GLOBAL NEWS FLOW: REVISITING THE NEW WORLD COMMUNICATION ORDER

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ABSTRACT: The paper critically examines the concept of global news flow in line with the New World Communication Order (NWCO). The New World Communication Order or New World Information and Communication Order (NWCO/NWICO) was coined by MacBride and came into existence in the 1970s. It aimed at addressing the glaring imbalance in global news flow dominated by the Western media which called the shots in global news purveyance and conveyance. This paper adopted an in-depth literature review approach. It attempts to revisit the call for a New World Communication Order in the contemporary digital era bearing in mind the unpredictable nature of global politics, conflicts of interest and different levels of technological development. Major highlights of the study include the expansion of the media landscape occasioned by advancements in information and communication technologies, and the rise of citizen journalism. The downsides or the threats are the issues of censorship, propaganda and misinformation. The paper leaning on the Development media theory therefore recommends a deliberate emphasis on development news from less developed countries by the Western media conglomerates in order to mitigate the level of negative news inflow from them to the developing countries of the world.

Keywords: News Flow, NWCO, NWICO, Global News, Communication

INTRODUCTION

The issue of international news flow has been of great concern for decades across the globe. There have been debates on how best to ensure balance, fairness and equity in the global information flow, coverage and reportage. Developing nations of the world often accuse the developed world of bias, schism and under-reportage. The issue gave rise to the concept of the New World Communication Order (NWCO) often referred to as the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). It has variously been noted by media and communication professionals that the concept of news and information flow emerged as a very critical area of concern regarding the unequal distribution of information and media power in the global space. This issue of equitable distribution, participation and representation in the global media sphere has witnessed varied and unprecedented transformations in recent years.

Udeze and Uche (2017) aver that the issue of global news flow has been a persistent phenomenon in both local and international frontiers as the debate has persisted even in the face of new media technologies. The duo argued that the global economic and political

landscape with its attendant changes seems to have done little in laying this reoccurring debate to rest.

The New World Communication Order was coined around the 1970s to address the imbalance occasioned by media dominance by Western conglomerates. There are however several factors that necessitated this clarion call, some of which include the post-World War II which brought about a change in the geopolitical landscape, the emergence of new states in Africa, Asia and Latin America, nonaligned movement across the nations, the advent of digital technologies and the interconnectedness of economies. All these have in no small measure impacted the way information is produced, distributed and consumed globally.

A major milestone in this call was the release of the MacBride Report in 1980 with the title: Many Voices, One World. The report highlighted the imbalances and inequalities in the global media landscape. The Report called for a new global communication order that would address the marginalization of the less privileged nations and ensure diversity, inclusivity and plurality in information generation, distribution and consumption.

Historically, the communication order has been characterized by imbalances, where certain regions, cultures, or perspectives dominate the discourse, while others are marginalized. This news flow imbalance poses challenges to fostering a truly inclusive and diverse global dialogue. In this age of technological revolution, all can witness the shifts in the dynamics of the global communication order and the process of global interconnectedness. The global communication scenario is further confounded by the advent of digital technologies and networked society as observed by Castells (2010). This has provided new paths for the dissemination of information through technological revolutions and also risks for privacy, surveillance, and the concentration of power on digital platforms.

Couldry (2012) makes a case for a deeper understanding of power dynamics as they have been evolving in relation to communication in the digital era. Changes in the structures of media and communication with the emergence of digital technologies and the wide use of social media platforms and global media conglomerates took over the traditional structures. This transformation has not only brought forth new opportunities for information exchange, but also raised critical concerns about issues like media imperialism, cultural homogenization, and concentration of media ownership. Further, in grappling with these challenges, societies need to take a peek at the complexities in the global communication order in order to fully fathom the challenges.

Objectives of the study

This paper's major objective is to revisit the NWCO and explore how the landscape of global news flow has evolved in contemporary times. It highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the new world communication order while taking note of the impact of digital technologies and the changing landscape of information generation, production and distribution across the globe.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is qualitative. It adopts an in-depth literature review approach thus drawing data from secondary sources including the internet, texts, and published journal articles that revolve around the global news flow debate.

Global News Flow Debate: then and now

Nwosu in Udeze and Uche (2017) posit that the global information flow debate has remained among the most persistent issues in international communication and world politics…it has remained hot and topical even up to these days of global economic uncertainty when one would expect it to be pushed to the background or even oblivion in the world's fight for economic survival. Little wonder Oguh (2015), argues that the representation of Africa by Western media has received a lot of academic and media coverage over the years, yet the issue persists even till today.

