

Broadcast Programming in a Digital Era: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract. Effective programming is the soul and the heartbeat of broadcasting. Because of its heavy dependence on technology and innovations, emerging trends continue to challenge the old and traditional methods of broadcast operations and programming. While the switch from the analogue to the digital technological mode appears seamless in developed countries, the experience is fraught with many challenges in developing nations like Nigeria. This paper examined the concept and challenges of broadcast programming in a digital era within the context of a developing country like Nigeria. As a conceptual study, it traces the historical antecedents of broadcast programming in the country and situates this in the classic ambience of broadcast programming models as a basis for further determining the impact of the social media on broadcast programming including the future of programming in the oxymoronic global and atomized market. The paper recommends that Broadcast stations owners and operatives should invest more on technological devices, both hard and software, including digital platforms that will enable cutting edge content production and broadcast programming that will blend with the peculiar features of the various social media outlets and concludes that while broadcasting may not be entirely supplanted by the Internet, the fact remains that digital technology could and has indeed precipitated a merger of the previously separate industries of telecommunications, computers and broadcasting cum publishing through convergence.

Keywords: Programming, Digitization, Analogue, Internet, Convergence.

1. Introduction

No situation best captures or reflects the dynamism of cultural productions in a digital age than the flexibility and seamless operations of broadcasters in terms of content sourcing and programming. While content - sourcing, production and packaging are critical in determining the competitive edge among broadcast stations in their scramble for audience followership, the dexterity by which radio and television stations select and order their programmes for maximum exposure to a predetermined target audience / market today goes a long way in guaranteeing their survival. Advancements in technology resulting in convergence or the overlapping roles of the social media, especially the increasing manifestations of digital platforms in all the stages of broadcast operations --- be it programme conception, production, transduction , distribution and eventual reception --- has destroyed ancient myths and assumptions, rules and guidelines while professionalism itself is being redefined on almost daily basis. Against this backdrop, scholars and practitioners alike are concerned about the consequences and the global implications of emerging trends and the way forward.

The attempt in this paper is to examine the concept of programming in a digital era within the context of developing country like Nigeria. In doing this, we shall trace the historical antecedents of broadcast programming albeit in the Nigerian context; review the classic broadcast programming models i.e the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) and the Commercial / Fiduciary models; impact of the deregulation on broadcast programming in Nigeria, including an examination of the challenges and prospects of programming in digital era. Our discussion shall peak into the impact of the social media on broadcast programming and the future of

programming in the oxymoronic global and atomized market.

1.1 Background Issues

The goal of every mass medium is to gather intelligence in terms of information and ideas, process such as stories in the form of news, entertainment and other sundry programmes and disseminate it to the public. In the broadcast media, the process of the assemblage of a variety of menus reflecting the changes in audience tastes and preferences with a specific understanding of the timing and mood of the society at large is broadly referred to as programming. As a key concept in broadcasting, programming connotes the professional and systematic sourcing and ordering and of contents for maximum audience attention. It is, according to Cole (2006) the: *wide range of the different creative endeavours brought together to depict social realities in packaged images and imageries delivered through programmes in right quantity and quality, in appropriate mix and variety, and delivered by a broadcast station to its audience.* (Cole, 2006:83)

Unlike programmes which are the end results or products of the creative energies of broadcasters like news, drama shows, situation comedies (sitcoms), documentaries, current affairs etc., programming refers to the broad idea or philosophy or policy that undergird the production itself. Programming subsumes scheduling. In the words of Onabajo programming entails the making of programmes and determining where to broadcast such materials. It implies “determining the kind of programmes to make, the belt or slot in which to bring them out, the target audience, the ratio or mix of other programme types in relations to the ones being produced, the general objectives envisaged and the specific objectives of each programme type”, Onabajo (2001:39). The audience are generally regarded as the ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ of the broadcast media that hold overt importance to their (radio and television)’s meaningful existence. As consumers of media menus, the audience are a diversified people with varied demographics – old and young, educated and illiterate, male and female, sociable and non-sociable, liberal and conservatives, including broad-minded and parochial, experienced and inexperienced, rational and irrational etc. all of whom must be accounted for by the media output. The continuous relevance and, indeed, survival of the contemporary broadcast station is determined by the rich pool of audience at its reach. In the reality of media economics, the audience is indeed the commodity that the media sell. Scholars in audience and

reception studies contend, for instance, that any political economy of mass media must be based upon an analysis of its commodity form, and the commodity form specific to the mass media, they argue, is the audience, hence the crucial function of the mass media is not just to sell packages of ideology in terms of programmes to consumers, but audiences to advertisers (Smythe, 1977). Consequently, the total effect of programming on broadcast audience as Onabajo posits, is dependent to a large extent on the arrangement, presentation of materials and the skill in manipulating the media to achieve the desired effects.

