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The Internet, Online Newspapers And Interactivity: Analysis Of Three Nigerian  
Newspapers

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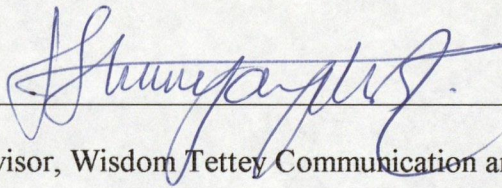
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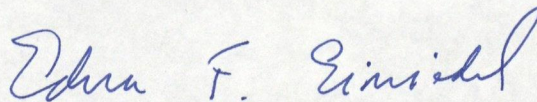
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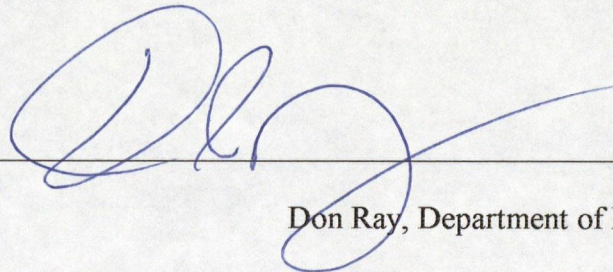
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled " The Internet, Online Newspapers And Interactivity: Analysis Of Three Nigerian Newspapers" submitted by Souza Oluwatoyin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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## ABSTRACT

The Internet has certainly provided an exciting and turbulent set of considerations for the newspaper industry. This thesis examined how the internet as a new communication tool that is relatively new to Africa, has presented the Nigerian media and the Nigerian people at home and abroad with an opportunity to interact online as well as promote their views on the global arena. It examined the growing global information technology revolution and how it is transforming the Nigerian newspaper media institution. It then discusses the state of online newspaper media in Nigeria, identifying the institutions offering online interactivity and the nature of the delivery platform used.

Daily newspaper data collected between August 1<sup>st</sup> 2001 and February 28<sup>th</sup> 2002 were analyzed to determine how three Nigerian print newspapers, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday*, with functional web presence responded to the challenges that the internet as a medium of communication presented to them.

Findings for this study found minimal differences between the online and the print newspapers, indicating that all three newspapers used virtually all the news items in the print versions to post on their online news editions. Interactivity was also found to be a basic technological tool for transforming the traditional newspaper model of message delivery into online news editions.

Analysis of *The Guardian* chatroom reveals that the roles of the sender and receiver were interchangeable. Both had equal control over messages being sent and received. Chatroom users developed a sense of commonality and community during interaction. This made the chatroom an important meeting place for Nigerians to talk about the history, politics, social life and culture of Nigeria. Everyday life affairs,

personal relations between men and women, parents and children also formed a most significant aspect of the discussion and this kept the chatroom community alive.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The spectacular developments that have taken place in electronics, computers, telecommunications and, most importantly to this research, the newspaper media, have ushered in the most significant period of social change since the invention of the printing press which laid the foundation for the information revolution that we now witness today. Ian Smillie (1991) in his book "*Mastering the Machine: Poverty, Aid and Technology*" notes that from the beginning of time, technology has been a key element in the growth and development of societies. According to Smillie (1991), technology is more than jets and computers; it is the combination of knowledge, techniques and concepts; it is tools and machines, farms and factories. It is organization, processes and people. The cultural, historical and organizational context in which technology is developed and applied is the key to its success or failure.

With the advent of the new communication revolution, the world is witnessing an expansion in online communications. The Internet, as an offspring of this current information technological revolution has been variously described as the most revolutionary communications development of the last century. Proponents say it has changed everything about every type of business and there seems no end in sight to the advantages this phenomenon can bring to the enhancement of business communication (Richardson, 1997). The Internet opens up entirely new channels and options for us to stay in touch with friends, family and peers. The Internet allows information to flow back and forth among millions of sources at practically the same time. Its beauty is that it enables us to instantaneously, reliably and globally communicate. Primary development

benefits include increased efficiency in the use of development resources and global access to information and human resources used for planning, consultation, decision-making and action (Richardson, 1997).

As an excellent resource for researching human knowledge, news and information, the Internet is also the medium on which a growing percentage of business communication is taking place. More media organizations are joining the online world and corporate web sites are becoming more integrated with communications for recruiting, to communicate with shareholders and the financial community and to advertise their products and services. Just as the Internet transformed communication and scientific research in the past decade, it is now changing the face of the print and broadcast industry and social exchange around the world. This transformation is having a profound impact on media corporations, large and small, government organizations, and ordinary citizens.

The new information revolution is enabling media institutions to provide a flexible, more open interactive and informed environment for users. The convergence of new information technologies such as telecommunications, computers, satellites, and fiber optic technologies are making it easier for media institutions to implement online interactivity. The broadcast and the print media, corporate bodies and individuals use the Internet to monitor news stories and for interactive purposes with online users. One major advantage of the Internet for online news is that, while it has made it easier to reach more people, it has also splintered audiences (Eboige, 2001). This means that you can target your message to very specific audiences because communications strategies can be targeted directly to whichever audience one chooses.

The point here is not that the Internet has changed or altered the basic principles of mass media communication. Effective communication and persuasion when it happens face to face, on television, in print, or on the Internet is still guided by the same tenet, which is the mass media's attempt to mold, shape or influence peoples' perception of reality. The fact is that mass media do influence people and their perception of reality and it is for this reason that people use media for getting or maintaining their power. In fact, the press was considered as the fourth pillar of democracy for no other reason than its capacity to reach the masses.

However, the emphasis here is on the advantages derivable on the net, in terms of the speed, versatility, user-friendliness and interactive exchange that allows the reader to express himself/herself while going through a message that is meant for a mass of audience. Both print and broadcast media in the developed world have recognized these advantages and they are reaping the fruits of this recognition. The proliferation of newspaper sites from the developed world on the Web buttresses how the Internet and the traditional media can go hand in hand in delivering news and information faster all over the world.

This trend has sadly not caught up yet in the developing world and according to Eboige, (2001) the time has come for a determined effort to redress this level of underdevelopment, which tends to portray the media as backward and resistant to change. The Internet's biggest drawbacks in the developing world are its dependency on largely urban-centered telecommunication infrastructure, dependency on the availability of computers and the cost of computers and generally poor levels of Internet services in

developing countries with monopolistic, expensive, state-run telecommunication systems (Richardson, 1997).

In Africa, some African policy makers, intellectuals and scholars in the field of development question the distribution of information and communication technology (ICT) to the developing countries of the South. The critics argue that the developing countries of the South do not have the appropriate technology to compete with or neutralize the cultural onslaught of the technology of the industrialized North. It is felt that the information available through networks produced in the North spread western values and culture, which threaten the survival of local culture. Zaibe (1999) summarizes the fear of the imperialistic posture of the information technology thus:

...the declining African countries are today under the electronic siege and are struggling to maintain not only various national sovereignties but also their right to existence. The very fabric of our societies is being rewoven or ripped apart as a result of new technology in information. Those in power in the first world have hailed the coming of the new technologies which make possible the global dissemination of their way of life in support of their vested financial interests as one of the greatest things of the century.

Uche also contributes to this debate by blaming advanced information technology for exacerbating the North-South information imbalance. He writes that the development of technology in the developing nations needs to be addressed because modern technology has become the preserve and monopoly of the industrialized nations and media communications systems have been restructured along the western technology advancement (Uche, 1997).

Despite the criticisms, Uche and Zaibe both acknowledged the good aspects of the new information revolution. They opined that the information revolution could capably

offer great potentials for decentralized and greater democratic processes and structures. In resonance, Eboige (2001) also stated that the new digital technology has great potentials to impact on the formation and maintenance of political systems in Africa. However, she cautioned that if access is limited to traditionally advantaged groups, there might be negative consequences that could further expand economic and social inequalities.

In view of the foregoing, this research sets out to examine how the internet as a new communication tool that is relatively new to Africa, has presented the Nigerian media and the Nigerian people at home and abroad with an opportunity to interact online as well as promote their views on the global arena. It examines the growing global information technology revolution and how it is transforming the Nigerian newspaper media institution. It then discusses the state of online newspaper media in Nigeria, identifying the institutions offering online interactivity and the nature of the delivery platform used.

From all indications, this study found minimal differences between the online and the print newspapers, indicating that all three newspapers used virtually all the news items in the print versions to post on their online news editions. Interactivity was also found to be a basic technological tool for transforming the traditional newspaper model of message delivery into online news editions. Analysis of *The Guardian* chatroom reveals that the roles of the sender and receiver were interchangeable. Both had equal control over messages being sent and received. Chatroom users developed a sense of commonality and community during interaction. This made the chatroom an important meeting place for Nigerians to talk about the history, politics, social life and culture of Nigeria. Everyday life affairs, personal relations between men and women, parents and children also formed a most significant aspect of the discussion and this kept the chatroom community alive.



In light of the preceding narrative, successive chapters are structured as follows: Chapter Two presents an overview of the state of information technology in Africa and in Nigeria in order to have a better understanding of the broader focus of this research. Chapter Three presents a review of relevant literature on various facets of the subject of this study and then examines the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter four outlines the methodology for analyzing the contents of the online newspapers and interactivity. Chapter five details and discusses the findings and chapter six concludes and offers recommendations for future studies.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN AFRICA**

#### **An Overview Of Africa**

Throughout the developing world, citizens are changing their worlds based on the shared belief that information and communication technology (ICT) can make a difference to their livelihood and political structure. While in the developed world, the information economy has officially transformed how its citizens work, live, learn, and entertain themselves, emerging economies are wrestling with more basic issues, such as connectivity, content management, training, and public policy (Rickard, 2001).

According to the United Nation's Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), while Africa's information and communication infrastructure has improved over the last decade, the majority of Africans are yet to be networked into the information age compared with much of the rest of the developing world (African Development Forum, 1999). A 1999 World Bank Development Statistical Report states that over 70% of the African population live in the rural areas and access to computers and telephones is very scarce. As a result, most of these technologies are concentrated in the urban areas and those who do not live in the capital cities are not part of the privileged few.

Statistical report from African Development Forum (1999) states that there are only about 100,000 dialup internet accounts for 750 million people (excluding South Africa) and these internet service providers are usually concentrated in the capital cities. Furthermore, irregular or non-existent electricity supplies, a common feature in the African landscape, is a major barrier to increased use of ICTs. Most African countries

have extremely limited power distribution networks that do not penetrate significantly into rural areas and power outages for many hours, days, weeks and months are a regular occurrence even in some of the capital cities.

Nevertheless, some significant changes are taking place on the continent gradually. Current statistics report that the use of the Internet has grown relatively rapidly in most urban areas in Africa, in much the same pattern as the adoption of the mobile phone (Jensen, 2002). As an indication, five years ago, only a handful of countries had local Internet access, now it is available in every capital city.

Although these are encouraging trends, the difference between the development levels of Africa and the rest of the world is still much wider in this area. Of the approximately 816 million people in Africa in 2001, it is estimated that only: 1 in 4 have a radio (205 million), 1 in 13 have a TV (62 million), 1 in 35 have a mobile phone (24 million), 1 in 40 have a fixed line (20 million), 1 in 130 have a PC (5.9 million), and 1 in 160 use the Internet (5 million) (Jensen, 2002).

As of mid 2002, the number of dialup Internet subscribers was close to 1.7 million, 20% up from last year, mainly bolstered by growth in a few of the larger countries such as Egypt, South Africa, Morocco and Nigeria. Of the total subscribers, North Africa and South Africa are responsible for about 1.2 million, leaving about 500,000 for the remaining African countries (Jensen, 2002). This is a remarkable improvement from the 1999 ADF statistics that records the number of subscribers at about 100,000 dialup internet accounts for 750 million people excluding South Africa.

Current estimates of the total number of African Internet users is around 5-8 million, with about 1.5-2.5 million outside of North and South Africa. This is about 1 user

for every 250-400 people, compared to a world average of about one user for every 15 people, and a North American and European average of about one in every 2 people. The World Development Report figures for other developing regions in 2000 were: 1 in 30 for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1 in 250 for South Asia, 1 in 43 for East Asia, 1 in 166 for the Arab States.

Access to information and use of communication tools in Africa have until the last few years been largely in the hands of state monopolies, but now the trend towards open democracy and more liberal market oriented policies has become established on the continent (ADF, 1999). There have been notable improvements in some countries in the availability and diversity of information and communication channels, the degree of use of new technologies as well as the capacity of the underlying infrastructures (ADF, 1999).

With assistance from international development agencies and non-governmental organizations, African governments are using various strategies and policies to improve infrastructures needed to support effective use of new information and communication technologies in order to improve national economic and human development priorities especially in economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Proponents of ICTs in developing countries believe that universally available communications, innovative content and internet connectivity are crucial to Africa's development. The new technologies have the capacity to improve democratic institutions, and information revolution is to be Africa's "last chance to catch up" and join the global information society (Uche, 2000). ICT proponents have consistently argued that information technology is the key feature that can make up for having lagged behind in the

20th century and its assets can be used to speed up Africa's march towards a better future (ADF, 1999).

As far back as 1980, UNESCO at its 19th General Conference in Nairobi Kenya, mandated its Director General (D-G), Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow "to undertake a review of all the problems of communication in contemporary society seen against the background of technological progress and recent developments in international relations with due regard to their complexity and magnitude" (M'Bow, 1980). The UNESCO D-G then set up the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. The Commission, under the presidency of Sean MacBride was referred to as the MacBride Commission.

The MacBride Commission published a detailed report, under the title; *Many Voices, One World* that crystallized around several key areas such as news flow, television flow, advertising and communication technology. According to the report, information and communications are a precondition of the new economic order. This means that Africa has to be able to access information and improve its communication infrastructures so as to be a part of the new global economic system. Since the MacBride report, an increased flow of information, data and related services is being experienced among the industrialized countries as well as between the industrialized and the developing nations (Mowlana, 1997).

In the past few years, there has been tremendous growth in the use of information technology in Africa and Africa is recognizing the potential benefits that ICT presents on the continent. There have been pioneering efforts in Botswana, Madagascar, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe to apply information technology to the media.

Countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Congo have joined the online media bandwagon. This offers several advantages over the traditional media system, including virtual access to media around the world, introduction of new interactive pedagogical techniques and the creation of virtual institutions and linkages where people and organizations in physically unconnected places could share resources (Marcelle, 1998).

While the Internet holds promises, a number of obstacles will have to be addressed before it can be fully utilized in Africa. There are a number of technological constraints that hinder online media. Telephone and other communication infrastructures outside of major cities remain inadequate. Connectivity beyond major capital cities poses a potential problem in creating a virtual media community strategy. Even though Africa has about 12% of the world's population, it includes only 2% of the global telephone network with over half of the lines in cities (Marcelle, 1998).

