The main functionalities of media systems across the divides

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Abstract: This article is a broad-stroke review of the universally agreed-upon functions of the media systems. The review is guided by a framework that merges a variety of media models from a range of disciplines addressing the multiple issues of media content, context, and its functions. Arguably, such merger occurs across historical periods, national boundaries, and disciplinary perspectives, otherwise called across the global digital divides. Important beautiful and dreadful events occur regularly across all regions in the world. There is consensus that these events cannot make the news unless they reach the vast majority of the audience and, by extension, the larger public. Since news is an event shared via a medium, media systems should invest in collecting relevant facts, evidence, and impressions that can later be translated into the story carrying the news. A media system is expected to play an essential role in ensuring that the human person can see, hear, touch, and connect with other people. Indeed, it is through such a process that we can all come to the realization, that journalism can be informative, balanced, and well-informed. Such a line of reasoning forms a backdrop for developing an argument that, as of today, journalism comes in a variety of forms. Within the context of such an argument that this paper is qualitatively developed through an integrative literature review to look at the greater influence of media systems across the global digital divides. The paper establishes that media systems play an essential role in many areas including linkages, policies, politics, literacy, socialization, and development. It behooves, in this regard, each nation to facilitate the establishment of a media system that is necessary and desirable for achieving its needs.

Keywords: Comparative media, Communication networks, Digital divides, Journalism, Relevance

1. INTRODUCTION

As a backdrop for the discussions on the emergence of Global Communication Networks, Thompson (1995) demonstrates in historical terms how as a process, communication globalization began in the mid-19th century. He continues to indicate that in earlier centuries, printed materials endured a hectic process of transportation over longer distances across different social contexts' borders for their distribution. However, this process became less hectic in the latter stages of the mid-19th-century. Thompson (1995) says in this regard that the communication process that governed the flow of information globally became more organized, elaborate, and extensive in the global system of communication and information processing and supply.

The current shifts globally from analog to digital information codification systems have arguably brought about a new technical era where communication and flow of information are now handed in a much easier and more

flexible way (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Jacoby, 2015). Media products are now circulating globally. Indeed, such products emanating from many given social contexts are increasingly shared globally and not just within their localized market context. Thompson (1995) argues in this context that such a scenario has been made possible because communication in this modern world is now taking place on a growing international scale. Media content is disseminated across borders and over huge distances so easily that media consumers can access such content from distant sources (Chen et al., 2015).

On his part, Baran (2004) indicates that satellites and the internet have made mass media truly global. The earth has become a global village despite not all countries using mass media in the same way. He continues to offer that radio and television were, in effect, international in their earliest days. Gugliemo Marconi's earliest success was the 1901 transmission of a wireless signal from England to Newfound (Raboy, 2016). American inventors Philo Farnsworth and Russian immigrant Vladimir Zworykin met and eventually overcame the challenge posed by Scotsman John Logie Baird, among whose greatest achievements was the successful transmission of a television picture from London to New York in 1928. However, it was not much later in the development of radio and television that these media did indeed become international.

On the other hand, Thompson (1995) indicates that disseminating information across extended distances is not new. He reinforces this by speaking about how several actors in the Roman empire, especially those in positions of authority in government, churches, and businesses participated in bringing about more elaborate postal communication networks in the region. Such elaborate networks can be seen, more particularly, in the production and wide circulation of the late fifteenth century printed materials such as books and pamphlets. Against this backdrop, it is worth mentioning, again that on an international stage, such communication networks mentioned above became more systematically organized during the 19th century. This kind of organization came about, in part, as a result of a technological revolution that brought to a stop the overreliance on physical transportation of printed messages to consumers.

Such organization's success resulted, also, from the growth of economic, political, and military domains. Other main innovations in communication that occurred in the 19th century include;

- The European Imperial powers' innovation of underwater cable systems.
- Exclusive formation and liberalization of various news agencies across different parts of the world.
- Establishing international agencies responsible for distributing frequencies and wavelengths.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FUNCTIONS EXPECTED OF MEDIA SYSTEMS ACROSS GLOBAL DIVIDES

2.1. Social intercourse/linkage function

Dominick (1994) argues that one of the media systems' functionalities includes achieving social intercourse objective. In this regard, the author proposes that such a function benefits everyone including people that share strong common interests and those that do share such interests. Social intercourse in this context is platforms offered by the media to different individuals to enable them to communicate with one another. The media has transcended the reporting of political and economic news. In more precise terms, the linkage function entails the media's role of bringing people or groups that share the same interests together even though they could be separated geographically. In this way, media plays a bigger role in establishing new social groups comprising members who initially had no idea that other members in those groups shared their interests. Some authors refer to this as public-making ability of the media (Christians et al., 2009).

2.2. National policies

Dominick (1994) indicates that as a practice, journalism is useful in conveying national policies to the public and those in the diaspora and keeps the government informed of the public needs and expectations. It also brings to the

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attention of the government citizens' reaction to government policies and decisions. In most cases, this happens when the media is under the supervision and direction of the government. On their part, Ahuja and Chhabra (2008) offer that the sole function of journalism, or media systems for that matter, is to convey national policies to the public and to keep the government at local, state, and central levels informed of public needs.