Broadcast programming in effect goes beyond window - dressing, neither is it a perfunctory exercise but rather should be best construed as a broadcast management function which involves careful but strategic planning, budgeting producing, scheduling, delivering and evaluation of a station’s overall activities to achieve maximum results (Ngwu, 2011:200).

1.2 Historical Antecedents to Broadcast Programming in Nigeria

Broadcasting, historically speaking, is a by - product of the cultural and political architecture of British colonialism in Nigeria. It all started with radio through the relay of the empire service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) from Daventry, England to Lagos in 1932. Three years later, the first Radio Distribution Service (Re-diffusion) was established in Lagos and later extended to some major cities in the country. Television however was a child of necessity which made its debut in 1959 through a regional initiative spearheaded by the opposition leader in the then House of Parliament, Chief Obafemi Awolowo as a result of a political disagreement. By this historical reality Nigerian broadcasting naturally inherited the philosophical orientation, technical, production cum presentation templates of its precursor, the BBC. This colonial impact became most noticeable in the programming outlook of the stations which was tailored towards the philosophical orientation of public service broadcasting.

Prior to this time, there were constitutional issues arising from the exclusive control of broadcasting in the hands of the central government. For reasons of national security, the power to own and control broadcasting was seen as too sensitive and dangerous to be ceded to the regions that made up the Nigerian polity. Thus structure and philosophy of broadcast programming inherited from the British were to:

serve purposes other than entertainment and that it should be used as an instrument to advance administration—a means of education and instruction of the people on public health, agriculture and rural development issues. (Ladele, 1979:14)

As this policy was retained post-independence, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation which replaced the Nigerian Broadcasting Service in 1956 necessarily became the official mouth-piece of government just as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) today. Onabajo (2001:41) argues that broadcasting during this era witnessed scarcity of artistes and trained staff for local production, a development which tilted programming in favour of eighty percent foreign content to the detriment of national goals. The situation was further compounded by the political conflicts and rivalry between the federal and regional governments after the McPherson constitution had placed broadcasting on the concurrent legislative list. Consequently, the news bulletins, interviews, discussions etc. became sectional, partisan and propagandist in nature with only few educational programmes aired to sustain the free education policy of the old western regional government.

However, political developments between 1966 and 1979, especially the challenges and threats posed to the nation by the Civil War prompted a shift in the programming orientation of Nigerian broadcast stations from their hitherto regional partisanship towards nationalism. Operating under centralized military administrations, the broadcast media became a major tool used to mobilize and re-orientate the citizenry towards national unity. On this broadcast policy shift, Onabajo writes:

Government gave broad programme guidelines for broadcast stations to follow. Television was to be used to mobilize the people towards higher agricultural output and massive restructuring of both urban and rural areas for development. This era also witnessed the reduction in the foreign content of broadcast programmes and a preference for a higher ratio of local programmes. (Onabajo, 2001: 41)

As time progressed, particularly between 1979 and 1983 otherwise known in the country's political lexicon as the Second Republic, there was a policy shift in favour of the drive for increased local content through locally sourced and produced programmes even though this drive was impaired, according to Onabajo (2001) by a myriad of factors such as: scarcity of funds, inadequate equipment, frequent breakdown of existing equipment and lack of trained

personnel. In a bid to overcome the highlighted challenges, broadcast stations embarked on aggressive revenue drive through all manners of advertisements and programme sponsorships which in turn affected the content, nature and quality of broadcast programming. Oso (2006) traced the parlous state of funds for the broadcast media then to the excruciating effects of the Structural adjustment Programmes (SAP) introduced by the Babangida regime with its twin effects of commercialization and privatization. It was Oso's view, for instance, that: *under this parlous state, programming and the general quality of programmes declined. Most stations simply could not locally produce good programmes. They relied more on low – budget, cheap format programme genres, essentially studio-based interviews and discussion programmes, scheduled assignments and events interspersed with press releases from corporate organizations for news.* (Oso, 2006:263)

With this development in broadcast programming, Oso contends that “the debate is no longer a normative question of the propriety of commercialization of the broadcast media rather it is coming to terms with the opportunity cost of a media system weighted in economics at the expense of social responsibility to the society.”

The era in discourse and the period immediately succeeding it (1984 - 1999), brought about increased competition in the broadcast sector as more radio and television stations were established by both the federal and state governments for political reasons. Broadcasting at this period was seen as a potent tool for political propaganda by contending forces which belonged to different political parties, groups and caucuses. This competition climaxed in the deregulation of broadcasting through Decree 38 of 1992 by the military regime of the self-styled President Ibrahim Babangida. The deregulation opened the window of broadcasting to private initiatives – a development that widened the opportunity for creative and inventive broadcast programming in the country. Some of early arrivals on the deregulated broadcast scene were the *RayPower FM 1 and 2, Rhythm FM, Star FM, Cool FM, AIT, Minaj, Channels TV, MITV, Clapperboard TV* now *Silverbird TV* etc.