Another challenge is the lack of a trained cadre of professionals to support the implementation of virtual communities. Currently the availability of specialist training in telecommunications is extremely limited on the continent. To date, few Africans in Africa are familiar with interactivity in a virtual environment. Although, a number of telecommunication operators maintain their own training schools, these usually suffer from the same lack of financial resources being experienced by the operators themselves. This situation poses a major challenge in introducing the virtual application on the continent. In Africa there are two major regional centers for training in telecommunications -ESMT in Senegal for francophone countries and AFRALTI in Kenya for Anglophone countries.



An even greater problem is that of brain drain and generally low levels of education and literacy amongst the population. These have created a great scarcity of skills and expertise at all levels, from policy making down to the end-user. Rural areas in particular suffer with even more limited human resources along with the very low pay scales in the African civil service. This is a chronic problem for governments and NGOs who are continually losing their brightest and most experienced to the private sector, Europe and North America.

The absence of clearly defined national Internet policies in most African countries poses another challenge. Policies are needed to provide a framework for the development of online media. Few African countries such as South Africa have a clearly defined national information or communication policy to guide the development of online media in their respective countries.

Another challenge to overcome is cultural bias. Some research into online media interactivity have focused on the process as a western construct and is viewed by some as a way to export western views to other nations more efficiently and more quickly than by other media currently available (Barker and Dickson, 1996). Online media, by their very nature involve more than just the transmission of information, but also the transmission of cultural and social attitudes between and among participants. African media can equally utilize this medium adequately to counter the effect of cultural imperialism by introducing various online media application to transmit their indigenous cultural values and social attitudes into the global arena. By doing so, online resources in Africa would not be seen as an attempt by foreign institutions to extend their influence to the continent through cultural imperialism, but as an attempt to promote African cultural values and news from

an African perspective on the global arena. Aside from these, other obstacles hinder a higher level of technology penetration into the continent:

Irregular or non-existent electricity supplies are a common feature and a major barrier to use of the ICTs, especially outside the major towns. Many countries have extremely limited power distribution networks, which do not penetrate significantly into rural areas, and power sharing (regular power outages for many hours and days) is a common occurrence, even in some capital cities such as Lagos and Accra.

Also, most African governments still treat computers and cell phones as luxury items by placing high tariffs and taxes on their importation, which makes these exclusively imported commodities all the more expensive, and even less obtainable by the majority. Although there have been notable efforts in some countries to reduce duties on computers, however communications equipment and peripherals are still often charged at higher rates.

### **Status Of Africa Online Media**

On the web, there is no dearth of news about Africa. In addition to updates by mainstream media sources such as Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), there is increasingly well presented content from alternative sources such as Inter Press Service (IPS), Reuters and Pan-African News Agency (PANA) among others (ADF, 1999). Local newspapers from about 33 African countries are now online and they provide direct access to local news about their countries as reported by the local media.

At the click of a mouse, Africans all over the world can now read *the Guardian* or *Vanguard* of Nigeria, *Jornal de Angola*, *Echos du jour* of Benin or *Botswana Guardian* and even join chat rooms, a discussion place for people to rub minds and air their views on current politics, economy, sports and the arts of their countries (ADF, 1999). However, only a handful of these online newspapers have chat rooms for this interactive purpose.

The African media presence on the Web is now regarded as part of the changes in journalism which reflect nothing less than the way the world has changed and continues to change, a kind of dynamism that reflects the fact that the profession has come of age. It is now easier to get answers to nagging problems or news documents that would hitherto have taken days or even weeks of search by browsing archived news stories. However, there is a constraint to accessing these sites within Africa because of low bandwidth connections and the expensive cost of browsing the net.

Indications are that online interactivity in Africa will continue to grow (Hanna, 1998; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998; Rahm and Reed, 1998). Media Institutions in Africa are facing a critical challenge to meet new demands for the 21st century. An important challenge is providing Africans in the Diaspora access to information via the Internet. Several media institutions are solving this challenge fully by making it possible for Africans and others anywhere in the world who have Internet and web connections to engage in online discussion about critical issues concerning Africa's development.

In Nigeria, professions like Journalism, Advertising, Marketing and even Sales, all involved in the persuasive communication business, are taking advantage of the World Wide Web to build sites or provide electronic mail systems, which make their jobs easier.

Journalists in Nigeria are making use of the Internet to enhance the news business just like their counterparts in developed countries.

Online media have generally made the work of media practitioners easier. They can reach more people more quickly and can also interact with their colleagues much more easily through a variety of mailing lists and chat groups. The need for journalists to have faster means of doing their work is greater because editors and newsreaders want regularly updated news-stories with summaries and copies of entire newspapers going online each day.

### **Impact Of The Internet On Newspaper Media**

The impact of the Internet on the newspaper media presents interesting opportunities as well as challenges to the industry. One radical change is that traditional forms of production have been altered by low costs in the use of information and communication technologies thus enabling almost anyone with access to a computer to become a purveyor of information (ADF, 1999).

The greatest benefit the Web provides over traditional print media is immediacy. There are no newspapers or magazines that can produce content 24 hours a day (Hilf, 2000). Print is constrained by production and time. Frequency of distribution is limited to how much one can spend on production and publication. Again, the constraint is on distribution of the information. Along with immediacy, the Web provides the ability to deliver a tremendously larger amount of content than traditional print.

In many ways, the Web is to print what cable television was, and is, to broadcast television. The message remains constant and the core element is the same but the medium

has been modified. Out of the 97% of television households in the United States that have cable available to them, there still remains only a 58.5% utilization for cable in American households (Hilf, 2000). Since the cable television did not run out the broadcast industry, therefore, it could be same for the print industry. The Web will not destroy print; it is exactly the opposite. Like the relationship between the broadcast and cable industries, print and the Web will support one another in many ways (Hilf, 2000).

The proliferation of African newspapers on the internet is creating a more participatory and interactive form of communication where Africans in the Diaspora can follow national events in their homelands through internet versions of local newspapers, send in contributions to news editors and also chat online with other internet users. Online newspapers were the first significant contributors to African content on the worldwide web (ADF, 1999) Also, through web casting, Africans around the world are now able to tune in via the internet to their hometown radio stations and read daily newspapers.

The convergence of the Internet with the traditional forms of media now presents participatory opportunities for Africans to voice their opinions on critical issues. The communication is no longer seen simply as a top-down flow of information, exemplified by the delivery of messages through the national press to mobilize the populace behind government development. This trend is serving to democratize access to information and communication resources. In view of the preceeding discussions on ICT development in Africa, the next section will focus on Nigeria and how it is developing its information communication technology infrastructures.

## **Overview Of Nigeria**

Located in West Africa and bordered by the neighboring countries of The Republic of Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with a population of about 108, 945 million (UNDP, 1999). Nigeria's literacy rate is 61.1percent, and GNP per capita income is US \$300 (UNDP, 1998). The United Nations Development Program computes a national human development index as a function of economic productivity, health care, and education in a nation, and Nigeria ranked 151 out of 174 countries in 1999 (UNDP, 1999).

Literacy varies from nearly 90 percent among the Yoruba ethnic group to less than 15 percent among the Hausas and Igbos. Christians have a life expectancy of 61 years versus 49 years for Muslims, and Christian adult literacy is 58 percent as opposed to 22 percent among Muslims. Only 15 percent of homes have electricity in spite of Nigeria being an exporter of electric power to African neighboring countries (UNDP, 1999).

Nigeria is the continent's leading oil producer and its economy is highly dependent on capital-intensive oil industry, which contributes around 95% of export earnings and about 75% of government revenue. The mining sector, which extracts minerals such as coal, natural gas and tin, accounts for nearly half of GDP (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2001). The bulk of the population is engaged in agriculture, which contributes about 30% of GDP. However, the largely subsistence agricultural sector has failed to keep up with rapid population growth, and Nigeria, once a large net exporter of food, now imports food. Nigeria launched an ambitious development program to create a large industrial sector and lessen its dependence on oil and agriculture. Nevertheless,



massive external debts combined with political instability, corruption, and poor macroeconomic management hampered implementation (UNDP, 2001).

After many years of relative inactivity, the recent opening up of the Nigerian Internet market has begun to have an impact on the African internet picture. With a fifth of Sub-Sahara's population, Nigeria was still a relatively small player in the Internet sector until mid 1998 when it only had a few dialup email providers and a couple of full ISPs operating on very low bandwidth links. The national regulator has since licensed over 50 ISPs to sell services, of which about 20-30 are currently active, with about 8 major players (Linkserve, 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Hyperia, Cyberspace, Infoweb, Sioel, Nova and Nitel). In the major cities there are now many thousands of cybercafe/business centers run by small entrepreneurs.

Nigeria's telephone network has a capacity of over 700,000 lines and is concentrated in and around the cities of Lagos and Abuja. In 1998, the total number of connected lines was 412,800, giving a telephone density of 0.34 line per hundred population and about two-thirds of the telephones are in Lagos (UNDP, 1998). The Government of Nigeria adopted a National Policy on Telecommunications as a gradual and guided approach to deregulate the telecommunications sector, and to modernize and expand the telecommunications networks in the country.

Although there are privatization plans that are currently being executed, the state-owned phone company, Nigerian Telecommunication Limited (NITEL), is the primary source of the telecommunication exchange. However, as in many developing nations, there is ambivalence about privatization and open competition, and the government and the telephone company are concerned about the possible loss of revenue.

Nevertheless, the extremely sparse and unreliable fixed line network in Nigeria, which also suffers from severe power outages and inter-exchange congestion, is still a major impediment to widespread Internet uptake. Also, due to the relatively small number of people who can afford a phone line, let alone a computer, public access services are very much in demand in the urban areas. As in most other African countries, where telecom operators have relied on the private sector to provide public phone services in most major urban areas, there are rapidly growing kiosks, cyber cafés and other forms of public Internet access.

Creating a healthy Internet presence in Nigeria has been an uphill struggle. Currently there are about 46 operating ISPs (Jensen, 1998). About 40 percent of those are commercial, but there are fewer than 100 leased lines and fixed wireless connections, and many accounts are e-mail only with activity concentrated in major cities.

A number of Nigerian interactive online communities like *Naijanet* and *The Guardian* chat room have become solace for Nigerians in foreign countries. The production and active consumption of the few Nigerian online media among Nigerians in foreign countries mark the Nigerian population out as one which is interested in explaining itself and its many subcultures both to itself and to a more global audience across the net.

In the past decade, transnational Nigerians have become very actively engaged in the Internet communications medium. Nigerians throughout the world who have access to personal computers with modems connected to local area networks are entering into cyberspace in increasing numbers and are constructing what Bastian (1999) calls a “virtual Nigeria” through online interactivity, the use of email, and the growth of web sites with Nigerian content. It is “virtual” in the sense that it is a community in which people do not

meet face-to-face, but through words on computer screens people relate, sometimes with great intensity, generating both solidarity and deeply felt emotions of friendship and dislike (Bastian 1999).

According to Bastian (1999), interactive discourse on the internet tends to take on nationalist overtones, even though these nationalists are living and working outside the boundaries of their nation-state and even though the discourse itself can have little effect on the everyday political and social life. Below is an excerpt culled from Bastian (1999) and written by an active chat room user on *Naijanet*, Sola A. This post is representative of both the prevailing nationalist sentiment on *Naijanet* and the emotions generated by this virtual community and Sola A evidently spoke for a number of Nigerian net users in his post: "Re: Monkeys work, baboons chop!"

I make a lot of postings on Naijanet. It is not that I want to bore you. This network has given me what I have yearned for all these years an avenue for communing with my compatriots. Perhaps, I will eventually run out of gas. Often times, I am shedding tears as I write. I sometimes feel like I don't have a long time to live. With me there is a spirit of urgency. No, don't get me wrong. I do NOT have aids, nor do I have cancer. It is just a premonition. But I am not afraid of death. My shoulders are too small to bear the burdens of my beloved country and race. That is why I am so glad for the opportunity to think with you. I want my life to make a difference. Together, we all can make a difference. We must give back generously to Africa and Nigeria. We must also expose and confront our maladies. Only by doing so shall we salvage the system. On my deathbed, I want to smile knowing that I was part of a brigade of patriots who helped in handing to the next generation a nobler national heritage. Oh God of all creation please let it be. My cheek is wet with tears now. I must sign off. I love you all. I don't care where in Nigeria you come from. Call me if you need help. I will be there as God grants me grace.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The new information and communication technologies have brought forth a set of opportunities and challenges for traditional media professions, such as journalism. This challenging new context is evident from the abundance of books and articles that suggest radical changes to human perception, cognition, and expression precipitated by new technologies. For example, a robust literature exploring online news journalism suggests that computer technologies spell the end of what has traditionally counted as "good writing" and, in fact, portend the death of print (Huesca and Dervin, 1999). While these claims are provocative and somewhat convincing, they lack an empirical dimension that investigates what Deuze (2001) describes as "what these new systems 'do to' reader practices and what the reader can do with the systems".

According to McAdams (1996) an online service can never perfectly replicate the newspaper. Some news stories will always be better and more credible in the print format because the print format , but the electronic medium allows many options that are not possible on paper. According to McAdams (1996), an online newspaper service operates by involving users of an online newspaper as contributors in the news making business by sending articles for "Opinions" and "Letters to the Editor" and also, users in turn expect responses from the editors and producers of news. Also, the print newspaper gives opportunity for readers to send in their feedback in the "Opinion page" and as "Letters to the Editors".

In many ways, an online newspaper is different from the print version. A traditional newspaper carries information in a linear direction. It lacks audience interactivity and it is not conducive to a two-way interactive exchange. This puts it at conflict with people who enjoy being online, where they can communicate with others and to some extent pilot their own course through information (Huesca and Dervin, 1999).

The purpose of this section is to explore online journalism and the challenges facing its practices by examining the interactions of newsreaders and the news contents. Aside from the structural and visual properties that suggest radical changes in the news form, online news sites also present transformations in the way authors and readers are conceptualized. New communication technologies are considered inherently participatory, which casts readers as active producers of stories. Readers take on the role of authors, which alters the traditional tasks of reporting and writing.

Fredin (1997) observes that readers have always been active and self-reflective and that online journalism provides them with choices that appeal to their interests. This requires not only a specific sense of reader interests, but also a more general, theoretical understanding of user expectations and information-seeking strategies (Huesca and Dervin, 1999). When readers are viewed more as collaborators than as consumers, the tasks of reporting and writing shift from content delivery to information development and design.

News reporting and editing undertaken from this perspective is focused on creating narrative structures that facilitate user navigation through a variety of information resources. Such resources might include a host of raw data such as reporter's notes, interview transcripts, government documents, and other materials that would allow

readers to construct their own versions of reality, rather than simply reading a reporter's representation of reality. The resulting interface calls attention to the process of narrative construction, and enhance the involvement of readers by actually placing them in the role of the creator (Murray, 1997).

