



ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN TARABA STATE BROADCASTING SERVICE (TSBS) JALINGO REPORTAGE; CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Mainstream media around the world have gone digital with more sophisticated gadgets and digital communication tools in order to compete with the social media which tend to have the credibility of breaking the news ahead of the conventional media. In Taraba State, some station livestream in their quest to meet up. Based on foregoing, this study is set to examine the impact of digital communication in Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo reportage, uncovering the challenges and prospects. The objectives of this study are to ascertain the impact of digital communication in TSBS, Jalingo; to examine the peculiar challenges the station faced with digital communication and to uncover the prospects of digital communication to the station. The study which is guided by Technological Determinism Theory, adopted a qualitative approach using in-depth interview to collect data from population which are the 18 trained Journalists of the Station. 12 out of the 18 population were selected based on experience and were interviewed to provide data for the study which were analysed thematically to explain the emerging themes. Findings revealed that digital communication have significant impact on the station's broadcasting hence; it uses digital communication tools to boost its operation, however, there are challenges ranging from lack of required tools, staff are under trained, and unstable power supply. The study concluded that digitalisation has a very high impact on TSBS and recommended that government should supply more equipment and train the staff for utmost utilisation of the digital communication tools.

Keywords: impact, digital communication in TSBS, reportage, challenges and prospects.

Introduction

Media scholars such as Udeorah (2009), regards the transmission of audio and video signals from a transmission station to a mass audience through electric race. The term broadcasting expresses the idea of scattered dissemination to anonymous unidentified destinations made up of listeners and viewers. It is related to the farmer's act of hand sowing grinds by scattering them broadly and allowing them to fall where they may. Broadcast communication is purposeful. They are intended to add something or introduce a change in the subject matter (audience) transmitted.

Until recently, all broadcasting media have run on an analogue system. Analogue radio use complete waves to transmit signals from a transmission station to a receiving box. Analogue radio uses frequency modulation waves. These waves produce clear voice transmissions but cannot filter out other noises around the sender. They are also not able to transmit signals past a few miles. A standard analogue radio is going to decrease in signal the closer you get towards its maximum range, at which point, all you hear is white noise. On the other hand, a digital radio is going to remain much more consistent in sound quality regardless of distance to or from the maximum range.

Kombol, (2008) defines digital communication as an advanced form of information transfer in which messages are converted into a series of 1s and 0s (binary digits) and sent over a channel to the receiver. Over the years, broadcast transmission has grown from strength to strength. It moved from monochrome (black and white in case of television) to colour transmission.

A digital standard is superior to analogue because of its greater accuracy, versatility, efficiency, and interoperability with other electronic media. Digital signals also have the advantage of generating no noise or “ghosting,” and being more resistant to signal interference. Within the range of the signal, this results in a perfect signal. Digital Radio is an advanced broadcasting technology that has transformed our radio listening experience. It enables broadcasters to offer contents with better sound quality. It also offers multiple programming choices, called multicasting and interactive capabilities (Asemah, 2009).

Digital radio is the use of digital technology to transmit or receive across the radio spectrum. Digital transmission by radio waves includes digital broadcasting, and especially digital audio radio services (Adeniyi, 2009)

In digital broadcasting systems, the analog audio signal is digitised, compressed using an audio coding format such as AAC+ (MDCT) or MP2, and transmitted using a digital modulation scheme. The aim is to increase the number of radio programs in a given spectrum, to improve the audio quality, to eliminate fading problems in mobile environments, to allow additional data casting services, and to decrease the transmission power or the number of transmitters required to cover a region. However, analog radio (AM and FM) is still more popular and listening to radio over IP (Internet Protocol) is growing in popularity. Especially in Taraba State radio station, the analogue seems to still be in used despite the transition to digital broadcasting in various states across Nigeria. Recently, the station’s AM has stopped functioning due to equipment and facility related issues. And until now, State Government has not made any effort to redeem the situation.

Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo is the only State Government owned radio station. The station has been suffering from lack of facilities, production equipment, infrastructures and poor management in the part of the government. Observers regard the station as a government neglected and poorly managed government media outlet. It is against this background that this study is set to investigate the impact of digital communication in Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo.