2. Broadcast Programming Models and Public Interest in Nigeria

Globally scholars identify two models or schools of thought in broadcasting. These are the Commercial and Public Service Broadcasting models. As expected

and by virtue of the reason(s) of her colonial heritage, the two models or schools find expression in the Nigerian broadcasting experience. Historically, broadcasting in Nigeria inherited the philosophy and programming template of the public service orientation of the British broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) concept sees broadcasting as a social and cultural rather than a commercial resource to be exploited for profit. The idea of public service broadcasting, according to Oso (2006) citing Raboy (1977) “is rooted in the enlightenment notion of the public and of a public space in which social and political life democratically unfolds”. Expatriating on the principles of the PSB model Blumer cited by Atkinson (1997:19) posits:

...almost all democracies have included some public – service element in their broadcasting arrangements. In part this reflected the notion that first radio and later television are special media. Due to scarce spectrum resources they exploited their great social, political and cultural power, and the privileges conferred on their providers, radio and television were expected to be ‘principled’ media’, the best summary expression of which was ‘public service’. In part too it reflected awareness of market insufficiency – the ability of a fully commercialized system to cater for all expectations.

In a nutshell, the Public Service concept of broadcasting derives from the general perception and acknowledgement of the mass media as a social institution. McQuail (2005:213) argues that as a social institution, the media are entrusted with the sacred mandate to “fulfill with varying degrees of voluntariness and explicit commitment, certain important public tasks that go beyond their immediate goals of making profits and giving employment”. This notion is akin to the ‘fiduciary’ or trustee model used to refer to the idea of the media being held in trust by their owners (whether government or private) on behalf of the public. It would be recalled that as far back as 1936 and 1949 when the British Colonial Administration set up the Plymouth and Turner- Byron Committees to chart a course for broadcasting in the West African Sub-region, it had rejected the idea of programme sponsorships including the suggestions on airing of advertisements by the erstwhile Nigerian broadcasting Service (NBS). Following this philosophy the early broadcast planners in Nigeria were at no loss on the direction of their programming as they were *convinced that colonial broadcasting should serve purposes other than entertainment and that it should be used as an instrument to advance administration --- a means of education and*

instruction of the people on public health, agriculture and rural development issues (Ladele, 1979: 14).

Meanwhile Commercial Broadcasting model is an offshoot of the neo-liberal free market capitalist ideology cum economic policy that sees the mass media essentially as an industry. By this orientation the mass media, especially broadcasting is seen and operated as a business concern which while providing their traditional products of news, views, information and entertainment, keep in view, and are in fact being directed, motivated and controlled by the manifest principles of the bottom line. Hence, the overriding goal of this school of thought is that of profit maximization and increased returns on the investments of the owners.

As noted earlier, financial challenges arising out of the harsh effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 80’s compelled broadcast stations to implement the policy of media commercialization which subjugated the ideological role of the mass media as social institutions to market forces. Although this policy shift, to a large extent, triggered off stiff competitions which had some positive impacts on the quality of programmes and the acquisition of state- of- the -art equipment by some of the stations, particularly with the private ones taking the lead, commodification of news, information and other sundry products through the policy and principle of “cash and carry” or what is now known in media parlance as “Let Them Pay” (LTP) became the vogue. This is what Oso (ibid) refers to as news by barter. As Oso observed, commercials have today gone beyond their initial complementary status for media capital such that the possibility of eliminating them is a perpetual nightmare for media industries and their advertisers.

Notwithstanding its benefits as earlier espoused, commercial broadcast programming, especially in the Nigerian context, appears to negate the principles and advocacy for press freedom in real and absolute terms. This is because commercial pressures and survivalist instincts now combine to compel broadcast stations to abandon the so-called fact-based standards of mainstream journalism for the “never – let – facts - stand – in – the – way –of – a – good - story” standards associated with tabloid journalism (Kayode,2014:280). Instead, as has been noted earlier, the commercial inclinations of the media and other unanticipated developments in technology have actually restricted access to the media to a few businessmen (advertisers) including media professionals who have the wherewithal to own media empires. The question therefore is: are the

media now being held in public trust for whom and by whom? Obviously, the logic in the saying that there is security in numbers and the assumption by Americans that the media will be financially healthier and their news more impartial if they rely on support through advertising from the private sector appears to have failed the test of media reality at least in the Nigerian context.

While providing a sociological review of the ethical crises in the Nigerian Press, Idowu (1996) contends that the concept of responsibility by media professionals parades a triple mandate that sees the role of the press as being contractual, self-imposed and assigned. By Idowu's analysis, the constitutional mandate on journalists under the banner of the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy constitutes the assigned role of the media. This confers the exclusive privilege on journalists as the only professional group given a specific assignment, from which they have derived the accolade as the Fourth Estate of the Realm. The contractual nature of media responsibility, according to Idowu, derives from the awareness that there is a tacit understanding between a medium of communication and its audience that well-processed information and opinions which are useful to the audience will be provided, that is information and opinions that can be acted upon.