### **A Historical Overview Of New Media Journalism**

The automobile replaced the horse, but the commercial airline did not replace the automobile. The newspaper changed, but never replaced personal correspondence. Television and radio news challenged, but did not generally replace, the newspaper.

-Newspaper Association of America, (1996:4)

Some of the simplest technologies survive very well in the modern age. Henry Petroski (1993 : 34), for instance, has written engagingly of how the pencil has "survived the exhaustion of its earliest and best sources of graphite and red cedar; it has survived the introduction of the mechanical pencil, the fountain pen, the ball-point; it has survived the development of the typewriter and the personal computer (which killed the typewriter)".

No one who has communicated with friends or associates around the globe by e-mail can doubt that we are living in a time of revolutionary change in communication. This can be done with little effort and no technical expertise, which illustrates how significant email is as a means of communication. No one who compares newsgathering in the Vietnam War, with film laboriously shipped back from the battlefields to New York for broadcast, to coverage of the Gulf War, with live coverage of bombing raids transmitted by satellite, can doubt that technological change affects news practices (Garrison, 2001).



The Internet has revolutionized the communications world and has been redefining the practice of journalism since the 1990s. Whereas television allowed a first glimpse into the new global communication era with worldwide satellite distribution and innovative global programming, the Internet seems to have finally lifted the curtain for the full vision of the truly global community. State borders decrease in terms of political communication, news junkies from North America up to Africa eyewitness the same breaking news events, not only through the television and newspaper but also instantaneously via the worldwide web.

The invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and computer set the stage for this unprecedented integration of capabilities (Leiner et al, 2000). The Internet is now a worldwide broadcasting facility, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location.

In their study, Leiner et al. (2000) wrote that the technology could be categorized into the following four major groups. The first group is the operation of infrastructure and a second group follows this, which is the management of a global and complex operational infrastructure. The third group is the social aspect, which resulted in a broad community of Internet users working together to create and evolve the technology. Media journalism is brought under the social category and is vitally relevant to this study as I intend to examine the interactive devices of the newspaper sites. The fourth category is the commercialization aspect, which results in an extremely effective transition of research results into a broadly deployed and available information infrastructure. For the purpose of

this research, a brief historical account of the history of the technology will be examined in relationship with new media journalism.

The history of new media journalism and the Internet begins in the 1960s and continues through the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s to the new millennium. According to Shedden (1998) the history of new media journalism is a complex one. The first recorded description of the social interactions that could be enabled through networking was a series of memos written by J.C.R. Licklider of MIT in August 1962 discussing his "Galactic Network" concept (Shedden, 1998). He envisioned a globally interconnected set of computers through which everyone could quickly access data and programs from any site. The concept was very much like the Internet of today as a widespread information infrastructure.

Shedden (1998) writes that in 1969, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) tested a new interactive media format called videotext. This new computerized interactive system transmitted texts and graphics, which required the use of a telephone, a modified television set and keyboards. The term videotex included computer communications services such as teletext and viewdata. At this time, the *New York Times* information bank was created. Infobank was an electronic collection of *New York Times* story abstracts.

On November 8 1970, a news copy is sent from a computer terminal at the Associated Press in Columbia to a computer in Atlanta (Shedden, 1998). This was reportedly the first use of a computer terminal for writing, editing and transmitting a story to a news wire service. In 1971, newspapers started changing from mechanical to computer production systems. Newspaper printing plants moved from hot metal to cold type and from letterpress to offset.

The introduction of computers in the production process is a crucial step in the evolution of new media and online journalism. In 1972, two reporters from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* created a computer database for a news story they were researching (Shedden, 1998). Donald Barlett and James Steele's computer-assisted database used IBM punch cards and a mainframe computer. Meanwhile, Ray Tomlinson from the Bolt, Beranek and Newman Company invented an electronic mail (e-mail) program (Shedden, 1998). The electronic mail program allowed messages to be sent and received by networked computers and in 1973, Bob Metcalfe and David Boggs created a local network technology called Ethernet. In 1974, a large number of newspaper newsrooms replaced their typewriters with computer front-end systems. In Canada, Toronto's *Globe and Mail* offered Info-Globe, the first commercially available full-text newspaper database in 1977 (Shedden, 1998).

In December 1, 1977, Warner Communications launched Qube interactive television in Columbus, Ohio. Qube was followed in the early 1980s by two high-profile videotext projects, Viewtron from Knight-Ridder and Gateway from Times-Mirror Co. Although all three were generally referred to as "failures," each led to high-profile services that are now extant in traditional and new media. And they were the precursors of the on-line services such as Prodigy, CompuServe and America Online (AOL), which in turn preceded the Internet boom. Warner later became part of Time Warner, which in 1995 launched the Full Service Network. Viewtron and Gateway were launched in the 1980s by their giant media parents to offer videotex, mainly re-purposed newspaper content, but also on-line banking, messaging and over phone lines to TV screens and later PCs. Both

projects folded in March 1986, victims of limited consumer acceptance and "ahead of their time" syndrome (Shedden, 1998).

The next generation of new media was on-line services. IBM, Sears Roebuck and CBS started a partnership in 1984 that was launched as the Prodigy. CompuServe and America Online, the other two of the "big three" consumer on-line services, also grew rapidly in the mid-1990s. In the early 90s, most journalists left videotex and moved to dialup services of Prodigy, CompuServe and AOL. According to the Newspaper Association of America (NAA) (2001), there were approximately 60 North American newspapers with sites on the Internet or with dialup services in 1994.

In 1995, the potential of online news was observed when the world turned to the Internet for current information on the Oklahoma City bombing of April 19, 1995. Internet news sources included statements from the White House, photographs of victims and updated reports about the disaster. Online newspaper archives continued to grow and a number of newspapers started saving their stories and abstracts in electronic database form. By this time, there were approximately 500 newspaper sites on the Internet in North America according to NAA sources (2001).

In 1997, there were, approximately, 2,600 newspapers with sites on the Internet (E&P Interactive, 2001) while in 1998, approximately 3,250-newspapers had a web presence. Current database statistics from E&P Interactive (2001) show that as of July 2001, there were 4,923 newspaper sites on the internet: Africa had 63 newspaper sites, Asia 218, Canada 260, Caribbean 37, Europe 685, Mid-east 55, Oceania 55, South America 300, and U.S. 3,245.

### **Internet And The Newspaper Media.**

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell introduced the telephone to the world at the Philadelphia Centennial. An 1892 news publication, "Scientific America" was wholly enthusiastic with Graham's achievement. It reported the potential this new communication medium presented thus: "It is a remarkable achievement, indicative of the marvelous possibilities in the future, in an art still in its infancy" (McQuail and Windahl, 1993:46). These words adequately describe the new communication art of the Internet of today.

The Internet is a new world with marvelous possibilities and as a new world it needs nurturing to reach maturity just as infants do by constantly improving and upgrading the internet's technological capabilities. The Internet also offers a global perspective. By providing connectivity to anyone with a computer and a telephone line, the Internet is the networking breakthrough of our lifetime (McQuail and Windahl, 1993). It includes everything from universal e-mail to transactions between individuals and between companies. It includes commerce as well as information exchanges and new directories (such as search engines) that provide phone book-style accessibility for digital communications. Some of the most important results of this networking revolution are new sources for news, research and interactive forums; new connections between customers and collaborators; new forms of marketing and outreach, and opportunities for new kinds of distribution of products and information.

From its early origins, the Internet has become a vast and growing global network that people use to converse, debate, meet, teach, learn, buy and sell, and share virtually every type of information imaginable. Practically every major American newspaper has some form of online product. Some electronic news sources on the Internet are free and

other news sites are only partially available, requiring a fee for full access. Very few newspapers are currently making a profit from their Internet-based systems (Associated Press, 1999). The question however is, why do they continue to put out the web versions then? One logical explanation according to David (2001) could be just that they want to have a web presence as a mark of being up to date with the digital technology revolution and not for the sole purpose of making profit. One of the exceptions is the *Nando Times* of North Carolina, which has more than 2,500 paid subscribers who access the newspaper either on the World Wide Web or via Nando Net's bulletin board service (INES Media Concept, 2000). The *Nando Times* has archives of news stories, and uses photographs and advanced multimedia effects implemented with Java extensively. The *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* also have an online fee-based version of their newspapers.

The original definition of the Internet is the "network of networks" and although the internet continues to change daily, that definition seems to be becoming more and more relevant (Partridge, 2000). As the broadest information super-highway, the web is made up of many new media forms and these new media forms include a variety of new kinds of networks with the convergence of audio, video and print into a dynamic communication art form. These digital devices provide the capacity and opportunity for increased feedback between journalists and readers.

One of the major benefits of online news is that users of the Internet can gain different perspectives on news. Users are no longer dependent on their traditional sources to receive their news, but can now reach news services around the world and send feedback to news editors and reporters via the Internet. The global accessibility and rapid

availability of news result in differing opinions about events. Local biases in reporting may now be quickly offset with information from different sources.

One example of fair reporting, according to Partridge (2000) concerns the diverse accounts of the number of people attending the Montreal rally held before the Quebec referendum of 1995 in Canada. Internet newsreaders were not only able to get diverse views of this story from across Canada but were also able to have continual updates of the referendum results, see reaction to the referendum from around the world, and gauge the reaction of financial markets. But in other instances, local governments can suppress expression by groups and individuals. An example is the British government's invocation of a broadcast ban on direct statements by representatives of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, under the Broadcast Act of 1981 and 1990. However with easier accessibility to the internet, Sinn Fein has its own home page and newspaper, *Phoblacht Republican News*, on the web (Partridge, 2000). Hence it can make political statements openly in the interest of Sinn Fein and against the British government without any restriction. Hall (1999) reinforces this view when he states that the Internet contains untold riches of information and access to people worldwide. In some respects, the Internet is a virtual street of infinite length, where anyone with a modem and an account with a service provider is free to project a sense of him/herself to the world. The internet, therefore, provides users with the freedom to choose the news stories they want to see presented in formats of their choice and to see the news when they want.

The point here is that the Internet has opened up new ways for groups and individuals to express themselves and provided consumers with new sources of information on which to base their opinions. For instance, the trial of O. J. Simpson was

extensively reported, updated on the internet and watched on television and it provided news consumers and people from around the world who followed the event, with various accounts of the trial from various sources on which to base their opinion. Television on the other hand has a linear format for presenting information. Even though television viewers have the option of changing channels, most channels report the same information in similar formats without savoring the opinion of the viewer.

Nevertheless, the news industry is currently undergoing major transformations as a result of the growing popularity of the Internet and innovations in Internet multimedia technologies (New York Times, 1996). Some newspapers on the Web attempt to deviate from the look and feel of the print version with regular updates and varieties of digital networks such as hyperlinks and chat rooms. Chat rooms are for readers to be able to send back and forth feedback on news incidences as well as have opportunities to chat online with news editors, reporters and other chat room users. News wire releases from Associated Press and Reuters offer headlines and full-text stories. The headlines sometimes appear with a one or two-line description of the news item. Typically, the description is the first line in the article. These news sources are updated continually throughout the day. However, some newspapers on the web attempt to implement the look and feel of the print versions. For example, *Times Fax* is an eight-page excerpt of the *New York Times* formatted using the Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF). This approach preserves the look and feel of a newspaper but lacks the interactive features available on the Web.

On many news sites, articles are posted that are exactly the same as those printed in print newspapers (Johnson, 1997). At better news sites, journalists augment stories with



hyperlinks, search engines and multimedia features, but the emphasis remains upon a one-way flow of information. Only a handful of sites include original news content designed specifically for the Web as a new medium of communication (Pavlik, 1997). As a result, except for major breaking news events, subscribers spend a remarkably small portion of their time retrieving news from online sources (Fidler, 1997).

Martin and Hansen (1998:25) further explain the situation described above by writing that "newspaper companies are businesses first, and they are culturally and corporately unable to understand the egalitarian, decentralized, peer-to-peer, autonomous nature of communication on the internet". Others mention newsrooms that breed aloofness, a reluctance to update antiquated computer systems and a lack of understanding about the nature of the internet, especially interactivity (Pavlik, 1997). Some reporters resist the idea of answering e-mail from readers, complaining they would be busy working on their next assignments and would not have time answering questions about old stories (Riley et al., 1997).

McAdams (1996), who helped create the *Washington Post's* online service, posits that a journalist with little online experience tends to think in terms of stories, news value, public service and things that are good to read. But a person with a lot of online experience thinks more about connection, organization, movement within and among sets of information and communication among different people. As gatekeepers of news and information, online journalists should take advantage of the multimedia and interactive features at their disposal adequately. They can transfer lots of information, or they can make users a smarter, more active and questioning audience for news events and issues

(Singer, 1998). Users are made smarter by involving them in the interactive experience (Schlossberg, 1998).

In 1948, William Schramm introduced a communication model that illustrated how message is created, sent and received (Schramm, 1961). This sender-receiver model of communication offered a weak feedback mechanism when it is applied to the way traditional media generate and transmit messages in a unidirectional manner. Messages in the form of news are often transmitted to the audience who receives them at home, in the office, pub or anywhere but with little opportunity to respond to such messages except when the media choose to savor the opinions of the audience through opinion poll.

In the traditional model of newspaper journalism, the process of feedback could also be a cumbersome process that demands active effort on the part of the receiver. Readers can respond to issues in protest or assent by writing editors and having their opinions published on opinion pages or they can physically visit newsrooms as individuals or group to make their opinions known to the public. The effort to give feedback is not easily accomplished and the end result is that traditional feedback is weak because of the complexities of the feedback structure (Newhagen et al, 1995).

The Internet by design is a communication tool that provides a gateway for interactants to exchange messages, back and forth and instantaneously. With the Internet, a floodgate of feedback is opened to a medium that once allowed only feedback to flow through in trickles. Senders now have the potential of becoming receivers and receivers can equally become senders in an interactive process of exchanging messages. Interactivity is a subset and highly specialized aspect of the feedback loop (Rafaeli, 1997). Online

interactivity involves active engagement of discourse or dialogue between two or more participants caught up in virtual reality or real time.

### **Online Interactivity**

This section reviews interactivity as the continuation of message creation in the context of online news delivery. It examines the development of online newspapers in the United States in order to gain an understanding of why users seek out online communities for interaction and how applicable this might be in the Nigerian context. This section equally uses communication models to explain how online newspapers are different from their printed versions.

The growth of a number of non-newspaper based informational sites (such as Yahoo, MSNBC, Hotmail) is a clear indication that internet users are moving towards a new form of communication that offers interactivity at its core (Shedden, 1998). Interactivity is the primary characteristic of the new technology. When Viewtron's researchers analyzed data about what customers wanted, they found that it was not more news; it was interaction with each other (Ashe, 1991). Features that distinguish online media sites from other media are multimedia, speed for updating information, horizontal distribution, decentralization, accessibility, no hierarchy, no censorship and interactivity (Lasica, 1996).