2.3. Illiteracy eradication

Media systems are expected to eradicate illiteracy. According to Ahuja and Chhabra (2008), the most fundamental objective of many contexts in the global south is fighting illiteracy. This action is therefore prudent for the broad participation of all citizens in nation-building. There are, indeed, many individuals who cannot read and write, and this is a big tragedy that the media seeks to address as one of their mandates. The most common way of eradicating this 'pandemic' is by going directly to the people affected by the programs that create literacy among them. There are massive campaigns for universal literacy that are in most cases undertaken by the media systems that sincerely believe in the worthy cause.

2.4. Political integration

Media systems have been bestowed with a great responsibility of conveying news and information to a wider audience scattered in various regions. This notwithstanding, the media has also been at the forefront in educating people across the digital divide on issues of integration. The media, as pointed out, plays an essential role in protecting core national values and interests. Beyond protecting and orchestrating these values through information and education, the media has been proactive in enlightening people about issues of integration (Fairbairn & Rukaria, 2010).

2.5. Investigative/surveillance role

According to Dominick (1994), the surveillance function falls under the media's commonly known expectation of disseminating news and information. Cable News Network, for example, provides a twenty-four-hour news service to cable subscribers. News magazines reach nearly 10 million people in the world. It is therefore correct to say that there is a high dependence degree of the audience on the media mainly for news. The investigative role of the press has loomed larger as its ideological and partisan role has diminished investigation of official malpractice, political deception, or abuse of public interest by private corporations. Media systems are vital in defending society against social evils, vices, and injustices (Alger, 1998; Beckett & Kyrke-Smith, 2007; Deane, 2015; Graber, 2009; Herman & Chomsky, 2010; Kellner, 2004; Keane, 1991).

2.6. Interpretation function

Dominick (1994) posits that the interpretation function is closely linked to the surveillance function. Media provides the ultimate meaning of an event. Explanations, commentaries, and views are given to the readers for them to gain more understanding of news content presented on other pages. This kind of interpretation is known to take different forms, such as graphical expressions, which emerged in 1754 in the popular form. Interpretation opens up a larger number of different points of view.

It is thus vital for journalists to uphold objectivity as their mandate in informing the electorate and strengthening democratic principles. In this regard, journalists ought to offer pragmatic embodiment to free speech, power scrutiny, exercise it, and accountability. A journalist should not be a servant of political, financial, or partisan groups. If this is the case, he or she should renounce the right to be at the service of the people for the building of a democratic society. Journalists always listen to many people, weigh each piece of information, and decide what to keep and what to discard (Severin & Tankard, 1997).

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2.7. Progress generator

Carmazza (2002) alludes that news regarding discoveries, advancements in science or technology, and cultural achievement are all newsworthy. In recent years discoveries of clowning methods applied to the animal world hit the world deadlines. Media systems are therefore informing their audience on the new discoveries, innovations, and advancements across the universe as a way of encouraging more of these noble achievements and progress.

2.8. Emotional appeal

Carmazza (2002) continues to offer that news, programs, and entertainment events that stir up emotions or, in other words, generate a strong appeal to an audience. The public always prefers an emotional story to a bland, ordinary story. Therefore media systems across the digital divide endeavor to satisfy their audience with the programs they offer for consumption.

2.9. Socialization function

Dominick (1994) explains that socialization refers to how a person takes up a given group or group's behavior and values systems. It is based on such an explanation that mass media outlets are contrived to present depictions of the societies people live in. It is through such portrayals that people become aware of how they should behave given the media's content they consume through watching, listening, or reading. Reference is made here through the lens of the mass media's role of educating its consumers about people's expected behaviors and demonstrating how such standards can be met. In other words, media systems offer their consumers role models that are worth being emulated.

3. IMPLICATIONS

This article surfaces some of the basic functionalities expected of any media system regardless of its geographical location. Since it is developed by an integrative review of literature, it lays a perfect pedestal for conducting empirical explorations regarding how media systems in various social contexts are meeting functions outlined in this paper.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

This brief article focuses on the expected functionalities of a media system across the global divides. The article does not claim an in-depth exploration as it is founded on a broad-stroke review of literature available to the author. Nonetheless, it is clear that a media system, regardless of where it is situated, should be designed to meet some of the basic functions outlined above. Such functions are arguably universally accepted or, in other words, not limited to specific localized social contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

Across many developing countries, where there is strong centralized control over the media, the principal role of mass communication should be founded on helping to develop and build the nation, economic and political development. Therefore, it is the prerogative of any media outlet to create a conducive environment for achieving national interests cutting across economic and social progress. Further, it should support initiatives geared towards achieving integrity, unity, and stability of its localized region. As Dominick (1994) puts it, the media systems in different countries, although different, illustrate the influence that economics, culture, geography, and politics have on the development of mass communication. Because of these and other influences, each nation should create a media system that is best suited to its needs.

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