Scholars have long debated the nature and implications of the global communication order. McPhail (1987) introduced the concept of media imperialism, arguing that Western media conglomerates exerted hegemonic control over global communication flows, leading to the marginalization of non-Western voices. In contrast, Tomlinson (1999) proposed the idea of cultural globalization, suggesting that increased interconnectedness facilitated the exchange of cultural ideas and practices on a global scale.

Global news flow has been described as unbalanced and skewed (Udeze & Uche, 2017). This imbalance appears in two forms: quantitative and qualitative imbalance. The quantitative imbalance is described as the volume or amount of news flow from one country to another especially between the developed and developing countries of the world. It has been observed that news and information flow mostly from developed countries to the less developed. Conversely, there is less flow from developing countries to developed ones (Nwosu, 1990; Okigbo, 1990; Agba 2002). Qualitative imbalance on the other hand refers to the type or nature of news that flows from the developed to the developing countries. The main complaint about the qualitative imbalance, according to Ekeanyanwu (2013), is that while the Western media loves to report on crises and disasters involving developing nations, they do not attempt to report other positive or favourable news that has to do with development. As a result, the Western media only covers stories of poverty, famine, political unrest, war, illness, coups d'état, natural disasters, and similar events.

The issue of global news flow imbalance has been a persistent phenomenon on both local and international frontiers. The debate has remained unabated even in the face of new media technologies. The global economic and political landscape with its attendant changes seems to have done little in laying this reoccurring debate to rest. Individuals, nations, countries and continents at different times and forums have continued to make their inputs from their different and differing perspectives on the global news flow debate (Udeze & Uche, 2017).

More recently, scholars have highlighted the role of digital technologies in reshaping the global communication landscape. Castells (2010) coined the term "network society" to describe the emergence of a new social order characterized by digital connectivity and networked communication. Similarly, Couldry (2012) emphasized the importance of understanding the power dynamics inherent in digital platforms and their impact on social relations and cultural practices. However, challenges persist, including the dominance of Western narratives, the digital divide, and the spread of misinformation. Scholars argue that addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of power dynamics in the global information ecosystem.

Schraeder and Endless (1998) in their longitudinal study of the portrayal of Africa by *The New York Times* between 1955 and 1995 found that images of Africa were mainly "negative" at 67 per cent in 1955, 92 per cent in 1985 and 85 per cent in 1995. It was also found that "73 per cent of all articles provided negative images of African politics and society.

Furthermore, Udeze and Uche (2017) argue that what constitutes balanced news reportage has been enmeshed in debates for decades at different forums in the global community. The media capitalists have always been accused of not just poor coverage of developmental issues in the less endowed countries of the world but deliberately highlighting issues of poverty, hunger and devastation thus presenting such countries especially Third World countries as savages, uncivilized and sometimes semi-humans while the developed world have always maintained their stand based on what they termed newsworthiness. This trend has become a recurring incident such that one wonders if the debates would ever be laid to rest, especially in the face of new media technologies and the activities of citizen journalists. Media scholars have not ceased to contribute their scholarly views on this seemingly over-flogged media debate.

The global news flow debate gathered momentum in the 1990s with several Nigerian communication and media experts and academics adding their voices. Momoh (1990) avers that the problems raised by one-way information flow and the existence of monopolistic patterns in international information flows have been the subject of discussion in several fora. Okigbo (1990) could not agree more when he states that the controversy over the nature and character of news flow between countries and world regions has proved to be one of the most persistent issues of international politics, diplomacy and economics. Nwosu (1990) however posits that the reason for the persistence of the global information flow schism seems obvious. No human relationship or interaction can take place without one form of communication or the other. In this era of political, economic and other uncertainties, the peoples of the world need understanding which comes through effective, fair and equitable communication in order to keep living and interacting together as members of the international comity of nations.

Biko, Gore and Watson (2000) in a study that analysed the coverage of Africa in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* between March and August 2000 found that 84 per cent out of 89 news stories on Africa were negative. The duo summed it up by asserting that news imbalance no doubt prevails over the reportage of Africa since negative reports far outweigh the positive.

Merrill in Udeze and Uche (2017) pointed out long ago that journalistic practice all over the world always has some elements of bias. This persistent controversy from another perspective hinges largely on the theory of media effects. Okigbo (1990) argues that if it is conclusively known that the media have no effects on their audiences, the controversy over the flow of international news and information would have ended a long time ago.