### **Defining Interactivity**

Mass communication was originally modeled as a one-way transmission of message(s) from source to receiver. A review of the traditional conceptualization of mass communication from Shannon and Weaver's model of communication, to the "magic bullet" theory, to the "two-step flow" model of media effects, to the principle of selective attention and perception, and finally the Westley and MacLean model, with its concepts of gatekeepers and feedback basically maintain a view of mass media as a one-way flow. Wilbur Schramm introduced the concept of an interactive continuum as it relates to the newspaper model of communication in 1954. He listed some communication encounters from the most interactive to the least interactive. These are:

- An argument between two persons.
- A group discussion with people taking turns.
- A family watching television
- Reading a newspaper.

With the interactive form of communication, an argument between two people is atop Schramm's list in a face-to-face communication encounter while reading a newspaper is the least interactive component on Schramm's list. The interactive component offers a community building potential in which people communicate up close either in an argumentative or conversational manner in face-to-face encounters. Interaction demands a two-way or multi-directional model of communication. The interactive features of online media provide an opportunity for the receiver to be recognized as an active participant. Online readers can do more than actively select information; they also can add information. The distinction between source and receiver, therefore, is dissolving (Steuer, 1992). Shapiro (1999) in his writing, therefore, argues for readers to be allowed a higher

level of real-time engagement in virtual communities as creators of content rather than just passive recipients and also as active participants in dialogue instead of just bystanders. McMillan and Downes (1998) write that interactivity increases when the goal of communication is more to exchange information than to persuade, and participants have greater control of the communication environment.

Rafaeli (1988) defines interactivity as a subset of message feedback and neither time nor the intent of the communicators classifies interactivity. He writes that the defining variable of interactivity lies within the relationship found among the messages themselves. According to him "Interactivity is an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third transmission is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions" (Rafaeli, 1988:43). He explains that interactivity depends upon how messages develop a dependency link, creating a string of interwoven exchanges that unravels into a long line of conversation.

In his view, that line of interactivity is "a solid, unbroken filament and any rent or tear reduces the system to only message delivery and perceived reception" (Rafaeli, 1988:44). For interactivity to transpire, the communicators must be able to switch roles effortlessly from sender to receiver and receiver to sender (Rafaeli, 1988). However, Rafaeli's dismissal of intent as unimportant only gives an incomplete view of the entire definition of interactivity essential for building an interactive model. Intent is essential for measuring the aim of interactants in a communicative interchange. A successful interactive exchange between journalists and readers relies on the intents of the communicants. Messages are evaluated based upon the intent of the content, the context and form of delivery.

Agenda-setting theory, according to McCombs and Shaw (1972), is tied to the intent of the journalist to create a message frame. Agenda-setting theory is valuable to society and mass media communication because it explores the intent of the media's message on the audience. In an online environment, agenda-setting expands beyond "what to think about" to "how to think about" and extends to "how to talk about". Shaw et al. (1999) expatiate this further by writing that people live in "topic communities" where they seek information and groups that conform with their interests. People go online to engage and meld with groups as part of an ongoing process of socialization.

Richardson (2000) writes that the Internet's most important benefit is probably its use as an interpersonal communication tool. Interpersonal communication is the foundation of participatory (interactive) communication. The term "participatory (interactive) communication" is used to describe the processes of two-way dialogue and expression that encourage sharing of feelings, desires, beliefs and experiences, together with problem analysis. People communicate with one another to search for solutions to problems, and also bottom-up communication raises the awareness of decision-makers to those problems (Bessette, 1996).

The basic tenet of interactive communication is that the communication process is more important than the production of media products or content (Richardson, 2000). Interactive communication within the field of communication for development tends to involve facilitated interventions and media used to catalyze two-way communication, dialogue and problem solving (Richardson, 1997).

McMillan and Downes (1998) developed an interactive application, which they called "the model of cyber-interactivity". It consisted of four components; the first

component has the sender as the only active interactant in the message delivery process. The sender has entire control of the content schedule. Corporate web sites adopt this component in their propaganda agenda as a publicity stunt for their company. Intent to exchange is not the communicative mission and time is definitely not an issue (McMillan and Downes, 1998).

In the second component, the focus is on the receiver. Here, the receiver has the option of searching and selecting precise and exact information. The authors dubbed this "rich content" and placed online newspapers in this category. Time is also not a defining element in this component since the receiver can only accept whatever result is yielded from search engines and cannot make time-specific demands for the delivery of information from the archive (McMillan and Downes, 1998).

A two-way or multi-directional model of communication is embodied in the third component. In this component, both sender and receiver are involved in the communication experience but the sender of the message exercises control over the message. McMillan and Downes (1998) named this the "virtual market" where the goal is to persuade the receiver to complete a transaction and examples are links to promote e-commerce in online newspapers.

The fourth and last component is "virtual community". The infrastructure of a virtual community is an Internet site, developed through programming applications and languages that are public, that is, ones that are available at no charge on the internet (Padula et al, 2001). This involves real-time engagement with other online users in various chat rooms and locations such as *The Guardian* chat room. The roles of the sender and receiver are interchangeable. Both have equal control over messages being sent and

received. Users tend to develop a sense of commonality and community during interaction since the aim is "to exchange information and build understanding among participants" (McMillan and Downes, 1998).

### **Interactivity: A Basis For Online Communities**

The idea of commonality is at the basis of all communities, whether they are real or virtual. Thus, the members of a community might live in the same area, work in the same profession, or practice the same religion. In all of those cases, what is shared becomes the basis for that community's existence. And from that basis, the group grows if it is interesting, fulfilling, and broad enough to sustain the continued interest of the members (Perry, 1998). Communities, by their very definition, create repeated business. So as companies look for ways to market on the Internet, developing or tapping into virtual communities seems to be the ideal solution (Perry, 1998).

Trio (1997) also trumpets the status of the Internet when he writes that cyberspace has become elevated to the degree that it is now frequently referred to as a society. Your business may exist in cyberspace. Your social life may be conducted in cyberspace. You may attend classes in cyberspace. Businesses build cyber-cafes, cyber-newsstands, and cyber front offices. Strangers meet in cyberspace. People feel comfortable enough to reveal themselves in cyberspace. You can disguise yourself in cyberspace (Trio, 1997).

According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, a society is "an enduring and cooperating social group whose members have developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another . . . a community, nation, or broad grouping of people having common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and



interests." Societies may be politically guided, spiritually guided, geographically guided, morally guided, or a combination of some or all of those (Trio, 1997).

Padula et al. (2001) posits that in a virtual community, individual identity and features are no longer important. Only the documents circulated, the actions undertaken, and their effects are of primary importance. The Internet is not bound by geography or distance, but by communications. A virtual community is deterritorialized and detached from physical and geographic space but dependent upon the possibility of connecting with the internet, which permits or denies inclusion in the virtual community. Since the invention of digital systems, solar time no longer exists; instead, there is potential for immediacy and the interval is measured in the time it takes the person addressed to answer and in the speed of the instruments involved (Padula et al, 2001). Time in virtual space is measured in acts of communication.

According to Padula et al. (2001), a virtual community requires two primary elements in order to exist. On one hand are the individuals who make up the community and measure themselves against each other within it: the community of people, composed of collectivities animated in the active and participatory, communicative, interactive mode. Interactivity is "the characteristic that makes it possible to communicate and take part in the construction of a renewed space of knowledge, to which each member is called to make a personal contribution" (Trio, 1997). The interactivity that the Internet both facilitates and demands can stimulate the creativity of the "internauts" and direct their participation toward the production of collaborative energies (Padula et al., 2001).

On the other hand, there must be a reservoir of materials from which to draw the knowledge that in the real world is contained in museums, libraries, collections, and

documents: the community of things (Padula et al, 2001). Virtual communities of things represent archives, which are continuously consulted, updated, and expanded by the members of the community, taking advantage of the possibilities the new information and digital technologies provide (Trio, 1997).

### **A Review Of Relevant Empirical Studies.**

Keith Kenney, Alexander Gorelik and Sam Mwangi carried out a research study in 2000 that supported previous research studies that online newspapers have low levels of interactivity. They used Carrie Heeter's six dimensions of interactivity to explain the new hybrid of interpersonal communication and mass communication found in new media. In their findings, they observed that little has changed over the years by stating that the communication between newspapers and readers is still mostly unidirectional. The findings asserted that online papers want to electronically push news into people's homes by promising more timely, thorough and personal news but ignored the basic properties of interactivity that distinguished new media. According to the study, "interactivity has remained a buzzword that many people use, yet few define the concept" (Kenney et al., 2000:34).

Kenney et al's (2000) study begins by recognizing interactivity as the primary characteristic of new media and argues that interactivity involves a two-way or multi-directional flow of information among members of a community or among distinct individuals rather than to a mass audience. The traditional model of communication, with its one-way transmission of messages from a source to a receiver, does not fit into

interactive systems. Kenney et al. (2000) further state that journalists of new media should set goals of building a community that satisfies its members. They should ask whether their Web sites hold people's attention rather than whether they provide clear messages that inform and persuade readers.

The study validates Heeter's theoretical definition by considering interactivity from both sides of a two-directional or multi-directional flow of information. Four of the dimensions emphasize the role of the user. Interactivity empowers the user and this empowerment is what makes interactive new media so different from traditional mass media (Kenney et al. 2000). Another dimension, "facilitation of interpersonal communication," treats both parties equally. The sixth dimension, "monitor system use," empowers the sender of messages from online newspapers.

Ha and James (1998) studied business web sites and found a higher complexity of choice; 14.5 percent of business Web sites offered choice of speed, 9 percent offered choice of language and several hyperlinks. Other measures of interactivity were lower; 81 percent had no monitoring devices and 38 percent had no means for interpersonal communication. Tankard and Ban (1998) also found that 6 percent of articles in online newspapers contained hyperlinks, 49 percent of reporters answered their e-mail messages, 64 percent had search engines. McMillan (1998) studied selected health sites and found that 7 percent of the sites had discussion groups, 34 percent had feedback forms, and 34 percent had counters.

McMillan (1998) also used Heeter's dimensions of interactivity to test the hypothesis that web sites funded by for-profit companies and advertising have lower levels of interactivity than sites that receive the majority of their funding from volunteer efforts,

non-profit organizations, government/education and mixed funding sources. The study found that, generally, levels of interactivity were relatively low. For example, only seven percent of all the sites examined included newsgroups, only 19 percent included search engines and only 34 percent provided a feedback form.

The result of McMillan's hypothesis, which predicts a relationship between funding and interactivity, was not supported because the theoretical linkage was not sound. The expectation is that for-profit papers would use more interactive devices to attract and hold users' attention because marketing specialists would operate such sites. They also had expected non-profit papers to be operated by journalists who are determined to inform or persuade an audience. The study therefore, surmised that for-profit online papers remain united with their corporate ideology and the traditional transmission model of communication. The non-profit papers are smaller and more motivated to build community through interactive devices that seem to offer more options for interpersonal communication (McMillan, 1998).

### **Carrie Heeter's Six Dimension of Interactivity**

Carrie Heeter's definition of interactivity was written to encompass all new media. Heeter (1989) identified six dimensions of interactivity: complexity of choice available, effort users must exert, responsiveness to the user, monitoring information use, ease of adding information and facilitation of interpersonal communication. Heeter's definition of interactivity is deemed to be an appropriate analytical framework for this study because it offers specific measurable dimensions to examine the concept of interactivity. These measurable dimensions will enable the study to not only examine the social framework but

also the technical framework of the selected online newspapers and hopefully, future work will expand the scope of this study.

Furthermore, a number of researchers such as Kenney et al. (2000) and McMillan and Downes (1998) have successfully used Heeter's interactive dimensions as their analytical framework to examine the level of interactivity and interpersonal communication in their study of selected web sites. Since the study of online media is still relatively new in Nigeria, I decided to observe how the features of interactivity as defined by Heeter will be displayed in the Nigerian newspaper media. The following are the six Interactive dimensions as defined by Heeter (1989):

#### **Complexity of choice available**

Creators of online newspapers realize that the more hyperlinks they add, the more choice users have to navigate through the newspaper site, and that these choices are important to interactivity. They also understand that users are empowered when they can choose to use a text or graphics browser, or to receive information in English or a different language, or if they can use a search engine to find the information they want.

#### **Effort users must exert**

Paisley (1983:79) defined interactivity mathematically as "the ratio of user activity to system activity." At one extreme, users exert no effort beyond reading the text information, which an online newspaper automatically "pushes" to them based upon information the users provided about themselves. At the other extreme, users select each "page" or screen to view, sending a message to the central computer asking to display the

requested page. These extremes lead executives of online newspapers to ask: "How much effort do users wish to exert?" Some believe that, computers that "push" the news to users will reduce user effort, and that such a reduction is desirable. Others believe that users like to "work" because they feel in control and because they can get the precise information they want.

### **Responsiveness to the user**

Online newspapers can interpose a human who responds to user queries or they can use technology to respond. Usually, of course, reporters or editors simply answer e-mail questions from users of their online site. Computer response, however, is possible, and ultimate machine interactivity is achieved when communication roles of human and machine are interchangeable (Rafaeli, 1988). Such intelligent interactivity is currently difficult or impossible for media systems to achieve, but online newspapers can achieve lesser levels of responsiveness by programming instructions, help pages and (informative) error messages.

### **Facilitation of interpersonal communication**

E-mail addresses can make communication easy between users and workers at online newspapers. Discussion forums and live chat areas attract and keep readers at a Web site. In addition, a site may offer synchronous communication with data transfers occurring at fractions of a second, or at the other extreme, a mandatory time delay may be imposed, perhaps to allow editors to screen messages. Options concerning channels of

communication, such as text, sound or full-motion video also can affect interpersonal communication.

### **Ease of adding information**

In this case, the user becomes the reporter-editor, and the message intentionally is transmitted to a larger audience. If online Web sites make it easy for users to add information, then they empower users. They stimulate creativity and discovery. Some online newspapers allow users to add the following types of information: Web pages, hobby and special interest pages, announcements of births, marriages and deaths and reviews of movies, plays and other cultural and entertainment events. Some online newspapers also allow users to make contributions to reporters' stories.

### **Monitor system use**

Unlike the other dimensions, this one derives from the perspective of the online newspaper. A monitoring device is defined as any explicit means by which a Web site operator can record who has visited the site and/or which part of the site they visited. The potential for continuous monitoring of system use has implications for billing and for programming system content to meet user interests. Of course, this information also is a valuable measure of how the site has attracted and maintained user's attention.

In view of the foregoing, this research will attempt to answer the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

- Do the online versions of *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* offer content that is unavailable in their print versions?
- How do the multimedia components facilitate the effectiveness of the online newspapers vis-à-vis their traditional versions and how well are the online newspapers creating interactivity that highlights Heeter's dimensions of interactivity?
- How are the features of an interactive participatory communication demonstrated in *The Guardian* chat room?



## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to examine the degree to which Nigerian newspapers are maximizing the potentials presented by the Internet to fulfill their responsibility to their audience. It also explores how the newspapers' web sites differ from their traditional versions. The first important step is to select for analysis, three Nigerian newspapers with web presence. These are *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday*.

#### Study Population And Rationale For Newspapers' Selection

A non-probability sampling technique was used to select 3 national daily newspapers published in Nigeria with functional web presence for this study: *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard*. They were selected because they are top-notch newspapers with consistent functional online and print editions in Nigeria. *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers were founded in the early 1980s and established their web presence in 1998, much earlier than *Thisday*. *The Guardian* is very important to this research because it is the only newspaper with a chat room forum that answers the third research question: How are the features of an interactive participatory communication demonstrated in *The Guardian* chatroom?

*Thisday*, on the other hand, made its inroad into the Internet in August of 2001. Despite its late start online, *Thisday* is observed to be more consistent at updating news stories on a daily basis than other Nigerian newspapers that came online at about the same time. The selection is also based on data available from a research study carried out by Ojo (1999), which named *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* among the top five Nigerian

daily newspapers, by circulation and size. *The Guardian* tops with an average daily circulation of 1,240,000 million, *Vanguard* with an average daily circulation size of 950,300 and *Thisday* with an average daily circulation of 900,000.

Large circulation dailies tend to have greater financial resources than smaller newspapers. This may not only enable larger newspapers to invest more in staff and in-depth coverage (Lacy & Bernstein, 1988), but also in the development of special features in their online editions. Also, small, entrepreneurial media organizations, in particular, might lack the required resources to set up Internet sites that integrate advanced tools. A study carried out to examine 83 online newspapers by Gubman & Greer (1997) suggests that online newspapers are often consistently “sophisticated” or “unsophisticated,” depending mainly on size of the organization. For example, those that exploit the Internet’s multimedia opportunities seem also more likely to exploit the Internet’s conversational potential, among other things (Gubman & Greer, 1997). Based on these facts and statistics, I believe that by quality and size, the selected newspapers would have bigger resources in terms of expertise and finances to invest in web sites that integrate advanced multimedia tools.

### **Time Frame**

The study period encompassed a review of both online and print versions of the selected Nigerian dailies, that came out between August 1st, 2001 and February 28th, 2002. This time frame was considered appropriate for data gathering and analysis because it enabled the study to assess whether online versions of the daily newspapers were

making any progress at initiating digital transformations into their web sites over a period of time.

Moreover, the year 2001 witnessed a number of awareness and public sensitization programs on the need for ICT development in Nigeria. In a news excerpt from *Thisday* newspaper dated June 20th, 2001, the Nigerian Minister of Science and Technology, Pauline Tallen, urged government ministries and the media to embrace information technology (IT) "as the present administration desired to enhance productivity and create wealth through the development of technology". In another news excerpt from *Vanguard* dated July 12th, 2001, the Nigerian Minister of Information, Professor Jerry Ghana, urged the Nigerian media to "embrace the potentials presented by the global information revolution and utilize the resources to present the Nigerian news from a Nigerian perspective with a Nigerian voice".

In view of the awareness that was created, *Thisday* newspaper was introduced online in the month of August 2001 and I considered this to be an appropriate time to observe how the Nigerian media are responding to information and communication technology. In addition, a six-month study would have been appropriate but I decided to extend my analysis of the daily newspapers to cover the month of February 2002. This is due to the bomb explosion at the Lagos Military Cantonment in Nigeria where thousands of lives were lost. The incident was very catastrophic for Nigerians worldwide and I wanted to observe how this national tragedy was reviewed in *The Guardian* chatroom. Was there a deviation from the everyday mundane issues that usually characterized the chatroom conversations to focus specifically on the tragedy that dominated all February headlines?

### **Sampling Technique**

The sample size of this study was purposively selected from newspaper editions that came out between August 1st, 2001 and February 28th, 2002. Online and print versions of *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* newspapers were each arranged chronologically to give a population size of 424 units (i.e. 212 online and 212 print), making an overall study population of 1,272 online and print newspaper units. In order to derive a smaller subset of samples that can be used to represent the larger population pool, I decided to draw a 25% sample size each from *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard*, totaling 106 newspaper units from each newspaper (53 online and 53 print). The sample size of online and print versions of all three newspapers totaled 318 units.

A 25% sample was deemed appropriate for this study because it produced a good and manageable population size that I could accurately and easily study without any bias or subjectivity on my part. It was also less expensive and time consuming to measure variables on 318 than on 1,272 newspapers. Some research texts recommended 10%, 25% or more depending on the population size of the research. For this research, a 10% sample size was deemed too small a sample size to appropriately measure a study that spanned over a seven-month period with 1,272 online and print newspapers. Overall, a 25% sample size of 318 units from the three daily newspapers is an appropriate number on the basis of which to draw generalizations for the entire study population.

The next step was to randomly select the sample size of 318 elements from the sampling frame through simple random sampling. The sampling element is the unit of analysis in a population and in this case, the newspaper documents being measured were the sampling elements. The list of 212 *Guardian*, 212 *Thisday* and 212 *Vanguard* online

elements were each numbered in a chronological order from 001 to 212 by dates of publication from August 1st, 2001 to February 28th, 2002 in a sampling frame. In another sampling frame, the list of 212 *Guardian*, 212 *Thisday* and 212 *Vanguard* print elements were also numbered in a chronological order from 001 to 212 by dates of publication from August 1st, 2001 to February 28th, 2002.

Using the random-number table, I began on the fifth row in the upper left side of the random-number table, took the last three sets of digits and marked the number that corresponded with the chosen random number on the *Guardian* print and online sampling frames. Numbers that occurred more than once or were larger than 212 were ignored. For *Thisday*, I started the selection on another row in order to eliminate any bias that could arise from picking the same digits chosen for *Guardian's* selection and in the process allow for equal probability of selection. With *Vanguard*, I also started the selection on another row to eliminate any form of bias or subjectivity that could arise from picking same digits. With the preceding sequence, a sample size of 106 elements each were selected from *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* newspapers, thus giving an overall sample size of 318 elements.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to understand how the Nigerian newspapers are maximizing the potentials presented by the internet and to explore how the online editions differ from what is offered in the print editions, the study undertook a qualitative analysis of the online and print newspaper editions. Data were collected from the print copies of the three newspapers by

subscribing to the Nigerian National Archives for current and previous issues of the newspapers needed for this study.

I also collected data from the news sites and also undertook an observational analysis of the dialogues that ensued in *the Guardian's* chatroom as they unraveled in order to explain the social life of the chatroom users. Data for the research are in the form of texts, written words, sentences, paragraphs and visual images describing or representing people in social life. Conversations were documented, visual images were noted and specific behaviors were also observed among chatroom users.

The reports and observations of this analysis were less abstract than quantitative analysis, which uses the formal and neutral symbolic language of statistics and mathematics. Unlike the quantitative analysis that measures social life in numbers according to the law of statistics, data for this research are descriptively detailed in rich words that are relatively context-based, imprecise and diffused with more than one meaning. The form of data analysis for this research involves inference. Inferences were made from the empirical details of the three newspaper sites by using judgment and reasoning to reach a conclusion based on the information drawn from the news sites.

*The Guardian* is the only Nigerian newspaper with an interactive chat room component.

Data for analyzing *The Guardian's* chatroom were collected within the seven months of research from *The Guardian* home page mainly as an observer and fewer times as a participant observer. As a participant observer, I was actively involved as a chat room user so I can understand better as well as experience how the chatroom evolved. Occasionally, I initiated a conversation, engage other users in conversations and at other times I join conversations as they unfold. Most times, I was just an observer and as an

observer, I passively observed other chat room participants so as to log the contents of emerging conversations before they disappeared out of sight. In *The Guardian* chat room the conversations disappeared as they scrolled by on the computer screen

The shorter life span of text printed on the screen did not allow me to scroll back up or down to read what occurred earlier when I was busy logging information from the chat room. Unlike other chat rooms such as Yahoo Messenger, CNN or MSNBC, I could not revisit statements nor log the exact context in which such statements appeared by scrolling back up or down through the conversations. Interactive exchanges in *The Guardian* chat room disappeared shortly after being expressed and could not be retrieved. This tended to limit my ability to properly capture the entire contents of the conversations. Also, the chat room did not offer multimedia devices that allowed users to print, save or search archives for contents of the chat forum. So, I opted for cutting and pasting as much of the conversations as I could for analysis and some information that could have been valuable to this study were lost in the process.

Finally, the data presented here represented two hours of synchronous chat room interaction every morning and evening for two hours at 10am local time in Calgary and 7 pm local time in Calgary. These time schedules were found to be appropriate because of the different time zones between Nigeria, Europe and North America. 10 am local time in Calgary is usually 6pm in Nigeria and in a number of European countries from where most chatroom participants were interacting. This is the time chatroom users from these countries usually come online. 7pm local time in Calgary was also considered appropriate because a significant number of chatroom users, mostly from the North American countries come online at about this time. There was no stated starting point for a

particular conversation that occurred in the chat room. Conversations progressed endlessly as different people entered and left throughout the day and night.

### **Limitations of this Study**

Due to limited financial resources and my geographic location, I was unable to talk with various actors such as the reporters and editors that work in the newspaper media in Nigeria. Also, with the nature of the delivery medium used for the chatroom interaction, which was the internet, I was unable to conduct interviews with the users of online news sites. Furthermore, I was unable to determine the geographic locations of various chatroom users accurately just by looking at their emails but based on Bastian's (1999) work on "Nationalism In A Virtual Space: Immigrant Nigerians On The Internet", it was safe for me to speculate that the chatroom users were from the Diaspora.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This section focuses on the findings of the content analysis of each edition of *Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* over a period of seven months. The reason for the seven-month review is to examine how these online newspapers are improving their web sites with multi-media devices. I also observed the interactive content and how conversations evolve in *the Guardian* chat room.

A sample size of 318 was selected from newspaper editions between August 1st, 2001 and February 28th, 2002. The analysis begins with each newspaper's homepage and requires activating links into the various digital components of the newspapers. However, before analyzing the data, this study takes a purely descriptive look at the entire web site of each newspaper to provide a better understanding of it.

*The Guardian* is an independent newspaper maintained by Microcom Systems Limited, Nigeria. According to its mission statement, *The Guardian* was established for the purpose of presenting balanced coverage of events, and of promoting the best interests of Nigeria. The opening screen of *The Guardian* features *The Guardian* icon on the top right side of the screen, some links to information about the newspaper and to previous issues. Another feature that is most interesting to this study is the chat room link on the top left side of the page. This welcomes users to interact responsibly on varying issues of concern to Nigerians all over the world.

*Thisday* is another independent newspaper with daily updates of news-stories, access to archives of past issues and external links to different African sites. *Thisday* opens up to a bold display of major headlines with graphic illustrations and links to detailed news stories. Below the news headlines, cartoons are displayed in vivid graphic forms to depict the Nigerian society or ridicule vices observed in the nation. The right side of the page features indexes into various categories of news stories. On the upper left side of the homepage is an indexed section that provides users with information about *Thisday*.

*Vanguard* is also an independent online newspaper featuring daily editions of top news headlines on the homepage. The right side of the homepage features news indexes and the left side features *Vanguard's* picture gallery and various external links into Nigerian and African sites. A subscription fee is required to activate links to archives of past issues

## **Discussion**

At the start of this study, three significant research questions were posed:

- Do the online versions of *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* offer content that is unavailable in their print versions?
- How do the multimedia components facilitate the effectiveness of the online newspapers vis-à-vis their traditional versions and how well are the online newspapers creating interactivity that highlights Heeter's dimensions of interactivity?

- How are the features of an interactive participatory communication demonstrated in *The Guardian* chat room?

Analysis of these research questions are presented thus:

**Research Question One: Do the online versions of *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* Offer content that is unavailable in their print versions?**

Findings indicated major differences in content between *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard*. The few similarities that existed in content occurred when there were major national events that made front-page headlines. An example was the bomb explosion of the Nigerian Military cantonment that made exclusive headlines in all February 2002 editions of *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard*. However, there were minimal differences between the online and print versions of each newspaper. This indicated that the online version uses practically all the news items in the print edition. The average length of the news item was not significantly different between the print and the online editions of the papers. However, each newspaper has a specific target audience and therefore differs significantly from one to the other in their news orientation as would be expected of any mass medium with a heterogeneous audience. *The Guardian* newspaper mostly reports news about the Nigerian political arena and therefore targets audiences that are politically inclined. *Vanguard* reports more news about business and financial world and therefore targets readers that are business oriented. *Thisday* on the other hand is a mix of both politics and business news with special focus on sports. *Thisday*, therefore attracts a lot of sports, especially soccer fans.

Unlike the print editions, the vast majority of the online versions had very few graphical images attached such as photographs of news events. Usually, the graphics have a significant relationship to the stories being carried. Using visual images such as photographs and animated cartoons help tell the news stories in concert with the news scripts. They also help to reinforce the authenticity of a particular news story and bolster the quality of news that is conveyed to the audience.

*The Guardian* had a graphics section devoted to photographs of news events but a problem observed with this section of *The Guardian* is that photographs of news events do not always accompany news stories and photographs of the news stories are not often updated on a daily basis. On several occasions, during this study, the graphic section was temporarily unavailable. *Thisday* had regularly updated photographs for news events and animated cartoons attached to its online edition to help illustrate the news stories further. The online version of the *Vanguard* was also consistent at upgrading graphics and repeatedly duplicates cartoons that depict the state of the Nigerian nation from the print edition.

Unlike *The Guardian* and *Thisday* online, *Vanguard* online carried a significant number of international stories in its World section. *The Guardian* and *Thisday*, however, had no foreign news section in their online news sites. This was not to underrate the value of reporting foreign news but to focus more on bringing the Nigerian news and politics to the global arena from a local perspective. Oftentimes, some crucially newsworthy foreign incidents have been given extensive news coverage as main news headlines. This is different from the print newspaper layout of both *The Guardian* and *Thisday*. *The Guardian* devotes three pages of its inside paged newsprint to covering foreign news.

*Thisday* also has a two-paged section assigned to news from around the world. It was also observed that the foreign news stories covered in all three print and online newspapers were more on the United States/Middle East crisis and Europe than about African countries. This is largely due to the fact that the newspapers subscribe to wire services such as Reuters, Associated Press (AP) for international news stories and little from African news wire services such as Pan African News Agency (PANA) and African Newswire Network (ANN).

**Research Question Two: How do the multimedia components facilitate the effectiveness of the online newspapers vis-à-vis their traditional versions and how well are the online newspapers creating interactivity that highlights heeter's dimensions of interactivity?**

This analysis presents the use of multimedia content in online news and its importance in enhancing the web experience. "Multimedia" is defined as any package of materials that includes some combination of texts, graphics, still images, animation, video, and audio. These materials are packaged, integrated, and linked together in some way that offers users the ability to browse, navigate and analyze these materials through various searching and indexing features.