As a result of the reduced income which the poor economy brought about for the media, the survival strategy forced many publications including broadcast houses to adopt cheap and instantly rewarding practices of junk journalism where half-truths become acceptable option in contrast to the 'professionally exacting but slow rewarding enterprises of responsible journalism. The consequence of this is the erosion of public confidence in the press as an agent of development.

Besides, another major backlash of commercialization of the media, according to Oso (2006), is that the role of the media as custodian of public interest is greatly impaired. This is because media content, especially broadcast programmes are overridden by the commercial logic of the advertising industry with its utmost dependence on entertainment as a ploy to capture the unwary audience. This, Oso contends, is usually done at the expense of other programme genres, especially those with deep current affairs and high intellectual discourse content. Democracy, Oso laments, "suffers in this regard" as "consumerism and political apathy become the order of the day as radio and television purvey fun and laughter in place of knowledge and enlightenment".

Equally, worrisome in the commercialization phenomenon is the growing exclusion of the populace from participation in media discourses, news and programme sources. As access to the media increasingly gets tied to the ability to pay either as programme sponsors, newsmakers, advertisers or producers, the poor, and the socially marginalized groups in the society become in Gaye Tuchman's words, symbolically annihilated (Gaye, 1981 cited in Oso, 2006). This reductionist attribute has turned the citizens to mere consumers in what a media scholar describes as part of the process of the disempowerment of the poor and the socially deprived. This is the kernel of Atkinson (1997:38)'s view when he asserts that "when culture is reduced to goods and services which can be converted into cash in market, the result is a misappropriation of the rights which citizens have acknowledged in favour of the proclaimed freedom of consumers to procure that culture".

Even if one ignores the issues of marginalization and disempowerment of the masses which media commercialization or its twin variant, commodification of news engenders, one cannot but acknowledge the effect of the propaganda model on media reality as enunciated by Herman and Chomsky (2002). Among other functions, the media, according to Herman and Chomsky serve and propagandize on behalf of the powerful societal interests that control and finance them. It is in the contention of these scholars, for instance, that: The competition for advertising has become more intense that boundaries between editorial and advertising departments have weakened further. Newsrooms have been more thoroughly incorporated into transnational corporate empires with budget cuts and a further diminution of management enthusiasm or investigative journalism that would challenge the structures of power. (Herman, E. & Chomsky, N., 2002: xvii).

The kernel of Herman and Chomsky's submission here is that editorial content of media production has been subjugated to the whims of advertising. This in turn has a serious implication on the waning zeal of the media for investigative journalism because invariably there often seems to be a meeting point between media owners, sponsors and those who control political power. With this development, it may no longer require a gift of clairvoyance to predict that the press may soon forfeit its accolade as the fourth estate of the realm due to the emergent contradictions in its compromised status as a dispensable adjunct to the already bloated structures of political power. It is of course true that the social reality of a privatized or deregulated media system

appears irreversible both in logic and expediency. After all, it is normal for human beings to invest into anything and expect to reap profits either in hard cash or social influence.

As Adaba (2001) notes, normal societies also never stand in the way of profit-making because it enriches the Commonwealth, except when such threatens the cohesion and orderly progress of society. It is gratifying to acknowledge, with limited optimism though that media commercialization has not degenerated to this stage in Nigeria. In his analysis of the dangers of commercialization, Adaba identifies two instances of the aberration of the concept in broadcasting to imply:

the sale of an entire newscast to a so-called "sponsor" whose logo or message or product is continuously displayed throughout the newscast; or charging news sources for the "privilege" of covering and relaying their pre-packaged views or messages as news.

According to Adaba, himself a renowned broadcaster, what the so-called 'sponsor' is buying in the first instance is the credibility of the newscast and newscasters to confer status by association on his company's logo, message and product, while the broadcasting station, by conceding, is selling cheaply the integrity of its newscast and newscasters as testimonials to the "truth" claim of the so-called "sponsors".

In the second category of news commercialization, the renowned broadcaster avers:

By charging and receiving fees, by whatever name called, to cover news, company Annual General Meetings, weddings, funerals, chieftaincy installation, town festivals, workshops and seminars, even events organized by charity organizations, stations are not only prostituting the integrity of news, they are insulting their audiences and breaching the National Broadcasting Code. (Adaba, 2001, *ibid*).

The National Broadcasting Code states unequivocally in Section 4.3.11 that news is universally accepted as sacred and that the sponsorship of news detracts from its integrity and predisposes a bias in favour of the sponsor, hence, newscasts shall not be sponsored. It would appear that this crucial section of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) code is observed more in the breach than in compliance as any meaningful content analysis of media presentations, whether print or broadcast in Nigeria would reveal.

