

**Politics, Technology and International Communication in
the 21st Century**

Philomena Effiong Umoren, PhD

philoumoren12@gmail.com

Department of Mass Communication

Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Oruk Anam, Nigeria

&

Aniekan Aniefiok Udonquak

aniekanudonquak@gmail.com

Department of Mass Communication

Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Oruk Anam, Nigeria

Abstract

The expanding frontiers of technology and its attendant impact on all the processes and forms of human communication in the last fifty years cannot be waved aside or ignored. More so, the growing need for political and economic integration and cooperation from the various nations of the world fan the embers and clarion call for communication and interaction on a professional and specialised level; thus the springboard of international communication. In juxtaposing the above mentioned phenomenon, it can be argued that they have significantly altered the layers of international communication. This is evident in the increasing romance between the political systems/ideologies in states and capabilities of digital technologies in facilitating communication across border for global cohesion. Accordingly, this essay appraises communication while introducing the meaty subset of international communication. It further discusses the developments that influence the nature and characteristics of international communication laying emphasis on politics, ideology and technology as currently being experienced and observed. The paper posits that international communication in the 21st century is no longer significantly determined political/ideologies idea in a state; rather, the availability and access to digital technologies are the more significant variables in contemporary cross-border communication.

KEYWORDS: Politics, Technology, Technological Determinism, Global Village and International Communication

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, on daily basis and in every facet of human endeavour the need for communication cannot be over stated. Communication is what makes any society thick. It is at the heartbeat of human interaction. Pate and Dauda (2015) define communication as “a social process that facilitates the exchange of ideas and feelings among and between individuals in societies. Communication takes place at multiple levels and indifferent forms but all with the goal of transferring meaning from a source to an intended receiver with the hope of getting a feedback” (p. 179). Asemah (2011) further defines communication as process through which individuals or groups of individuals exchange ideas, information, messages, feelings and notion through previously agreed and understood symbols in order to influence each other.

The growing need and importance of communication is seen in the mucky world of politics, in what is known as international relations. Different nations of the world now have and establish embassies in other countries in order to harness and exploit positively, global phenomenon of interest to them. That goes to stress the point that no man is an island. So also, no nation can stand on its own, not even the five super-powers of the world – United States of America, United Kingdom, France, China and Russia. Inasmuch as they (the world super-power nations) barter and haggle with each other,

especially those with opposing ideologies, they cannot completely do without one another. Ibanga (2006) succinctly captures it thus:

Modern scholars have agreed on the view that no country can live in isolation. That is to say that, "no one nation is an Island." The need for interaction among nations of the world is imperative. Nations are unevenly endowed, the law of comparative cost advantage advises that, "nations should produce what they can best produce and forgo what they can less produce in order to attain comparative cost advantage on goods produced" in this analysis, interdependency among nations is the watch-word. Nations depend on one another for their wants and desires (p. 309).

The above assertion would only be a mere dream without the concept or the idea of international communication. The relative global peace that appears to be in the world now, since, the end of the World War II, is largely down to increased international cooperation between nations of the world through international communication. Ekeanyanwu (2015) lends credence to this position by stating that most war among nations or between one country and another had their remote and immediate causes connected to the inability of the combatants to talk meaningfully at a round table or the inability to understand and appreciate the other side's point of view or opinion due to poor international relations and information management abilities of the diplomats involved.

As staggering as above position may sound and appear, it only helps underscore the importance of communication and in this case, international communication. Albeit, communication becomes a much complex task when it involves people across cultures because of the fact that individuals often view the world through their culturally perceived lenses, thus influencing and shaping their understanding of the world around them (Pate and Dauda, 2015). Recent happenings around the world have also further solidify this position; not least the Russian-Ukrainian war. The Russian President, Vladimir Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskiy, had before the commencement of hostilities, traded blames of the other being illogical in its reasoning and demands. And the two leaders could not communicate a solution to avert the war that has rocked the region, causing unfathomable destruction of lives and properties. The failure to come to a common ground and negotiate a peaceful solution to the tension that was palpable before the war is what Ekeanyanwu (2015) was describing above. More so, since the two-way flow of news is fundamental to the strengthening of peace and international understanding, states and information media in each country have the right to diffuse reports of national events to others beyond their borders (Musa, 2011), and that is what international communication embodies.