Innovative multimedia content is observed in all three newspapers and it confirmed the initial speculation that by quality and size, they would have bigger resources in terms of expertise and finances to invest in multimedia technology. *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and

*Vanguard* newspapers deliver their news stories with the aid of the devices at the disposal of their audience in an environment that allows the audience to control the reading and viewing experience through a combination of navigational, searching, hyperlinks and feedback devices. The feedback and navigational tools, for instance, allowed readers to send electronic responses or queries to news editors as well as explore the newspapers' database for necessary information and as well link readers with related web sites for information.

*The Guardian* provides opportunities for readers and online users to interact with other users, respond to stories through letters to the editors and connect news stories to archival resources through hyperlinks and search engines. Deuze (2001) points out that texts interconnected through links (hyperlinks) can refer internally to other texts within the text's domain or externally to texts located elsewhere on the Internet. *The Guardian's* hyperlink component does not empower users to browse freely within the site's database. Users are required to subscribe and pay a required fee before they can be authorized to browse archives of past newspaper issues. However, users can freely browse links into current issues within the site's database.

*Thisday* newspaper uses both internal and external hyperlinks to search database, connect stories, archives and resources to sites where information concerning Nigeria can be found. *Vanguard*, like *The Guardian*, uses an internal search engine that restricts the ability of users to browse freely within the site's domain. Users are restricted from browsing the archival database unless they subscribe to the online version of the newspaper. The use of external hyperlinks in the newspapers was only observed in *Thisday*. This limited use of hyperlinks to external sites is not unusual. As Jankowski and

Selm (2000: 57) explain, "few sites actually embed external hyperlinks because linking and integrating external content can be 'problematic due to ownership and copyright infringements'".

Deuze (2001) divides Multimedia interactivity on web sites into three types; Navigational Interactivity through 'Next Page' and 'Back to Top' buttons; Functional Interactivity through direct mailto and bulletin board systems; and lastly, Adaptive Interactivity or Moderated Discussion offering chat rooms and personal customization.

This study observes the presence of two of these interactive options in *Thisday* and *Vanguard* at the navigational and functional levels through 'Next Page' and 'Back to Top' buttons and through direct mailto, and bulletin board systems. *The Guardian* not only featured the navigational and functional multimedia devices but also the adaptive multimedia interactivity. The adaptive multimedia interactivity also offers a chatroom, which Deuze (2001) considers the most sophisticated level of interactivity among the three interactive options. Altogether, the newspaper sites operate multimedia components that feature still images, cartoon animation, hyperlinks, navigational and functional interactivity as well as an adaptive interactivity in *The Guardian*.

In reference to the preceding observations, a question that arises is how the preceding observations shape the operation of the online newspapers vis-à-vis their traditional versions. Traditionally, professional journalism has offered the audience few direct opportunities for interactive communication. A noted means for feedback, especially in print journalism, is the "Letters to the Editor" and "Opinion" sections. Readers usually write letters as a reaction to media messages, a one-way delivery system that offers little opportunity for continuous interactive exchange.

The communication remains reactive, however, unless journalists or other readers in subsequent letters respond to the initial communication. In principle, the same applies to call-ins that are used frequently on radio and television shows. Clearly, the Internet is a new medium that could extend interactive options in journalism. However, not every communication mediated by the Internet is interactive. Receivers of messages on the Internet “may or may not move fluidly from their role as audience members to producers of messages” (Morris & Ogan, 1996) because oftentimes, producers of news are cautious of relinquishing their roles as gatekeepers of news to the audience.

The three online newspapers examined for this study are more likely to host fully interactive or at least reactive communication than their traditional versions. The newspapers' sites correspond with the traditional sender-receiver model with a feedback loop and they integrate special tools, such as e-mail links, chat rooms, online polls and discussion areas that enable readers make their own statements. The feedback tools help establish both reactive and interactive communication processes. For instance, e-mail serves as a faster means of both reactive and interactive communication between journalists and readers. Moreover, the online newspapers regularly provide general e-mail addresses and as such impersonal, traditional letters to the editor can be sent faster online.

Interactive communication is achieved by a synchronous live chat. *The Guardian* chat room on the Internet is a powerful tool for interactive communication and is open to any topic. The chat room widens opportunities for reader-to-reader communication. Sometimes, readers comment on articles and news topics that in turn lead to inspiring, instructive discussions. An example is the following illustration from *The Guardian's* chatroom:



**SAM** - Buster, ordinary Nigerians are very much concerned with politics and Government, that's the truth.

**onwu atu egwu** - Ijaw\_bo, am curios to know what is a Nigerian citizen?

**Ijaw\_bo** - SAM, we are lost. I'm confused. I'm I a Nigerian? Why must i play in my so call state of origin alone. why don i have right in all parts of my country.. why cant i relocate to another state to continue my standard living.. These are our social problems...

At other times, the chat room is characterized by trivial talk. Here is an example, also drawn from *The Guardian's* chatroom:

**Baby** - Ojukwu, where are you chatting from?

**Ojukwu** - fine BABY I'm in Queen country

**Baby** - Ojukwu, where is that?

**Ojukwu** - fine BABY --LONDON

**Baby** - okay, I'm chatting from America Ojukwu.

**Ojukwu** - BEAUTY-princess how is America --I mean your area

**Baby** - Ojukwu, America is fine. I'm not beauty, I'm baby.

Unlike the traditional versions, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* online newspapers demand multimedia adaptability in audio, video, text, graphics and animation. Online news becomes more conversational and interactive by the use of visual designs such as animated cartoons and graphics to help tell the story in concert with the news script. Combining text, still photos and animated graphics, presented in a nonlinear format ensure a two-way communication system where online users can search for information.

Both versions of *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* newspapers enable users to send their own text to comment on stories or to provide additional information in "Opinion" and "Letters to the Editor" and in turn, this allows users to actively participate in the viewing process instead of passively reading the information presented.

*The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* print newspapers are organized in a linear format while the online versions allow different ways of reading news stories in a nonlinear, associative format. Linear refers to a progression in a straight line, like reading

page by page of a print newspaper from page A to B to C. Nonlinear refers to items that can be selected out of order. Instead of proceeding from Page A to Page C via Page B, non-linear organization allows readers to proceed directly to Page C or even Z. The news stories have links to more extended versions and links to other web sites where related information can be found inserted into them. When a user clicks on a headline, it takes him or her to a web page with detailed news story.

Interestingly, the next phase of this analysis will explore interactivity in greater depth as defined by Carrie Heeter and how well the three online newspapers are creating interactivity that highlights Heeter's dimension of interactivity.

### **Complexity of Choice**

According to Heeter (1989), creators of online newspapers realize that the more hyperlinks they add, the more choices users have to navigate through the newspaper site, and that these choices are important to interactivity. They also understand that users are empowered when they can choose to use a text or graphics browser, or to receive information in English or a different language, or if they can use a search engine to find the information they want.

Findings from this study indicate that the three online newspapers present the user with the choice of hyperlinks and search engines that allow users to browse the whole web site internally for previous issues of news stories. Some search results are located in restricted areas and access to such information requires fee subscription to the newspapers. *Thisday* and *Vanguard* news sites also have external links that enable users to browse other sites outside the news sites for required information.

### **Effort users must exert**

The effort users of online news make in order to find information is examined here. How much effort do users wish to exert? According to Heeter, some believe that computers that "push" the news to users will reduce user effort, and that such a reduction is desirable. Others believe that users like to "work" because they feel in control and because they can get the precise information they want.

Findings for all newspapers indicate that users exert little effort when reading main headlines of current news items but exert more effort when searching for previous news editions. However, users are empowered to find information easily with a single click of the mouse. Information about business, entertainment, education, sports news etc, is easily found most of the time. In other words, the home page provides indexes and links to indicate easily what information is available within the site; thus reducing the effort users need to exert in order to access information.

### **Responsiveness to users**

Responsiveness is determined by how effectively online newspapers respond to user queries and inquiries or a lack of response and the nature of the response. Usually, reporters or editors respond personally to emails from users of their online sites and sometimes the news sites give computer-generated responses to messages. Findings show that the three newspapers made the following responses available to users:

All the newspaper sites analyzed for this study had sections for feedback to send questions and queries to news editors and reporters. I, therefore, sent an impersonal 'Letter to the Editor' to all three newspapers via their online email on the Nigerian

Government Probes into Federal Government Treasury Loots as a news consumer to observe how effectively the newspapers respond to users. *The Guardian* responded by sending a form letter to acknowledge the message. The *Vanguard* news editor responded to the email in the form of a personal response but there was no response from *Thisday*. Also, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* web sites had no feedback mechanisms for queries and inquiries to the Webmaster. *Thisday* site had an e-mail address for the Webmaster but the address was either invalid or the browser could not locate the e-mail address.

Interactivity is recognized here as responsiveness in an interpersonal communication. In an interpersonal communication, both sides send messages. Two-way communication is present as soon as messages flow bilaterally and meaningfully. *Vanguard* newspaper was more interactive than either *The Guardian* or *Thisday* by responding to feedback meaningfully, thereby establishing a bilateral flow of information. *The Guardian's* response was not interactive but more reactive, a reaction to my message that did not lead to further interaction. Rafaeli & Sudweeks (1997) explain that the use of machines and their applications is, in itself, not interactive. *Thisday's* lack of response is in concert with a study by Newhagen, Cordes and Levy (1995) that revealed that editors of a newscast did not even look at e-mails from their audience, although they had encouraged people explicitly to send comments. Therefore, it is obvious that the mere availability of tools that allow for interactive communication does not necessarily imply a process of fully integrated audience participation in newsgathering and processing.

### **Facilitation of interpersonal communication**

Interactive features that made interpersonal communication possible were available on the home pages of the online newspapers such as the chatroom and feedback mechanisms. *The Guardian*, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* had feedback mechanisms. They all had at least one e-mail address displayed on the home page as an easier and faster means for the audience to be able to communicate and interact with journalists of online news stories.

*The Guardian* news site had a chat room for users to interact with one another. Some users discuss various issues that are pertinent to the Nigerian nation and others discuss light, mundane issues. It is a place where Nigerians come together to empathize with one another, share feelings, problems and sometimes seek solution to such problems. The following excerpt is drawn from *The Guardian's* chatroom to illustrate various interactions among users from those concerns that are pertinent to the Nigerian nation to the light and mundane issues.

**Ijaw\_bo** - we are not sitting on a time bomb. We just think so. We created our problems and we can solve them. Give those Hausas in Lagos a sense of belonging and make one of them a commissioner. They are Nigerians and should enjoy such rights, the same thing should happen up north. Then we shall all be happy as one people.

**SAM** - In one Nigeria we believe...One nation one destiny...whether you are a Moslem, Christian, African traditionalist

**Buster** - SAM, we talk a lot. One Nigeria is what? U can see tribalism everywhere u go.

**Ijaw\_bo** - we have to address all these problems through a referendum. Then we can start from there.

**Ijaw\_bo** - Buster, tribalism every where is not based on tribal segregation. Ours is tribal segregation, which is wrong

**Ijaw\_bo** - segregation in Nigeria has caused a lot of tribal conflicts.. lets stop or we shall continue to fight over who owns where and what mineral field...

**Jameel** - hi to everyone in the room, hope the room is full of the best babes in the world-Nigerian babes!

**Jameel** - to the best girls in the world a.k.a. Nigerian babes! I love you all my sisters and am proud of you!

**Daewoo** - jameel you've gone round town and you didn't see someone to do valentine, so it's here u want to find Nigerian girls.

**Mia** - that is so sweet of u to say jameel

**Daewoo** - Just joking, Nigerian girls have it all in place.

### **Ease of adding information**

Kenney et al (2000) carried out an investigation on 100 online newspapers and discovered that 7% allow users to make contributions to reporters' stories, add web pages, hobby and special interest pages, announcements of births, marriages and deaths, reviews of movies, plays and other cultural and entertainment events. However, none of the newspapers examined for this study offered any means for users to add information to the newspapers' web sites except in their "Opinion" and "Letters to the Editor" sections. The reason might be that the managers of the news sites are concerned about losing control of their sites to the audience and thereby unable to exercise their gatekeeping function adequately. Also, the news sites are operated from Nigeria and as a developing country, ICT technology is still in its developmental stage and the newspapers are not fully equipped with all the multimedia devices that one observes with online newspapers in developed countries.

### **Monitor system use**

This indicates how online newspapers interact with their users by collecting information about users in order to monitor as well as customize their presentation of news. The significance of this measure is that it empowers the sender of messages from online

newspapers and information collected is a valuable measure of how the site has attracted and maintained users' attention. This is observed by the presence of two monitoring mechanisms: visitor registration and visitor counters that display the number of visitors to a site. Findings for the two measures indicated that *The Guardian* newspaper site requested registration and had visitor counters that display the number of visitors to the news chatroom. However, *Thisday* and *Vanguard* news sites do not collect information about their online users nor monitor their presence with visitor counters.

**Research Question Three: How are the features of an interactive participatory communication demonstrated in *The Guardian* chatroom?**

*The Guardian* chatroom offers an unmoderated interactive option that allows multiple users to engage in what has been termed “synchronous Computer Mediated Conversation,” a form of typed communication that occurs in real-time, as opposed to asynchronous e-mail. Online synchronous chatting is a never-ending thread of conversation that occurs by typing texts into message boxes and then pressing enter or send. Sent messages are then displayed on individual participant's screens, synchronously. The main strength of *The Guardian* chatroom is that every participant has the potential to be both recipient and sender of information at the same time. Also, users have the ability to say what they wish to say, and when, on any particular topic of interest.

Rheingold (1994) describes people in virtual communities as using the words they type on screens to exchange pleasantries, argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. The vast majority of *The Guardian* chatroom participants are there in search of social interaction, contact, commonality, and companionship. Everyday, participants meet online to exchange information, debate, argue, flirt, empathize, and support.

Nigerians are able to transcend geographical locations to communicate, express views on current political issues, sports, the arts and perhaps most importantly, to build a community in virtual space. People bring their real-life problems and personalities with them to their virtual lives. It becomes a new way for Nigerians to build interpersonal relationships. This section, therefore, explores the world of a web-based chat room for Nigerians and how the cultural and social norms and behaviors that Nigerians exhibit in real life are manifested even in their virtual lives.

#### **Anonymity and Identity in *The Guardian* Chatroom.**

*The Guardian* chatroom provides a new social space, which breaks down the authority-audience dichotomy that the traditional newspaper reinforces. It provides a forum for public discussion of issues from the viewpoints of participants and without many of the identity-based constraints that face-to-face social interaction imposes upon them because they have the privilege of choosing nicknames. People tend to speak more openly and bluntly when their privacy is protected than they would in face-to-face interaction.



