be a total rejection of western communication technology by merely looking at communication as instrument of war and cultural imperialism.
4. Modernization of communication infrastructure and improvement of broadcast programming and newspaper features.
5. Sharing cultural values with the rest of the world through media programming.

Conclusion

The concept of villagisation of the media of communication is a fresh look at a new indigenous perspective on newsgathering, processing, interpretation and dissemination that is culture-based. The concept of villagisation will provide truly indigenous-based attempt at localizing the media of communication in such a way that they complement or replace the modern media of communication or at least, provide Africa a truly African perspective on communication technology. This will go a long way in closing the ever-widening gap necessitated by media domination of the developing nations by the Western blocs.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussions, the paper recommends:

1. There should be well defined communication policies in developing nations such as Nigeria. This will help to define the nature and scope of both national and international communication flow.
2. There should be adequate funding that will facilitate researches in the area of indigenous communication.
3. Local media contents should be encouraged and exported to the developed nations.
4. Use of local languages in broadcast programmes or movies should be encouraged to resuscitate the indigenous languages.
5. In term of media technology, developing nations such as Nigeria must appreciate the use of indigenous media of communication. This forms the basis of ethnocommunicology and villagisation of mass media

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