Apart from the above, the tendency of a commercialized media system to reinforce the hegemonic power of the powerful social class while it, at the same time, disempowers the socially weak groups in the society cannot be over-stressed. Media scholars like Oso (2006: *ibid*) have argued that: With their ready access to the media and higher social capital, the members of the powerful class are able to define the critical issues of the day and dominate the ideological field with their own world view and discourse. The voices of the poor are muted, and if heard by any chance, are muffled, incoherent and inaudible. With the turn of events, it does seem that the contradictions thrown up by commercialism in the media industry have called to question the ability of the media to protect and defend the cause of the masses. As it were, the media's slogan of being 'the voice of the voiceless' is flat and does not excite any passion from the presumed beneficiaries of the cliché.

3. Deregulation and Broadcast Programming in Nigeria

Deregulation as a concept implies the loosening of government's control and monopoly on the reins of the economy. This concept was applied to Nigeria's broadcast industry in 1992 when private individuals and organizations were, for the first time, allowed to own and operate broadcast media after the promulgation of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Decree 38 of 1992. Prior to this time broadcasting was the exclusive privilege of Government both at the federal and state levels. Kalejaiye, Atofojomo and Odunlami (2006: 79) explained government's disposition on its exclusive hold and monopoly of the broadcast media thus:

..., for such a long time, government held on to its exclusive monopoly of the broadcast media because it felt it could not trust the professional discretion of private individuals to protect the public interests or safeguard the nation's security. It would be recalled that successive military [adventurists] found it a convenient strategy to execute their coups on the airwaves of the nation's broadcast media. The government probably felt the nation was not ripe for private ownership of broadcast stations.

Although a deeper analysis of the political situation in Nigeria pre - broadcast deregulation seemed to suggest that General Ibrahim Babangida's decision was rather a clever strategy to decentralize the broadcast sector in such a way as to make the frequent announcement coup attempts by military irredentists on the networks of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Nigeria

Television Authority (NTA) difficult and ineffective, subsequent events on the nation's broadcast scene after the deregulation exercise have since lain to rest the fears of government. That exemplary courage by the Babangida administration on August 24, 1992, to promulgate the National Broadcasting Commission Decree 38 of 1992 threw open the gates to allow private individuals and organizations the opportunity to own, control and operate broadcast stations in the country. The Decree was amended by another Decree 55 of 1999 promulgated by Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar regime on May 26, 1999 barely three days before handing over to the elected civilian government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. This decree set up the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) which was to be saddled with the responsibility of regulating and controlling the broadcast industry in Nigeria.

The deregulation of the broadcasting exerted some positive impacts and could be regarded as a success story in the country. In the first place, the Nigerian nation, contrary to initial government's apprehensions, has not collapsed. There has not been any case of the use of the private stations to ferment trouble nor subvert the country. Rather, Kalejaiye *et.al* (2006) submit that:

... what Nigerians seem to have witnessed is the opportunity to choose. Competition in broadcast programming brought about by private stations has created some vitality and vibrancy in the broadcast sector such that even many government-owned stations that were almost sinking in boring and monotonous monologues of "government said, government added, and government reiterated", have been forced to abandon their slumber. (Kalejaiye et.al, 2006:84)

Also through the deregulation of broadcasting there has been an upsurge in the activities of independent producers in Nigeria. This is because the options and latitude provided by a deregulated broadcast market gave the independent producers, most of who had been frustrated out of 'civil service' – oriented government media stations new opportunities to showcase their talents.

Besides, the employment market in the broadcast sector, in the wake of deregulation, offered better prospects as employers lured the few available talents with better remunerations. Poaching of proficient On – Air – Personalities (OAPs) soon became the order of the day as most government stations that failed to appreciate the professional worth of their talents and other professional in the news,

programmes, and engineering directorates lost them to the upcoming broadcast stations.

Nonetheless the deregulation of broadcasting is not without its flip side in Nigeria with its attendant unsalutary effects on programming. The exercise for instance revealed the weak manpower base and policies of many broadcast houses. The quantitative increase in the establishment of radio and television stations has not been marched with a corresponding increase in the quality of trained and experienced professionals that could service the various departments of the stations. The ensuing trend is nothing but a mere recycling of the same few professionals in the old media houses. This has created a lot of problems in terms of unethical professional standard in programme content production and presentation.