This brings up the subject of foreign correspondence. According to Asemah (2011), a foreign correspondent is a reporter who sends foreign news for his organization. A foreign correspondent is charged

with reporting events for a mass medium from a foreign country. It is the social as well professional responsibility of a foreign correspondent to diffuse reports of national events to others beyond their borders. This is done with two broad objectives in mind: first, to fulfil the surveillance function of the mass media. The second objective is, to promote and defend the territorial interest of their states for the purpose of peace and development. Thus, it can be argued that international communication cannot be complete without foreign correspondents as they play a very crucial role in polity and are the heartbeat of whole process.

Although, the growth of citizen journalism and the ever expanding frontiers of digital technology will offer a different school of thought to the omnipotency of foreign correspondents in international communication. But first, what is international communication? International communication is the exchange of meaning across national frontiers and between two or more countries (Agba 2002). This means that communication takes place between countries and nations of the world whether directly or indirectly. Ekeanyanwu (2015) summarises that international communication is the arm of mass communication concerned with the gathering, dissemination, interpretation and analysis of global news, information and communication. However, there are some developments in this present century that influence significantly, the nature and characteristics of international communication. And they are: politics,

ideology and technology. An examination of the three variables is the thrust of this research.

POLITICS/IDEOLOGY

For clarity purposes, the subject matter of politics and ideology will be treated and discussed as one. A closer examination of the two variables points towards one implied meaning. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, ideology means a set of ideas that is based on Marxist/capitalist ideology. It is also a set of beliefs, especially one held by a particular group that influences the way people behave. And Politics on the other hand is the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society. From the above definition, it can be deduced that politics and ideology try to explain and embodies one phenomenon. They all talk about and refer to culture: a way of live. Therefore, it could be used interchangeably albeit not in very context. So how do they both individually and collectively influence the nature of international communication is the sixty four thousand question.

Under politics/ideology as developments that influence the nature and characteristics of international communication, there is one significant but rhetorical question that surfaces. According to Baran (2012), the big question is: How much influence will countries accept in exchange for fuller membership in the global community? To buttress this position and provide more clarification, Ojobor (2002) states that the media differs from country to country, depending on

the type of government in those countries added to the ever expanding frontiers of digital technologies. And the overriding political philosophy of how media ideally operate in any given system of social values is called a normative theory otherwise known as political theories of the media (Asemah, 2011 and Baran, 2012). The normative theories of the press include: the authoritarian, the libertarian, the social responsibility, the Soviet media development media and the democratic-participant media theories. The theories are called normative theories because they talk about the relationship that should exist between the government and the media in any given society. The theories describe, explain and set standards or rules of language or behaviours which should be followed for the media practitioner (Asemah, 2011).

The authoritarian media theory operates and exists in authoritarian States where every form of social, political and economic lives are controlled and determined by the State. Examples of countries in this category include Saudi Arabia and North Korea. The libertarian media theory, although obsolete now, was called the free press theory where the media were not accountable to anyone. It was formulated by Sierbert, Peterson and Schramm in 1963 with the absolute and total independence of the media as its watchword. The Soviet media theory holds sway in Soviet State led by Russia.

The social responsibility theory, introduced by F. S. Siebert, T. B. Paterson, and W. Schramm in 1966, originates from the libertarian or free press theory. This theory is built upon several key assumptions

and principles, which include the following: Media holds a responsibility to society. Media ownership is viewed as a public trust. News media should prioritise truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and relevance. Media should be free but also engage in self-regulation. Media entities should adhere to agreed-upon codes of ethics and professional conduct (Asemah, 2011).

The origins of this theory can be traced back to the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press, established to re-evaluate the concept of press freedom as advocated in the libertarian or free press theory. This re-evaluation was prompted by the realisation that the global free press system had, to a significant extent, failed to deliver on its promise of serving the public interest and providing the anticipated societal benefits (Umoren & Udonquak, 2022).