Revisiting the New World Communication Order (NWCO) in the Contemporary Age

In this era of digital technologies, one cannot help but question the continual relevance of the New World Communication Order and its underlying principles. It is a truism that technological advances and innovations have facilitated much connectivity and exchange of information, they have also raised questions about privacy, independence, market forces and sovereign statehood. Furthermore, the emergence of citizen journalists, media giants and business conglomerates and social media platforms, has compounded the debate within the global media space.

Principles of New World Communication Order

The New World Communication Order hinges on key principles which include:

Inclusivity and cultural diversity: Less-endowed nations such as African and Latin-American countries have been clamouring for inclusion in information generation and dissemination. This includes advocacy for diverse cultural representation and perspectives in the media space across the globe.

Inclusivity operates on key principles one of which is respect for diversity. Inclusivity starts with recognizing and embracing the rich tapestry of human diversity. This encompasses differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and more. By acknowledging these differences, humans can move towards creating a more inclusive society that values and celebrates them. Inclusivity thrives when open and respectful dialogue is encouraged. People should feel free to express their thoughts and concerns without fear of discrimination or backlash. It is essential to actively listen to different perspectives and engage in constructive conversations to bridge gaps and build understanding (Thomas, 1990; Thomas & Ely, 1996; van Dijk, van Engen & Paauwe, 2012; Daya, 2014; Derven, 2014; Theodorakopoulos & Budhwar, 2015).

Inclusivity also encompasses the principle of equal opportunities. This entails that all individuals have equal access to opportunities and resources. This means removing barriers, both overt and subtle, that hinder people from participating fully in society especially as it relates to information generation and distribution. This is where citizen journalism reigns supreme. In news production and consumption, everyone should have an equal shot at coverage irrespective of race or region, colour or creed.

Media pluralism: The concentration of media outlets on just a few hands is disheartening. Thus, a need to ensure the emergence of diverse media outlets and independent voices to counter the monopoly.

Information sovereignty: Sovereign nation-states have the right to control their own media systems and call the shots without external control or interference, especially from the Western media powerhouse.

Democratization of Communication: There is a need to encourage open and unrestricted access to communication gadgets and resources, both human and material across all continents of the world.

The major focus of these principles is to challenge and counteract the concentration of media power in the hands of few individuals especially the Western media conglomerates thereby ensuring an all-inclusive platform for global discourse. This makes the voices of the voiceless to be heard across the globe without the 'muzzle and puzzle' that hitherto characterized the global media space.

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of NWCO

The strengths of the NWCO lie in advocating for media pluralism, cultural diversity and the right of countries to own and control their media environment, fostering a more equitable representation of diverse perspectives on information news flow in global space.

Since the inception of the NWCO, the global media landscape has undergone significant transformations, driven primarily by technological advancements, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and changes in audience behaviour. The rise of the internet, social media platforms, and digital media technologies has revolutionized the production, dissemination, and consumption of news on a global scale.

Hitherto there were only Western Media Conglomerates such as Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP) and the like. However, even Africa now has its own News agency called Pan African News Agency (PANA) apart from regional news agencies there are now national news agencies such as the New Agency of Nigeria (NAN).

Weaknesses/Challenges Confronting NWCO

Despite the advancements, challenges such as misinformation, digital divides, and media concentration persist. These obstacles continue to hinder the realization of a truly equitable global news flow. The Western powers still control the media landscape as a result of high technological advancement that is almost non-existent in poor developing nations of the world. The world still aligns with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America (VOA), Cable News Network (CNN), etc.

Opportunities to be exploited

The digital age also presents opportunities for democratizing information production and dissemination. Open access platforms, citizen journalism, and collaborative storytelling are some of the positive developments that contribute to a more inclusive global news environment.

The advent of the internet and digital technologies has revolutionized the way news is produced, disseminated, and consumed. This technological advancement has impacted the flow of news across borders. A very glaring instance is the inception of social media. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok have become powerful intermediaries in the global news flow unlike what was obtained in the past when media audiences had to wait for conventional media or big media conglomerates to disseminate news. These news social media are changing and shaping the narratives and thus, amplifying diverse voices across the globe.

Threats

In the contemporary digital age, the relevance of the NWCO and its principles remains subject to debate. While technological innovations have facilitated greater connectivity and information exchange, they have also raised concerns about privacy, surveillance, and news flow bias. Additionally, the emergence of new media actors, including technology giants and digital platforms, has complicated the traditional power dynamics within the global media ecosystem.

Despite the aspirations of the NWCO, significant challenges persist in realizing a truly equitable global news flow. Issues such as media concentration, censorship, propaganda, and misinformation continue to undermine the principles of diversity and pluralism. Moreover, the digital divide exacerbates inequalities in access to information, limiting the participation of marginalized communities in global discourse.