There is also the irony and ambivalent nature of government's implementation of the deregulation policy itself. For instance, at a time when the federal government should be relaxing its hold on the nation's airwaves, the same government, through different administrations re-enacted its domination of the broadcast sector with the creation of additional radio and television stations. This became so rampant during the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration when he established thirty two (32) additional radio stations for the FRCN and a total of one hundred and forty eight stations for its television counterpart—the NTA! Hence it appears that the federal government is trying to take back by the left hand what it had reluctantly released with the right hand. Although many of these stations have become moribund with many just struggling to survive, the obvious lopsidedness in broadcast media ownership has further strengthened government propaganda machine in a manner that jeopardizes the essence of democracy and threaten freedom of expression.

Highlighting the implications of the government's action against the backdrop of its weak personnel structure, Odukomaiya in Aderiye (2003) noted that the government has been politically motivated in expanding broadcast facilities without giving corresponding thought to the personnel that should provide effective management to the new broadcast stations. Such actions, according to Odukomaiya, amount to a grievous error for government to assume, as it has done, that expertise in broadcast performance and operation can translate into management capability.

4. Broadcast Programming in the Digital Era: Challenges and Prospects.

Broadcasting in the digital era is characterized by the computerization of all data transmission, storage and processing through the binary code which provides a basis for the convergence of the media. McQuails (2005: 554) sees digitization in the context of the replacement of analogue by digital transmission of television signals, leading to a large increase in potential channel capacity and scope for interactivity. Straubhaar and LaRose (2002:26) conceptualize digital communication as “the conversion of sound, pictures and texts into computer readable formats by changing them into strings of electronic information in encoded form”. From these scholars, digital communication, contrasts with its analogue counterpart in the sense that it relays all the information present in the original message in the form of continuously varying signals that correspond to the fluctuations of sound or light energy originated by the source of communication.

Digitization provides a radical change in the way broadcast programmes are produced and transmitted to the audience. In the case of television, for instance, the first revolution starts with the camera lenses which are fortified with devices for higher resolution than those in the conventional one. The scenario is captured by Straubhaar and LaRose thus:

[Digital] transmission is not limited to HDTV pictures, however, Broadcasters can pack multiple conventional TV and audio channel into the same channel space using compression technology and can also include streams of Internet packets. In fact, broadcast executives look to supplemental digital series to provide new streams of relevance that will offset the immense costs of switching to digital television. (Straubhaar and LaRose, 2002:26)

The secret of innovations in communications and broadcast technology lies in the discovery of micro processing, which has changed the face of the electronic and communication world. Smaller components and computer circuitry are incorporated into new applications of technology. It is such developments that have led to the incorporation of digital circuits into television receiver design, thereby eliminating many of the interference patterns now seen on sets. Consequently, obstructions to signal fidelity such as shadows, ghosts are being eliminated in broadcasts. Bittner (1989:289) argues in the case of telecasts that such improved quality will permit sharper pictures resulting in improved graphic displays from teletext and videotext systems.

With this development there is a complete paradigm shift in broadcast operations particularly in terms of content generation, presentation and transmission.

Worthy of note in the digital era is the high degree of fluidity in broadcast programming and programme scheduling strategies that has defied the old order. The broadcast audience in the digital world has become global. This means that broadcast operatives and managers can no longer afford to be fixated in ideas of the “cut and paste” linear era of analogue technology.

Also, the digital era increases the sources of uncertainties and the level of risks for the expanding number of players involved in broadcasting. British scholars Chalaby and Segell (1999) identified some of the critical sources of uncertainties trailing the digital fever to include: market demand for digital services, intensified competition, regulations, the pace of technological progress and the phenomenon of convergence. The scholars argued that the process of digitization is challenging public service broadcasters and may contribute to weaken their presence in the public sphere. This, they reason, is because as technological mastery increasingly tends to rest in the hands of commercial firms, digital broadcasting consolidates the commercialism of television. Aside from fuelling the growth of conditional access, it is argued that digitization threatens universal access which is one of the key principles of public service broadcasting. Chalaby and Segell conclude that when digital broadcasting will be fully operational, watching television will cease to be a common experience, to become a shared activity that individuals experience separately.

If Chalaby and Segell see digitization from the point of uncertainty, Straubhaar and LaRose view it from a more positive dimension. From their own lens, the digital era offers a lot of prospects to the broadcast industry. These are in terms of improved transmission quality because digital signals are less susceptible to interference and distortion and offer a greater prospect for channel abundance due to the ability to digitally compress messages.

Another benefit of the digitization to broadcasting is that many users can share the same transmission channel simultaneously by taking turns, through the process of “packet switching” typical of internet operations. Providing insights to this development, McQuail (2005:26) argues that:

The implications of all this for mass media are still far from clear, although it is certain that the ‘traditional’ media have also benefited greatly from the new media innovations as well as acquiring new competitors. Secondly, we can already conclude that the communications revolution has generally shifted the ‘balance of power’ from the media to the

audience, in so far as there are more options to choose from and more active uses of media available.