They realize that they can speak their minds because there is very little chance of anyone ever linking them with their statements. Also some chat room users behave and speak in ways that they desire but are unable to in face-to-face interactions because it could jeopardize their professional and personal status.

The chatroom users are anonymous participants who hide behind an alias or a nickname to protect their identity. A participant may choose a nickname that conveys something about "self" to evoke reactions and attract others to strike up conversation with him/her. They pick identities that are heroic, action oriented or humorous plays on words as a way to build and maintain identities that reflect aspirations, reflect personality traits and external appearance. Examples of such names are *Abacha*, *Awo*, *Ojukwu*, *Sisi*, *Onwu*, *Atu Egwu*, *Usuben*, *Walebobo*, *Dudu*, *Ekun*, and *Lagbaja*<sup>1</sup>.

*The Guardian* chatroom achieves a high level of anonymity. Status, power, and other socio-cultural categories, which are central to the way people interact with one another in daily face to face conversation becomes insignificant in *The Guardian's* chat room. Participants' ideas and arguments are the basis by which they assess each other rather than by appearance or claims to special status and higher learning which can be fabricated by any chat room user, and so are of little or no significance.

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<sup>1</sup> These names are very significant to the Nigerian history and culture. For instance, "Abacha" was an ex-military president in Nigeria who ruled with an iron fist and as such the name "Abacha" is a way of ridiculing what any military regime in Nigeria stands for. "Awo" and "Ojukwu" were legendary figures in Nigeria that stood for the freedom of the Nigerian populace and these names are significant to the users because it reflects their personality traits. "Sisi" and "Dudu" are feminine names that portray the beauty of an African woman in the Nigerian culture and some chatroom users adopt them to reflect their external appearance as beautiful.

The social, gender or race categories used to relate with people in face to face interaction such as man/woman, black/white can not be applied as readily during *The Guardian's* chat room conversation. This is because there is no way to obtain even the most elementary information about a chat room participant other than what is explicit or can be inferred from written text or what they choose to tell in their written statements. Sometimes, what appears in conversations or written text may accurately represent a participant's identity. This is, therefore, a totally different interactive environment that is based on textual or written communication rather than on visual and paralinguistic cues that are encountered in a face-to-face interpersonal relationship.

### **Language Structure:**

Interactive written discourse commonly called chatting (Marriott, 1998) resembles written language with respect to vocabulary use but simulates spoken conversation due to its rapidity, informality, use of personal pronouns and loose grammatical structure (Herring, 1996). Another attribute of online chat is the fact that "participants interact without the benefit of para-linguistic cues as to the personality, or mood of their interlocutors" (Herring, 1996). Primarily, English is the language of interaction in the *Guardian* chat room. Sometimes, participants use their native dialects or "Pidgin English"<sup>2</sup> to make conversations as a gesture of familiarity and commonality. Adages, cliches, aphorisms and proverbial expressions in Nigerian dialects are commonly used to metaphorically illustrate and explain issues. Examples are presented thus:

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<sup>2</sup> Pidgin English is a broken and flawed form of the acceptable Standard English language. Nigerians and few other African countries commonly use it to depict a sense of familiarity

**ALIAS 430** - Ojukwu, onwu atu egwu, na una cause Ibo man trouble, why una loose the war mgbo mgbo piafukwa unu isi, ewu biafra

**onwu atu egwu** - ALIAS 430, enyi mechionu, iga na sopuru, ndi luru ogu, nacho iweputa unu na ala nigeria

**LADY --QUEEN** - lost prince nitori nkan ta ba wi fun ogba lo gba ngbo aru ma so ni shigidi nru igba ose

It is also worth noting that due to the fact that internet relayed communication is a medium that fosters a high degree of anonymity, conversation on most channels is light and playful. People can hide behind an assumed identity and feel more relaxed, jovial and playful with others. There are frequent references to nicknames, age, sex, occupation, weather, travel information, inquiries about good restaurants, jokes and general small talk.

Conversations in *The Guardian* chat room are often multi-threaded. They appear as random juxtaposition of statements that can refer to anyone in the chat room and any member of the chatroom can respond to these statements and with experience, chat room users are able to follow multiple streams of conversation. Werry (1996) notes that in chat rooms, successive, independent speech acts are simply juxtaposed, and different topics interwoven and this sequencing contrasts significantly with that of oral discourse, as well as most forms of written discourse. My data analysis supports this observation.

*The Guardian* chat room is rife with simultaneous intertwining streams of conversation. An example is the following stream of conversation:

**Ijaw\_bo** - SAM, education itself is brought by good governance. If there is a good government there surely will be standard education for all.

**LOST PRINCE** - scar there are many kinds of queens. Lady queen is a transvestite queen.

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and commonality, e.g. **baby** - onwu atu egwu, Ojukwu, i dey salute una oo

**Ojukwu** - fine BABY how now?

**onwu atu egwu** - baby, i dey return ur salute 10 fold o, how now?.

**SCAR** - mucor, you are a f\*\*king chicken

**SAM** - Buster...ordinary Nigerians are very much concerned with politics and Government... That's the truth.

The statement Ijaw-bo made is "SAM, education itself is brought by good governance. If there is a good government there surely will be standard education for all". Before Sam could respond, Lost Prince made a statement to Scar on an entirely different topic. Sam still replied with a statement that logically made sense to Ijaw\_bo's earlier statement. As can be seen in the excerpt, Lost Prince and Scar each made a statement between Ijaw\_bo and Sam's utterances. A logical explanation for this is that typing is slower than speaking and conversations keep proceeding even as a participant types his/her response and when one is ready to send the response, it is likely that the conversation has progressed beyond the point at which the participant's contribution would be appropriate. At that point a participant can either delete the response or send it nevertheless. At the same time, it is also possible to retain the relevant flow of the conversation even if the next sequence in a particular conversation is interspersed with other conversations, as Ijaw\_bo and Sam demonstrated in their conversation.

Another example of overlapping and intertwining conversations chosen from among regular examples throughout this study occurs as follows:

**Ojukwu** - Sam---politics in a society of 10percent literates is very difficult to control politically- your view is a drop of water in an ocean

**Lady --Queen** - lost prince, may thunder strike you. your dead body will be sent to Nigeria because you do not have respect for women

**Ojukwu** - fine baby how are you now?

**Onwu atu egwu** - baby, I am returning your salute 10-fold o, how are you now.

**Baby** - fine thank u

**Buster** - SAM, see what ojukwu said? Average naijas [Nigerians] will change his/her mind as soon as they see money.

**Daewoo** - Buster that's what we are saying the Nigerian people's attitude to issues like politics and other facets of life that will ultimately affect there life is wrong, wrong!

**SAM** - Ijaw...watching American television is like watching...nationalism in action every day...the mass media in Nigeria has to play a role in nation building...Bad government might be a good Government if turned.

**ALIAS 430** - Ojukwu, onwu atu egwu, you caused the Ibo man's trouble, why did you loose the war

**Baby** - onwu atu egwu, where are u chatting from?

**Onwu atu egwu** - Ijaw\_bo, am curios to know what is a Nigerian citizen

**MUCOR** - he is only winding you up. He doesn't mean any harm

**Ijaw\_bo** - SAM, we are lost. I'm confused. I'm I a Nigerian? Why must I play in my so call state of origin alone. Why don't I have right in all parts of my country? Why can't I relocate to another state to continue my standard living? These are our social problems...

**Ojukwu** - BUSTER-thank you my brother because that man don loss like his brother

The statement, " SAM, see what ojukwu said... as soon as they see wazobia (money)" is a response to Ojukwu's "SAM---politics in a society of 10percent literates is very... drop of water in an ocean". While this is going on, Ojukwu, Onwu Atu Egwu and Baby are exchanging pleasantries among themselves. Meanwhile, Mucor's pacifying of Lady Queen is a response to Lost Prince's insult of Lady Queen. Participants were able to follow and maintain meaningful streams of conversations even as the conversations intertwined and are interwoven into other participants' topics simultaneously. As earlier indicated, even though these diverse streams of interaction often intersect, overlap and appear as randomly juxtaposed sentences, chat room users are able to follow logically, coherent multiple streams of the same conversations with little or no confusion.

The streams of conversations within this chat room are not in singular linear progressions. The conversations branch out constantly as participants follow several streams of conversations and interact with many participants at once. Chat room users do not have to contend with overlapping conversations becoming too loud or people being too far away for one to hear what they are saying as is the case with face to face mode of interaction. This is not an issue in *The Guardian* chat room as users find it easier to

participate in several streams of conversation because they are situated equally well to see every sentence made by every member of the room.

### **Relationship Building among Participants**

A variety of language usage is observed in the chat room interaction. For instance, "*i dey salute una oo*" "*baby, i dey return ur salute 10 fold o, how now?*" ("*I salute you all*", "*baby, I'm returning your salute 10 fold, How are you?*") are instances of pidgin English that Nigerians sometimes adopt in making conversations with fellow citizens as a gesture of familiarity and commonality. Another example is this utterance made by Alias 430 "*Ojukwu, onwu atu egwu, na una cause Ibo man trouble, why una loose the war mgbo piafukwa unu isi, ewu biafra*". ("*Ojukwu, onwu atu egwu, your tribe caused the Ibo man's problems, why did you lose the Biafran war*") This statement is a combination of the Nigerian Ibo dialect with Pidgin English. Another example of Nigerian dialects combined with English language is "*lost prince, you better watch out. elepe ni queen, maje ki o pa e fun iya e*" ("*lost prince, you better watch out. Queen curses people, don't let her kill you for your mom*") "*lost prince I give you 7 days wa gburo mi*". ("*Lost Prince, I give you 7 days, you will hear from me*"). Other times, chat room participants interact purely in Nigerian dialects. Examples are, "*je ki inu e yo si omo re o*", ("*Let your heart mellow towards your child*"). "*lost prince ma so fun e wipe obinrin ni mi abeyinto*" ("*Lost Prince, I will tell you that I'm a woman of substance*") and "*banky aje sa ra wa. ko sin kan ti iya aje yen le she*" ("*Banky, I'm well endowed with power. There is nothing that witch woman can do*").

Interacting in native dialects is a very common occurrence among participants in the chat room because it reinforces oneness, commonality and familiarity among native speakers who are diversely separated by geographical location. By so doing, they are able to build personal relationships, which can further reinforce a sense of solidarity among chat room users of the same tribe.

The chat room conversations show facets of Nigerian life and give hints to how Nigerians of different cultures, beliefs and values relate in real life. The chat room predominantly comprises two distinct ethnic groups; the Ibos and the Yorubas. 'Ojukwu', 'Onwu atu egwu' and 'Baby' are members of the Ibo tribe while Nur, Bankky, Lost Prince and Lady Queen are members of the Yoruba tribe. They exchange pleasantries with a sense of familiarity and sometimes share very personal information with others of similar background in the chat room. An example is the following chat room conversation between Sexy, OmoNna and Raven:

**Sexy** - OmoNna, how is the wedding preparation going?

**OmoNna** - U want me to discuss my wedding plans openly or are just goading me @Sexy,  
**Sexy** - OmoNna, I am just making a chat. I don't want you to disclose your plans, you can just say it is cool.

**Raven** - weddings are work

**Sexy** - Raven, weddings are cool. Have you been to one recently?

**Raven** - no....I am planning one Sexy.

**Sexy** - Raven, you mean you are getting married?

**Raven** - yes I am

Just as it is in face-to-face interpersonal relationships, friendship bonds are formed amongst people of the same tribe in this virtual community. Mostly, participants of the same cultural background segregate themselves from others by chatting in native dialects unknown to others but understood by them. Despite the cultural differences, other users beyond the people from the same ethnic groups were able to build friendships. These

participants mostly discussed fundamental issues pertinent to the social, political and economic well being of Nigeria and what it means to be truly Nigerian. The following excerpt is an example:

**Onwu atu egwu** - Ijaw\_bo, most Ijaw people are suddenly clamoring to affiliate to biafra, now the chicken has come home to roost, you want biafra, when biafra want you, you are Nigerians

**Ijaw\_bo** - Buster, tribalism every where is not based on tribal segregation. Ours is tribal segregation, which is wrong

**SAM** - Daewoo...that man is travelling from Lagos to USA every summer...He was not doing his job...I have criticized him in this chat room before...Tinubu must account to Nigerians ...He has succeeded in dividing Lagos state...shame to him...I lived in Lagos state for almost 7 years...I never felt like an outsider.

**Ijaw\_bo** - Segregation in Nigeria has caused a lot of tribal conflicts. Lets stop or we shall continue to fight over who owns where and what mineral field...

**SAM** - But the Hausa community must never take laws into their hand by killing a man that defecates in their premises. There are the police. Even in USA homeless people urinate and defecate at all places, No person has ever taken a revolver to shoot them. Why should that happen in Nigeria?

**Ijaw\_bo** - I grew up with yoruba boys schooled in OAU but now I have to leave my childhood friends to rivers state where I don't know anybody to play politics because I don't have the right in my childhood state of Lagos... this is bad and unacceptable...

**Daewoo** - Tinubu was all over the place during military regime shouting foul for whoever cared to listen but when giving the chance to make changes, he suddenly ran out of ideas, what a shame.

**Buster** - SAM, I was in Nigeria when the trouble started, even heard all from eyewitness. What are you going to do in a situation where all is sitting on a time bomb?

**SAM** - In one Nigeria we believe...One nation one destiny...whether you are Moslem, Christian, African traditionalist...etc. Please wherever you are and you see God please call your brother.

For this category of chatroom users, the identification of being Nigerian is strengthened because when something happens in real life that creates anxiety such as intertribal clashes, injustice in Sharia (Islamic) laws or corruption amongst public officials, the chatroom becomes a common arena for public discussion of the Nigerian polity.



### **Chatroom Discourse On The February 2002 Bomb Explosion In Nigeria**

For many, the Internet is the best way to find out what happens in the country because news from Nigeria reaches the Internet fast. Reactions to the news vary from demands of action to short comments. Great tragedies like the Lagos bomb explosion and victories like the soccer world championship, raise instant flow of messages.

Nigeria experienced a tragic bomb blast incident at the Lagos Military Cantonment in February 2002 and this resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. When this tragic accident occurred, *The Guardian* chat room took on added significance and I observed how this national tragedy was reviewed in *The Guardian* chat room. My purpose is to examine if there is a deviation from the everyday mundane topics to focus specifically on the topic of the tragedy that dominated all February news headlines in Nigeria.

*The Guardian* chat room is a general chat room that does not list any specific category of topics of discussion for users. The conversations have no defined direction or purpose unless participants decide to follow a particular topic together. However, in the face of the February bomb explosion at the Lagos Military Cantonment, the chatroom conversations changed rapidly to take on a defined direction with the presence of *The Guardian* news editor. My goal is to explore the conversations that originated from this particular event and how chatroom participants responded to the tragedy. I followed the conversations of the month of February, 2002 chat room and logged the dialogue.