New Theoretical Framework

There have been multidimensional viewpoints on the theoretical frame underlying the phenomenon of this global order for communication presented based on critical theory and post-colonial perspectives. Critical theory makes these power relations, inequality, and hegemony immanent within the global communication framework. Postcolonial perspectives at the same time are such that they acknowledge the decolonization of communication—a process that accepts the history of imbalances even as it amplifies voices hitherto suppressed or excluded. This theoretical framework tries to articulate the subtleties in the global communication order.

Media imperialism is a theoretical framework of the uneven distribution of media power developed by McPhail (1987). This had, in turn, sparked critical discussions on the power of the Western media conglomerates in defining narratives of global events, possibly side-lining

diverse perspectives. To mitigate the effect of media imperialism and dominance by Western media conglomerates, there is a need to explore a new theoretical framework that would address the global news imbalance. One of such theories is the Development Media Theory.

Development Media Theory—Redefining and advocating for a paradigm shift

This is not a new theory per se. It is a theory that developed to fill the vacuum that seems to be unaddressed by the four classical theories of the press. Proposed by McQuail in 1987, it advocated for media support for democratic government and its effort to bring socioeconomic changes in a given polity. It sues for media cooperation and support as against an unmitigated critical stance towards the government of the day (Baran & Davies, 2012). The theory received a major boost from the MacBride Commission Report of 1980 under the auspices of UNESCO.

Communication should be viewed as a major development resource, a tool for ensuring genuine political participation in decision-making, a central information-based method for defining policy options, and a means of identifying national priorities (MacBride Commission Report, 1993, p. 288).

The major tenets of the development media theory as highlighted by McQuail include:

1. The mass media should agree to and carry out positive developmental responsibilities in accordance with national development policies.
2. The news and information flow of other nations with similar or close to the country's conditions in terms of national culture and policy should be prioritized by the mass media content which should be subjected to censorship and restrictions based on economic significance and community development needs.
3. Journalists and other media practitioners should be aware that they have duties and responsibilities in addition to the freedom to collect and disseminate information (McQuail, 1987, p.121).

According to Nwafor and Ogbonna (2022), development media theory claims that the media should be supportive of the government rather than being critical until the country is well-established with a strong economy while also aiding them in implementing people-oriented policies. The theory is to a great extent, applicable to the mass media in developing countries. It advocates for positive reportage while exercising caution in the coverage of bad news that can jeopardise a country's quest for growth and development. The main goal of the theory is to emphasize the positive; thus, enhancing the country's move towards self-sufficiency and socio-cultural growth. McQuail (2005) describes it as a theory of both state support and resistance to other nation's norms and competing media ideological leanings.

It has been variously noted that the difficulty in using the four normative theories of the press as propounded by Siebert et al and their inability and inadequacy towards highlighting the major elements in solving communication problems in developing countries led to the formation of the development media theory. Media practitioners are seen as mediators and agents of national development and modernization.

Redefining and advocating for a paradigm shift

While communication and media experts and writers in the past have pigeonholed this theory to just media support for a democratically elected government in a developing nation, we are of the view that the global media especially the Western media conglomerates should equally emphasize development through coverage of positive and development news from third world countries instead of the persistent schism and skewed reportage that emphasizes the negatives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The concept of global news flow and the principles of the New World Communication Order (NWCO) continue to shape discussions surrounding media globalization and information and communication rights. The evolution of the global communication order calls for a critical overview of its current state with strategies on how to move forward. This paper has tried to suggest how a fair, equitable, inclusive, and diverse global communication order can be created bearing in mind the history of the NWCO, the need for a multidimensional theoretical framework, and incorporating pragmatic strategies.

The New World Communication Order even at this present time stands at a very critical junction that demands thoughtful analysis and transformative interventions. Addressing the existing imbalances requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders globally including governments, media organizations, media and communication professionals, technology companies, and civil society. It also calls for diligent efforts on the part of scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to see to it that while the benefits of global communication are engendered, the attendant risks of power imbalances, cultural homogenization, and media concentration are lessened.

Revisiting the New World Communication Order in the digital technological age underscores the persistent struggle to address the challenges of media inequality while at the same time appropriating the potential of innovative technologies to promote a more diverse and inclusive global media landscape. Furthermore, by adopting a theoretical framework that prioritizes cultural diversity and inclusivity coupled with ethical communication, the global community can attain an equitable and just communication order that reflects the richness of human experiences and perspectives.

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