McQuail's ideas quite align with those of Chalaby and Segell, especially in his observation that "traditional mass communication was essentially one - directional, while the new forms of communication (digitization) are essentially interactive. With this singular fact, it is McQuail's submission that "Mass Communication has in several respects become less massive and less centralized".

With digitization all cannot and has not been the same with all mass mediated exchanges and communication, broadcast programming inclusive. For instance, there is now a fluidity in programme scheduling at broadcast stations unlike in the old order in which broadcast programmes are pre-scheduled in a fixed time frame (usually on quarterly basis) which allows the audience and advertising agents to identify, negotiate and book for programme sponsorship in a fixed and predictable manner. Today the dynamism of broadcasting in the digital era has necessitated a lot flexibility which, most times, does not conform to the traditional method of scheduling- be it hammock, stripping, stunting, counter, block etc.

Also arising from the digital milieu is the increasing spate of the demassification or atomization of media audience. Demassification which refers to the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu has today neutralized the concept of the general public / audience as hitherto conceived and applied in the broadcast media. What this means is that with the new media, the audience is actually on the saddle and dictates the direction of uses and gratifications to be obtained from any given media. In other words, the media user in the digital age is now able, through the application of newer technologies, pick from a large selection of media previously shared with other individuals as mass media. Hence, as Odunlami (2012:85) observes, more than ever before in the traditional media, the new media now typified in the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs. With this reality broadcast programmers in the contemporary age need to overhaul their strategies by integrating the emerging technological platforms of the digital age into their operations.

Added to this is the ubiquity and versatility of the social media which is a great challenge to traditional broadcast houses. Previously radio and television stations contended with competition for audience and commercials from rival stations which compelled

many of them to deploy creative 'right- mix' programming schemas and strategies. Today the social media are awash with a lot of platforms and applications like *YouTube*, *Netflix*, *Iroko TV* etc. providing alternative sources of broadcast contents like video – on – demand services to the audience. The typical broadcaster now contends with the explosion of multi-channel subscription-based consumer choice, a diverse range of high quality programming which remains available through to anyone through 'Free – to – Air' television and radio. This is further compounded with the emerging global nature of broadcast audience. Hence with this development, many broadcast stations have lost their traditional hold on the audience. For instance, gone are the days when some stations prided themselves with slogans / pay- offs like "the largest network in Africa", "Voice of the People" etc. as the audience now knows better.

Apart from the shift in the locus of power which has transformed the audience from a consumer to the producer of broadcast content through digitized technology, the broadcasting sector has equally had its own fair share of the impact of disruptive innovations. Today everybody with a smart or android phone is a producer of some sort and the term "production" itself has become so elastic as to incorporate the entire gamut being shunned out through the undifferentiated mass of User Generated Contents and Citizen Journalists.

5. The Future of Broadcast Programming in Nigeria

A true broadcaster is not given to illusion or complacency. The velocity of technological innovations globally accentuates the constant training and re-training of broadcasters in order to keep them abreast of developments in their trade. However, the global trends in technological advancement notwithstanding, some environmental factors like funds constraint and the poor state of requisite infrastructure typical of the developing world still limit the speed of adaptation of Nigerian broadcasters to technological changes especially in the area of digitization. But be that as it may, broadcasting like the other mass media agencies are global institutions which are technologically-driven. The future of broadcasting and indeed programming will be determined by a number of factors most of which are precipitated by practitioners' response to the internet and digitization.

Digitization may no doubt be the future of broadcasting, however, in practice, digital

transmission may not, by itself, change the essential nature of broadcasting. Experience has confirmed, as Laven (1998:8) predicted, that in spite of the take-off of digitization in many countries, over-air broadcasting still remains inherently a “passive”, “one-to-many” and “one-way” communication system still with many opportunities to add interactivity to traditional broadcasting. Of course, digital technology as many scholars have predicted, will multiply the number of available broadcast services such as: free-to-air and subscription services, video-on-demand and pay-per-view services, nonetheless each delivery system still has its own strengths and limitations. This implies that individual broadcasters will in the future decide the most appropriate digital delivery mechanism for their markets or environments. Consequently it will no longer be business as usual for Nigerian broadcasters and programmers like their colleagues elsewhere because gone is the era when radio and television networks dictated what, when and how we listened and watched. This is the era of the audience as consumers are actually in firm control and call the shots in terms of what programme they want, when they want it and where to get it.

Consequently, the broadcast programmer of the future must see the wisdom in Laven (1998:10)’s counsel that the prospect of new delivery systems that digitization and Internet offer does not imply the death of broadcasting. According to Laven, “Broadcasting is, and will remain, ubiquitous. The Internet will become very important. Broadcasters will almost certainly be major suppliers of services and content for services delivered via the “enhanced” Internet. The other delivery mechanisms have yet to prove themselves, but broadcasting to computers will probably be a very large market”. For instance, broadcast programming in the future must be creatively done in such a way that maximizes the advantage that broadcasting still has over the Internet. It is common knowledge for example that the Internet often suffers from serious congestion when too many users attempt to download or retrieve information from a particular site or at busy times of the day whereas such a problem does not exist in broadcasting.