The democratic participant media theory, formulated by Denis McQuail in 1987, outlines several key assumptions as articulated by McQuail himself. First, right of access: According to this theory, individuals and minority groups possess the right to access media and should be served by the media in accordance with their determined needs. Second, freedom from Centralised Control: It is posited that the organisation and content of media should not be subject to centralised political or state bureaucratic controls, ensuring independence from government influence. Third, audience-centric focus: The theory emphasises that media should primarily exist to serve their audience rather than prioritising the interests of media organisations, professionals, or clients.

The development media theory, established by McQuail in 1987, encompasses several fundamental principles. First, positive development role: This theory advocates that media should willingly undertake and promote positive development tasks that align with nationally established policies. In other words, media should actively contribute to the development goals and objectives set by the country. Second, freedom of the press with restrictions: According to this theory, freedom of the press should be subject to limitations based on economic priorities and the developmental requirements of society. In certain cases, restrictions may be deemed necessary to ensure that media activities support the broader development needs of the community or nation (Umoren & Udonquak, 2022).

However, the performance and role of the media in international communication, that is, messages emanating from a particular country at a particular time and the type of information such a country receives and decides to propagate for the consumption of the ever hungry information audience and members of society depends greatly on the type of political media ideology practised in such a country. And this by and large affects international communication in every sense of the word.

Furthermore, Baran (2012) writes:

Different countries' mass media systems reflect the diversity of their levels of development and prosperity, values and political systems. That a country's political system will be reflected in the nature of its media system is only logical. Authoritarian governments need to control the

mass media to maintain power. Therefore, they will institute a media system very different from that of democratic country with capitalistic, free economy.

In addition, even in very highly democratic societies or countries of the world, there are still some measure of press and information gagging. For instance, Canadian law forbids ownership in its commercial broadcasting channels (Baran, 2012). And this exhibition of political power and influence tickles that same way and affects the way that same countries take part and handles international communication.

Also, in October according to UNESCO (2002) cited in Baran (2012) UNESCO, an arm or organ of the United Nations, approved the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* by a vote of 148 to 2 two dissenters were the United States and Israel. And content of the convention were books, television shows, music among others. So, given the fact that books, newspapers, radio, television, film, magazines and very importantly, the Internet are all various mediums of international communication and it is also the main constituent of the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, therefore, the refusal of the United States of American to assent itself to it obviously had an influence on Israel because of their historical political alliance and they also objected to it. And those mediums are very important channels of international communication. So, the political interest of nations and countries is of paramount importance and anything that

will go contrary to their interest are always avoided. And this adversely affects international communication as explained with the case of the USA and Israel.

TECHNOLOGY

The Marshall McLuhan proposition of the world as a global village has indeed come to reality! Technology has caused and propelled the new media revolution. The emergence of ICTs has brought about radical change in the sphere of communication (Akpan and Nnaane, 2011). Since technological advancement has expanded the frontiers of communication and information dissemination in contemporary society as Nwabueze (2009) opines, Baran (2012) advances the discourse on how technological development has influenced international communication thus:

There are very few physical borders between countries in a globally mediated world. Governments that could once physically prohibit the introduction and distribution of unwanted newspapers, magazines and books had to work harder at jamming unwanted radio and television broadcasts. But they could do it, until satellite came along. Governments cannot disrupt satellite signals. Only lack of the necessary receiving technology can limit their reach. Now, with the Internet, a new receiving technology is cheap, easy to use, and available to more and more millions of people in every corner of the... and because of the universal availability of free translation of software like Google Translate, its content is readable to those millions of people wherever they live. As a result,

difficult questions of national sovereignty and cultural diversity are being raised anew.

In a similar vein, MacBride *etal* (1980) add, “Thanks to technological advances, nations can become more interlinked than ever before in history. The global web of electronic networks can, potentially, perform a function analogous to that of the nervous system, linking millions of individual brains into an enormous collective intelligence.”