Research Problem

Generally, what digital broadcast media will bring comes with remarkable exciting changes to broadcasting. Media consumers will have more choices from broadcast radio. Broadcasters will have new opportunities to develop innovative programming and services, along with new revenue stream and market franchises. Broadcasting can compete with the new media environment, while ensuring that the public interest needs are still met.

Despite the overwhelming benefits of digital broadcasting, Nigeria is bound to encounter problems resulting from the low level of our technological advancement and the income level of the individuals. Innocent &Uwaoma (2012) noted that Nigeria is faced with a lot of challenges ranging from infrastructures to manpower and ranging also from financial implication to sensitisation issues.

In Taraba state specifically, the financial implication and the neglect of the government owned station by the state government constitute a major problem. Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo - the only State Radio Station, is apparently faced with the issues of lack of funding, lack of modern equipment, neglect of the station’s welfare, inadequate training of staff among other issues. These have resulted into failure in broadcast from time to time and lack of access to digital communication tools. It is in the light of this that this paper is set to assess the impact of digital communication alongside its challenges and prospect.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the research questions thus:

- i. Does Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo use digital communication tools in its reportorial operations?
- ii. What is the impact of digital communication tools on the reportage of Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo?
- iii. What are the challenges of digital communication in Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo?

Literature Review

The Concept of Broadcasting Media

Broadcasting is a form of mass communication that involves the dissemination of information, news and entertainment to a large audience through electronic transmitters. When the signals transmitted are audio (sound and speech) it is referred to as radio broadcasting, but when both visuals (motion pictures) and audio signals are transmitted, it is called television broadcasting (Adeniyi, 2009; Iheanacho, Anyaegbu, & Etumnu, 2021).

Digital Broadcasting and its Gains

Generally, digital broadcasting has enormous benefits it can render to both the audience and broadcasters. These benefits could be in the direction of programme content, media convergence, quality signals and multiple channels. Nevertheless, Udeorah (2009) submits that the PAC deliberated and determined the benefits of digitisation. Different sectors of the society shall benefit in different ways; national interest, listeners' and viewers' interest, broadcasters' interest, content providers' interest and so on.

In this regard, when the transition is fully completed, the spectrum will be freed up. Thus, the spectrum can be applied to other services. This is in line with Mishkind (2009), submission that American Congress had a desire to generate more money by auctioning spectrum space. The implication is that "a huge spectrum will be available for radio and television stations in Nigeria"

However, Baran (2010) argues that if broadcasters opt to devote their entire spectrum space, as technologically required, to the transmission of high definition images, they will lose audience share to cable, the internet and DBS, all of which offer multiple channels of programming and data.

The Challenges of Digitisation in Nigeria

Despite the benefits associated with digital broadcasting, there are several factors that pose challenges to the process. It is time to look at the chief challenges that form the crux of this discourse.

Technical and Financial Issues

The switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting requires huge investment on the equipment and gadgets. To acquire this, there must be finance. The technical and financial issues are two-fold: The involvement of the broadcaster and the implication for the audience. The broadcasters need to acquire new digital equipment ranging from production equipment to transmission equipment. In this vein, broadcast organisations like Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN, will be hit severely.

Manpower

As the complex and fragile equipment are coming in, there is need for matching manpower. The task of training and re-training personnel to fit into the digital process pose a challenge to the race. On the other hand, the process will definitely increase the number of stations. Thus, the existing broadcast personnel who may likely fit in may not be enough to fill the spaces and as such, pose an initial challenge.

Power Supply

The power sector in the country is nothing to write home about. The country has spent huge sums of money, though not accountably, to revive the power supply to no avail. Consequently, the sound of generators at every corner of a Nigerian street calls for alarm. But the people have to use these generators to at least, "live life". Also, all the companies in the country – petrol stations, telecom, banks, manufacturers, broadcast organisations, etc – rely on standby generators to carry on their businesses.