The mass media, especially broadcasting is at the fore-front of technological adaptation and innovations which is a basic reality of today’s digital and knowledge – driven world. For effective broadcast programming that meets the challenges of the digital age therefore broadcasters must constantly brainstorm and through effective research find ways of benefitting from what Laven (1998) describes as

“the impact of exponential technologies” if the competitive advantage of broadcasting will not be eroded. Hence while being equipped with the old skills of right mix programming and scheduling strategies on the one hand, the broadcaster of the digital age must be at pace with the already identified technological changes that could address today’s daily operational challenges.

Stier (2013) identifies the six trends that would direct future television to include: storytelling, content mobility, event-based viewing, content delivery optimization, binge watching and more participants, more creative risks. According to Stier, unlike in the past when television story telling revolved around a single screen, the evolution of omni-platform environment of the digital age allows television storytelling to be splashed across multiple screens simultaneously. Hence where today’s model focuses attention on a primary screen with other screens such as tablets or mobile playing a supporting role, the model of the future will see these screens working seamlessly together. This omni-platform evolution, according to Stier, will impact broadcast programming in a value chain, from content creation and preparation, to sales and marketing, to distribution as well as impact the story arc through social interaction.

By content mobility, it is implied that as the cost of video screens falls, the demand for content mobility will rise exponentially. For instance, with a smartphone serving as the nerve centre for the screen world, content will be able to follow a consumer from device to device, location to location. This would create new opportunities for advertising impressions, provided they are properly targeted and calibrated for a multiscreen lifestyle.

Event-based viewing on the other hand, according to Stier, refers to the future of content creation which hinges on building a social experience around a programme that enables viewers to be a part of a broader event experience that reaches well beyond the television and living room. Meanwhile content delivery optimization as a concept is meant to displace the hitherto remote and channel guide experience which has stayed relatively the same for more than half a century. Content delivery when optimized is likened to the situation when a learning thermostat learns a user’s habits and adjusts a home’s temperature, similarly, smartphones may soon be equipped to learn a viewer’s habits and deliver customized programming that match viewer’s preferences.

Binge watching refers to the emerging trend which allows the customization of content delivery in such a way that viewers are able to sit down and watch entire series in a single day or weekend through on demand – internet streaming media providers, Digital Video Receivers (DVRs), digital media libraries and players etc. The point on more participants and more creative risks as enunciated by Stier suggests that original programming experiments by internet streaming video providers offers a taste of the different kinds of relationships that talent will have with distribution partners. In the future, new relationship models will allow more industry players to take greater creative risks while on the other hand, it will also place a heavier burden on the systems that track and calculate rights, profits and participations. All these possibilities and more are the scenarios that will challenge the creative skills and determine the relevance of the typical broadcast programmer in the radio and television industry in as full blown digital milieu.

6. Recommendations

The realities of digital broadcasting make the following suggestions imperative:

- There is a need for a shift from the conventional / generalist approach to broadcast programming to a niche-specific programming strategy aimed at an identifiable target audience.
- Broadcast stations owners and operatives should invest more on technological devices, both hard and software, including digital platforms that will enable cutting edge content production and broadcast programming that will blend with the peculiar features of the various social media outlets.
- The realities of media convergence have made the full integration and incorporation of social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, Skype etc. unavoidable components of the contemporary broadcast programming tools.
- The contemporary broadcast programmer must be versatile, multi-skilled and digitally literate to access, manipulate and utilize digital technology for maximum efficiency, hence there is a need for an intensive investment in their human capital development through adequate training.
- Broadcast training institutions and mass communication departments should emphasize applied /industry-based

researches on digital programming and disruptive innovations and how these could add values to contemporary broadcasting operations.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the concept and practice of broadcast programming especially in the context of the digital era leveraging on the Nigerian situation. Depending on the approach and strategies, programming determines the success and sustainability of radio and television in the face emerging challenges posed to practitioners and the industry by the rapid technological changes of the information and knowledge age. As our analysis in this paper has revealed, broadcasting may not be supplanted by the Internet, the fact remains that digital technology could and has indeed precipitated a merger of the previously separate industries of telecommunications, computers and broadcasting cum publishing through convergence. But while the Internet has become very important for broadcasters as a new delivery mechanism for broadcast services, on-demand services, and the delivery of services to international audiences, unlike broadcasting the Internet is not well suited to the simultaneous delivery of programme material to large audiences and it cannot offer services to mobiles and portables without consuming huge amount of data/ radio spectrum. The contemporary broadcasting strategy must be effectively re-jigged, synergized and updated to account for the emerging trends and platforms if broadcasting would not lose its prime place in the digital era.

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