Following the Lagos bomb explosion, the Guardian chat room was fully occupied with people talking about the Lagos bomb blast incident and drawing similarities with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on New York City and the World Trade Center. This

is a pointer to the fact that chat rooms tend to become even more active in the face of a national or international crisis.

In the wake of the Lagos tragedy, the chatroom offered a lifeline to Nigerians all over the world to empathize with one another. Many participants around the globe who were unable to connect to Lagos via telephone lines logged on to *The Guardian* chat room site to communicate with their families and to grasp the horror of the bomb explosion that destroyed thousands of lives, left many homeless and turned the Military cantonment into a high risk disaster zone. There was an obvious shift from everyday mundane issues to focus specifically on the topic of the bomb explosion in Lagos. The chat room discussion centered primarily on the bombing incident and many participants used the forum to post messages of sympathy to loved ones in Nigeria. An Example is the following excerpt drawn from the transcript of February 2nd, 2002.

!!!ALAKA!!! - I've tried to get in touch with my people in Lagos, but it seems all the lines are dead.

OmoNna - I have sent emails to my brothers in Lagos, hopefully they should be all right, I was on Nigerianet and I posted some messages to Nigerians.

Sexy - OmoNna, i fear o, what is happening to Nigeria, maybe it's the Osama Bin Ladens

Topesoul - I heard it is war and I'm frantic with fear, I pray my family is okay.

**DUDU** - It is not possible for Nigeria to be a terrorist zone, we are not a world power like the US

I viewed the chat room in the wake of the incident and though the participants were talking about an event that unfolded a day earlier, what actually happened and what was happening was not known in full details. Official press statements had not yet been released to the public and details were not known at the time. So most chat room

participants offered varying opinions and speculated on the event until The *Guardian* News Editor came into the chat room to provide participants with specific details regarding the bomb explosion. For example, the following excerpt shows questions and answers between participants and the news editor.

**nur** - Hello, News Editor, what is happening in Nigeria. We've heard so many things and I don't know what to believe. What is the real situation?

**News Editor** - Calm down everyone. The situation is under control now. What happened was that there was an explosion at the military cantonment and the impact was too severe especially for those who live in Ikeja up to Oshodi. And I'm sorry to report that thousand of lives were lost. That's the short of what happened.

**Nick Duh** - So, what is the government doing about the situation.

**nyngod** - logged on. - from by.net using Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 5.0; Windows 98; DigExt) on 2/14 at 3:23pm GMT)

**baby** - How do we know if our family members are safe?

**jameel** - logged on. - from by.net using Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 5.0; Windows 98; DigExt; (R1 1.1)) on 2/14 at 3:24pm GMT)

**News Editor** - Tinubu was all over the place this morning for safety inspection and several anti-bomb explosion unit have been deployed to inspect the disaster zone. Also, many people living close to the scene have been evacuated.

**News editor**- It's still fairly recent and there is no definite word on the number of casualties. What we know is that many people who were not even directly hit by the explosion, jumped into Oshodi river, most of them children, and drowned. It was a very tragic event.

**baby** - so what can we do to assist the victims, at least we are privileged to be alive, i suggest we should organize relief from our various abode for those who were seriously affected

**Nick Duh** - What you said is quite true baby, we don't have to wait for the government before we help out in our little ways. It doesn't matter how small the pound or dollar donation is, what matters is that we offer our assistance as patriotic Nigerians.

**News editor** - Whoever wants to assist the victims should please send their donations to our headoffice in Lagos. Our address in on the website.

In the above chatroom conversation, the presence of the News Editor prevented participants from going off tangent. This is an example of a facilitated or asynchronous interactive exchange. The value of this exchange is that the facilitator, who is the News Editor in this context, brings a wealth of positive informational resources to the chatroom interaction by answering specific questions, aiding online participants in how they interact

and offering interactive exchange that is coordinated among the participants. The conversation was specific to the particular topic of the bomb explosion. Participants were able to stay on the subject matter. As users submitted their questions, the News Editor was able to provide answers that gave temporary relief to chat room users. Also noted in the conversations is that grammar was properly constructed and conversations were more coherent and less chaotic. This signifies the deviation from the everyday mundane issues that usually characterize the topic of the chatroom to more reflective and somber discussions. Also significant is the presence of an authoritative source that helped reduce the level of chaos and randomly juxtaposed sentences that often characterize *The Guardian* chatroom.

Finally, as Nigerians find chat room interaction a good way to discuss political and other issues with other culturally diverse Nigerians from all over the world, *The Guardian* chat room then becomes a communal forum around which to gather to discuss pertinent topics, proffer solutions to problems and also share common interests. For many chat room participants, being Nigerian cuts across cultural differences. This is demonstrated in the way several chatroom users shared their feelings, empathized with one another and sent messages of goodwill to other Nigerians who were affected by the tragic bombing incident. McMillan and Downes (1998: 4) resonated this attitude by stating that users tend to develop a sense of commonality and community during interaction since the aim is "to exchange information and build understanding among participants".

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

This study presented the analysis of the use of multimedia in three Nigerian online newspapers in comparison with their traditional versions. It explored how *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday*, three Nigerian daily newspapers with web presence, were maximizing the potentials presented them by the Internet technology to bring more interactive and informed news to their audience globally.

These newspapers, which are the top three newspapers in the country, based on physical circulation, were selected for this research based on Lacy and Bernstein's (1988) rationale that large circulation dailies tend to have greater financial resources than smaller newspapers which enable larger newspapers to invest more in the development of special features in their online editions. Gubman and Greer (1997) also echoed this view in a study, which described online newspapers as often consistently sophisticated or unsophisticated, depending mainly on the size of the organization. In this study I tried to find out how the Nigerian print media used the Internet from a communication and technical perspective.

Each analysis began with a descriptive look at the newspapers' homepage. It simply looked at what was available in the news sites and what links were required for activating various components of interactivity. Analysis was also carried out with particular reference to the Lagos bomb explosion in Nigeria. From all indications, this study found interactivity to be a basic technological tool for transforming the traditional newspaper model of message delivery into online news editions.

The first research question (Do the online versions of *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* offer content that is unavailable in their print versions) examined the differences between the online and the paper versions of the newspapers. The differences, however, were minimal, indicating that all three newspapers used virtually all the news items in the print versions to post on their online news editions. This can be attributed to the fact the news stories in both versions of the newspapers shared the same news sources and bylines. The newspapers were not sufficiently equipped with adequate financial and technological resources to meet the expense of different news crew for both print and online newspapers, therefore, news in the print and online newspapers often share the same headlines with the same bylines.

Both versions of the newspapers gave comprehensive and intelligent accounts of the day's events in their news stories and a cursory reading of the news items of the three newspapers for the entire study period revealed that there was little duplication of news stories among the newspapers. It was clear that different types of news judgment was involved in what each newspaper regarded as being newsworthy.

Also, the newspapers did not falter in attributing the origin of their news stories. The source of the news stories provided some measure of credibility and context to the news and readers were not left to wonder about the origin and credibility of the news item being reported. The Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press (1949) firmly recommended that newspapers should not hide the names and characters of the participants from view but identify the source of their facts, opinions and arguments so that the reader or listener can judge them.

Both versions of the newspapers also focused almost exclusively on Nigerian issues and used Nigerian sources far more than foreign news sources thus giving the Nigerian community a voice it might not otherwise have on the mainstream internet. In this regard, the online newspaper was more of an information service for those interested in learning about issues confronting Nigerians and Africans in general.

The second research question for this thesis was: How do the Multimedia Components facilitate the effectiveness of the Online Newspapers vis-à-vis their Traditional Versions and how well are the Online Newspapers Creating Interactivity that Highlights Heeter's Dimensions of Interactivity?

Findings for this research question supported McMillan and Downes (1998) interactive application with the focus on the receiver. According to the two writers, the receiver had the option of searching and selecting precise and exact information. The three news sites studied empowered the receiver with various searching devices for selecting precise and exact information. In addition, interactivity also distinguished the online newspapers from their traditional print versions. Readers were empowered with navigational tools and feedback mechanisms such as email to interact with the medium and send messages back and forth with the writers of the newspapers.

The hypertext nature of the online newspapers required a much more active role for the reader, urging the reader to make decisions about destination and content. This process involved an ongoing dialogue between the author, the medium, and the reader, thus not only enforcing interactivity but also blurring the traditional boundaries between reader and writer. In this context also, reading traditional newspapers is an active and engaging activity, as the reader too makes choices about where to go and what to read by

flipping through the different pages of the print newspaper to a designated story of the reader's choice. Likewise, the online reader navigates through different news stories by using links.

Over the seven-month study period, the level of interactive exchange, however, indicated no progress towards setting up more interactive features to facilitate more interactive exchange on the web sites and among online users. It is believed that, sometimes, the managers of the news sites were more interested in having a web presence than updating multi-media devices that make the reading experience a more enjoyable experience for the audience. This echoed David's (2001) observation that managers of some web sites merely have a web presence as a status symbol and a mark of being up to date with the digital technology revolution and not for the purpose of informing, educating as well as entertaining their audience.

The three news sites provided opportunity for feedback in a systematic manner that provided users with direct links to emails of news editors so as to involve both sender and receiver in the communication experience. However, they failed to respond adequately to user enquiry and also failed to provide direct links to previous stories and informational sources such as reporters' email addresses. This was attributed to the fact that as gatekeepers of news and information, online journalists do not want to relinquish control of their news stories to the audience to what may be a fundamental shift in their role as senders and gatekeepers of information in the communication process.

Interactive media blurred the lines between the receivers and senders of a mediated message. The use of a medium such as the Internet involved not only active participation in the traditional audience roles of selecting and processing media messages, but active



participation in creating them as well. However, the traditional receivers were not the only ones profoundly affected by this change. The traditional senders of media messages, the journalists, are faced not just with a new delivery method but with what may be a fundamental shift in their role as senders and gatekeepers of information in the communication process.

McMillan and Downes (1998) identified an interactive component that this study answered in the third research question. This question examined the features of an interactive participatory communication that were demonstrated in *The Guardian* chatroom. The value of this interactive exchange is its freewheeling nature and its free speech opportunity. It is a synchronous exchange that conformed most closely to face-to-face communication. It involved real-time engagement with other online users in various chatrooms and locations such as *The Guardian* chatroom. The roles of the sender and receiver were interchangeable. Both had equal control over messages being sent and received. Users developed a sense of commonality and community during interaction since the aim was "to exchange information and build understanding among participants" (McMillan and Downes, 1998).

Today, it is mostly the Nigerians living and working outside the boundaries of their country in all the corners of the world that use *The Guardian* chatroom for communication about Nigeria. This made *the Guardian* chatroom an important meeting place to these Nigerians as they talked about the history, politics, social life and culture of Nigeria. Everyday life affairs, personal relations between men and women, parents and children also formed a most significant aspect of the discussion and this kept the chatroom community alive and strengthened the ties inside them.

Very fundamental questions were dealt with such as "Is there anything to support the idea of Nigeria as one unity?" "What are the alternatives?" "How should the country be ruled?" "How can the Biafran war be approached?" This was a reaffirmation of Bastian's (1999:24) existing perspective that interactive discourse among Nigerians on the Internet tends to take on nationalist overtones, even though these nationalists are living and working outside the boundaries of their nation-state.

*The Guardian* chatroom was also a place for users to maintain cultural identity and research cultural heritage, to collect and preserve knowledge. I see these as analyses and thoughts that helped people to understand and maintain their cultural identity in a foreign country. In this use, the Internet may be the most useful media ever used because it linked people of the same culture even if there were only three of them and all in the different ends of the world. The use of the Internet for building identity and dealing with important matters of life gives birth to distant communities or virtual villages. As Bastian (1999) observed, it is "virtual" in the sense that it is a community in which people do not meet face-to-face but through the auspices of words on computer screens and people relate, sometimes with great intensity, generating both solidarity and deeply felt emotions of friendship and dislike.

The Internet has proven useful for the Diaspora in maintaining its cultural identity. For the Nigerians living in the homeland, the Internet can be one of the most important ways to have a say in the global village. It will be an essential tool for many professions, not only for academia. Development of the Internet in Nigeria might help to improve the poor communications technology situation in the country. All these put together, the

efficient use of the Internet both in and outside Nigeria will definitely do much good to the country and her people.

Even though multimedia enhances the interactivity and consequently the appeal of web sites, there are financial limits on the resources these web sites can spend for online news especially with the downturn in the Nigerian economy. Also, ICT is still in its developmental stage in Nigeria and the Internet is therefore a very expensive means of interactive communication. The average Nigerian earns a minimum wage of 7,500 naira per month about \$75 (CDN) every month and internet browsing costs an hourly rate of about \$10 (CDN). This financial cost of browsing the internet in a developing society where people are still striving to acquire basic amenities such as medical care, electricity, water, food and clothing, does not encourage the Nigerian audience to stop reading the print newspapers to log on the Internet for news.

Finally, this study has illuminated three areas of research: the Internet, Online news and Interactivity. The study showed that the *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Thisday* newspapers were replicating their print versions on their web sites and *The Guardian* further added value by maintaining a vast chatroom site with several interactive components for consumers. One important aspect of this research has been its appraisal of the interactive devices offered on the news sites with particular emphasis on *The Guardian's* chatroom as a synchronous means of interactive exchange. This research has also expanded the knowledge of the subject of chatroom interactivity by revealing how a Nigerian chatroom demonstrated the features of an interactive communication on its web site. By examining these newspapers, it showed that, although the news sites may be less sophisticated in technology devices when compared with the dominant mainstream news

sites from the advanced world, the Nigerian newspapers on the web were best positioned to provide information about Nigeria that cannot be found elsewhere.

There is an untapped potential for the Nigerian newspapers if only they can go a step further and make some improvements on their web sites. Using the Internet as a medium of news could present an economic opportunity for the Nigerian media through advertising to create markets that are local, national and international in scope. The opportunity also lies in the global reach of news and heightened interactivity with the use of multimedia, which may potentially present an economic opportunity for the newspaper organizations.

### **Recommendations For Future Study**

It is suggested that future work may expand the scope of this study to include a detailed analysis of various arguments about the internet as a democratization tool and how online users use the internet to participate in their nation's political discourse. This is an interesting issue that can be researched in order to examine how the chatroom allow users to freely express their opinions on various socio-political subjects, what issues are discussed and if the chatroom really breaks down hierarchical structures to create equality among users.

It is also suggested that future work include an interview of various actors in the news media such as the news journalists and equally online news readers and the print newspaper readers. A survey study of these actors can serve to further enrich the research with the perspective of the news journalists and online users.

It is hoped that this research will motivate other researchers interested in African development to research various development challenges that confront Africa. News journalists, particularly those from Africa, can equally begin to contemplate their potentials and important role in providing a better understanding and appreciation of Africa to the global society.

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