Theoretical Frame Work

Technological Determinism Theory

The theory was formulated by Marshal McLuhan in 1964. The basic premise of the technological determinism theory of Marshall McLuhan is that the media are extensions of the human body. The theory holds that the media not only alter their environment but the very message they convey. The media bring new perceptual habits while their

technologies create new environments. The theory states that technology, especially the media, decisively shape how individuals think, feel and act and how societies organise themselves and operates. The medium determines the content of communication. The medium has the power to manipulate our perceptions of the world.

Technology determinism theory has its root in Marshall McLuhan postulation that developments in communication technologies were the main force for change in human society (Ekhareafu & Asemah, 2013, Macaulay, Etumnu, & Onwukwe, 2021). Technological determinism is typically an example of a humanistic theory, but it can be applied to a scientific theory. Technological determinism describes what happened in the past with the four periods of human history. McLuhan uses three different technological developments to show the transition into each new period. It draws order out of chaos and helps us to focus on what is important and ignores what is not. By focusing on the period, the technological development and the dominant sense receptors of the time, McLuhan simplifies the changes culture has made. It also explains why something happened. Why something happened is as important as what actually occurred. Each new period was pushed from one to the next because of each new technological development. Although, the inventors did not know it at the time, their invention made a major impact on human history.

Methodology

This research is a qualitative one which adopts an in-depth interview method in order to collect data from the population. The researcher considering the nature of population, used purposive sampling technique. 12 out of the 18 trained Journalists with not less than 15 years working experience, who are all working in the Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo, were purposively selected to participate in the in-depth interview. The data collected were analysed thematically.

Results and Discussion

Use of digital communication tools in Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo reportage

From the findings, all the respondents revealed that Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo make use of some digital communication tools in their reportage. The station uses the digital gadgets to some extent for converting data, processing and at the point of dissemination. The respondents maintained that the station has **Switch HP Procurve 1810g-B**: The HP Procurve unmanaged 24-port switch has 10/100BASE-TX autosensing per port and 2 open transceiver slots for media flexibility. The HP Procurve switch 2324 is ideal for low-cost, unmanaged 10/100 connectivity with uplinks.

Adobe Audition: Adobe audition (formerly Cool Edit Pro) is a digital audio workstation from Adobe Systems featuring both a multi-track, non-destructive mix/edit environment and a destructive-approach waveform editing view:

I can say to a large extent we use digital communication tools, previously we use to have typewriter but now that era is far gone now, we use computers. We also have software for editing and some of our reporters too have digital audio recorders which they convert they collect raw information and convert it and process it before dissemination. The radio station itself is also moving digital because as it is now, we have the FM and we have the application so by implication no matter where you are, you can receive our signals as long as you have the app on your device. So, to this I can say yes TSBS is using digital communication tools in its reportage (Respondent 6).

We also have tablets. A tablet is a wireless, portable personal computer with a touch screen interface. The tablet form factor is typically smaller than a notebook computer, but larger than a smart phone. The idea of tablet computing is generally credited to Alan Kay of Xerox, who sketched out the idea in 1971. The first widely sold tablet computer was Apple Computer's Newton, which was not a commercial success. Technological advances in battery life, display resolution, handwriting recognition software, memory and wireless internet (Respondent 7).

The results above revealed that TSBS Jalingo employ some digital communication in its reportage. This is so because all the interviewee revealed that the station uses some digital tools in their reportage (though not all). The station makes use of digital gadget like computers, tablets, Switch HP Procurve, adobe audition and other tools to enhance modern broadcasting. The findings corroborate the findings of Williams Ruth Chikodili (2013) which said that with the advent

of modern information and communication technologies, average radio station in Nigeria now strives to go digital in order to compete with its counterparts. This is in line with the theory used in this study-Technological Determinism Theory which holds that the media bring new perceptual habits while their technologies create new environments. The theory states that technology, especially the media, decisively shape how individuals think, feel and act and how societies organise themselves and operates.