And the unique thing about the role of technology in international communication is that it encourages free-based information flow. Evidently, social media have democratised the media through citizen journalism bringing about mass participation (Umoren and Udonquak, 2021). And as Baran (2012) pointed out above, it cannot be easily gag. Nwabueze (2009) writing on the post electoral developments during Ahmadenejad’s reign in Iran in 2009 says:

After the supreme council on election has upheld the widely disputed victory of Ahmadenajad, series of country-wide protest began in that nation. Before then, some international media such as Cable News Network (CNN), Fox News and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had been banned from operating in Iran. But the world hardly missed any post-election action, especially graphic details of the violence that heralded the protest. Why? Virtually every Iranian who had a handset became a reporter, posting pictures and messages to popular websites such as YouTube, Twitter, CNN.Com. The Iranian government failed in her attempt to block Internet signals and prevent information from

filtering out from the streets, including the remotest parts Tehran. These messages were being rebroadcasted and published in the traditional mass media.

Hence, the justification for Asemah (2011), assertion that the coverage of international events has been improved by technology; therefore, this explains the situation where mass media houses are scrambling for foreign correspondence. Also, the world has become increasingly integrated. Thus, technology practically kept international communication afloat and alive despite those attempts to gag it. Also, technology that has always been to the rescue of the foreign based correspondents as regarding story sourcing, processing and dissemination to the base station back home for onward transmission.

CONCLUSION

International communication exists but it has no doubt benefitted a great deal from the technological advance of the late 20th and 21st century. But as much as international communication continues to make giant strides, it has been undone and hampered by political interest of countries. This is because politics has literally taken hold of virtually everything. The pattern and flow of communication within and without the borders of countries is determined by the political systems in practice. Nonetheless, international communication through the aid of technology and ICTs has continued to surge ahead. And in the nearest future, it can only continue to excel. The emergence of new science, technologies and innovations provides opportunities for the unrestricted international communication to strive despite the political systems in practice. In conclusion,

international communication in the 21st century is no longer significantly determined political/ideologies idea in a state; rather, the availability and access to digital technologies are the more significant variables in contemporary cross-border communication.

REFERENCES

- Agba, P. C. (2002). International Communication: Principles, concepts and issues. In C. S. Okunna (Ed.), *Teaching mass communication: A multi-dimensional approach*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Akpan, C. S. and Nnaane, M. A. (2011). *The new media revolution*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.
- Asemah, D. (2011). *Principles and practices of mass communication*. (2nd ed.) Jos: Great Future Press.
- Asemah, E. S. (2011). *Selected Mass Media Themes*. Jos University Press, Jos.
- Baran, S. J. (2012). *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media literacy and culture*. (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Ekeanyanwu, N. T. (2015). *International communication* (Third ed.), Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.
- Hornsby, A. S. (Editor). (2010). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary International Student's Edition*. New 8th Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1732p + one CD.
- Ibanga, A. (2006). *Intensive Government for schools and colleges*. Uyo.
- MacBride, S., Abel, E., Beuve-Mery, H., Ekonzo, E., Marquez, G., S. et al. (1980). *Many voices, one world*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Musa, M. D. (2011). Mass media, intellectuals and the cultural imperialism discourse in Nigeria. In L. Oso & Umaru Pate (Eds.), *Mass media and society in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Nwabueze, C. (2009). *Reporting: Principles, approaches, special beats*. Owerri: Top Shelve Publishers.

Pate, U. A. & Dauda S. (2015). Cross cultural communication, peace education and national development in Nigeria. In I. Ndolo & C. Onwumechili (Eds.) *Nigeria: Development communication & interrogating the field*. Enugu: Rhyce Kerex Publishers.

Umoren, P. E. & Udonquak, A. A. (2021). Rural development issues, social media and national development in contemporary Nigeria. *AKSU Journal of Social Sciences (AJSS)*. 1 (1): 287 – 297.

Umoren, P. E. & Udonquak, A. A. (2022). Conceptualising Military - Media relations in Nigeria: An appraisal of the normative theories of the press. *Akwa Ibom State University Journal of Arts*, 3 (1): 324 – 337.