Impact of digital communication tools on the reportage of Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo

According to respondents, the digital communication tools have made a tremendous impact on TSBS because it has made easy and has enhanced wider coverage of the station. “With the digital app that we have now our limitation is boundless; we don’t have boundaries. You can be anywhere in the world as long as you have the app you can get our programmes content” (respondent 5). “Yes, it has increased our visibility and it has also made our work easier, for those who are working in the news room, other departments; the process of converting these raw materials into messages that could be disseminated has also been made easier”. Therefore, the impact of digital communication tools in TSBS can be said to have been so effective and it also in a speed:

Digital communication tools have tremendous impact on modern broadcasting, this is because the Journalists in Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS)Jalingo use the digital communication tools to burst their information, enhance the stations’ mode of operation, make work easier for the Journalists and have helped the station to face away paper-pen form of production to some extent. Digital communication tools have made the Journalists in TSBS to do multi-tasking (Respondent 8).

The results above showed that digital communication tools are enormous. All the respondents acknowledged the positive impact of digital communication tools in radio broadcasting. This by implication means digital communication tools have enhanced broadcasting in TSBS, Jalingo.

It is apparent the respondents claimed that digital communication tools in broadcasting is very relevant while none of the respondent said that the use of digital communication tools in broadcasting is not relevant. It is imperative to note that digital communication tools are indispensable in radio broadcasting TSBS as they facilitate, enhance and improve broadcast process.

The findings of the study shows that digital communication tools improves the processes involved in broadcasting, this findings uphold Gester & Zimmermann (2009) who believed that the adoption and absorption of Information and Communication Technologies are being carried out in broadcast industry by bringing efficiency in all the functional wings including production, editorial and marketing so as to gain competitive advantage.

The challenges of digital communication in Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo

From the findings, it was revealed that the station lacks adequate working tools. The station does not have required tools necessary to make their content effective, “there is a need to have more advance digital tools that will aid the work” (Respondent 1).

The staffs are under-trained, most of them are not familiar with the little digital gadgets we have let alone bringing other sophisticated ones. These calls for the need for training of staff to enable them know how to utilise the digital tools in order to enhance efficiency in broadcasting. Also, there is the challenge of funding, there is lack of adequate funding from the government and this has made the station to be almost abandoned and cannot progress further as it expected. Another challenge the respondents noted was that of power supply:

Unstable power supply is another problem suffered by this station. In a situation where there is unsteady power supply to power the computers or to recharge the UPS, TSBS finds it difficult hence, diesel is high and the station is not been funded. This in turn, means that they cannot be connected to the internet which is at the center of the digital communication (Respondent 5).

The essence of this question was to examine the challenges of TSBS Jalingo with digital tools and the station itself. It is often said that to everything that has advantages must possibly have disadvantages. The results above indicated that there are enormous challenges facing TSBS as a station, ranging from poor funding, lack of staff training, insufficient digital communication tools and so on.

The station as stated earlier has been suffering from lack of facilities, production equipment, infrastructures and poor management from the part of the government. Observers labeled the station as a government neglected and poorly managed media outlet. The government especially in the state level do not manage the media stations leaving them with issues like poor welfare, lack of roving vehicle, inadequate facilities, poor working conditions, lack of staff training among others. Asemah (2022) and Anyanwu, Awaeze and Etumnu (2022) say for the peaceful co-existence of the society, government should create enabling environment and allow Journalists to discharge their social responsibility function effectively.

Conclusion

This research work has shown that digitisation has a very high impact on broadcasting in Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo. Digital broadcasting transmission is all easy technology breakthroughs which records data in singles and makes this transmission easy. It directly makes editing even much easier especially for editors and line transmitters and transmitter engineers. Digitisation will help improve accessibility, sharp picture quality, good and efficient programming and so on. However, the said station has numerous challenges among which is lack of funding, inadequate modern facility, lack of staff training inadequate power supply and so on.

Recommendations

The need for every broadcast station to go digital and the call for government to wake up to their responsibilities in funding media stations as well as addressing other challenges cannot be overemphasised. It is on this note that the researcher recommends the following:

1. Taraba State Government should supply all the necessary digital communication gadgets and facilities required for broadcasting in order to burst the state media outfit.
2. Having achieved the first recommendation, Taraba State Broadcasting Service (TSBS) Jalingo should familiarize themselves with digital communication tools and be competent in using those tools to enhance their work.
3. Finally, the researcher recommends that the government should wake up to their responsibilities of funding the station and provide modern equipment, train the station's staff and create enabling environment for the Journalists to operate.

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