

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE PRINT MEDIA: A GLOBAL-CUM-NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The print media as we know them today have developed over a number of centuries. Any discourse on its (print media) evolution without recourse to the means of communications that preceded it, would not appreciate the long strenuous stride it had made to this present day. The print media evolved through three historical discoveries or milestones. These are the evolution of language, the evolution of writing and the invention of the printing machine. While this evolution is beyond the scope of this paper, I x-ray the events that culminated in the evolution of the print media, chronicling their historical progression in Nigeria.

The Evolution of Print

Stanley J. Baran, while giving credence to the importance of printing, said “as it is impossible to overstate the importance of writing, so too is it impossible to overstate the significance of Johann Gutenberg’s development of the movable metal type”. Also, Historian S.H. Steinberg, corroborating Baran’s submission, argues that “neither political, constitutional, ecclesiastical, and economic, nor sociological, philosophical and literary movement can be fully understood without taking into account the influence the printing press has exerted upon them” (1959). Marshall McLuhan expresses his admirations for Gutenberg’s innovation in his book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* where he argues that the advent of print is the key to our modern consciousness.

One would ponder the relevance of Gutenberg’s invention to this paper? The question might as well be ‘what importance does Gutenberg hold in the evolution of the print media?’ The following discussions might provide answers to the above questions.

The Printing Press

Printing and the printing press existed long before Gutenberg perfected his process in or around 1446. The Chinese were using wooden block presses as early as A.D. 600 and had movable clay type by A.D. 1000. A simple movable metal type was even in use in Korea in the 13th century (Baran, 2009). Gutenberg’s printing press was a significant leap forward, mainly for two important reasons.

First, Gutenberg was a goldsmith and metallurgist. He hit the idea of using metal type crafted from lead molds in place of type made from wood or clay. This was an important advance. Not only was movable metal type durable enough to print page after page, but letters could be arranged and rearranged to make any message possible. And Gutenberg was able to produce virtually identical copies.

Second, Gutenberg’s advance over Korean metal mold was one of scope. The Korean press was used to produce books for a very small, royal readership. Gutenberg saw his invention as a way to produce many books for profit. He stressed quality over quantity, partly because of his reverence for the book he was printing, the Bible. He used the highest quality paper and ink and turned out far fewer volumes than he otherwise could have.

Other printers, however, quickly saw the true economic potential of Gutenberg's invention. The first Gutenberg's Bible appeared in 1456. By the end of that century, 44 years later, printing operations existed in 12 European countries, and the continent was flooded with 20 million volumes of 7,000 titles in 35,000 different editions (Drucker, 1999).

The Social Impact of Print

Gutenberg developed his printing press with a limited use in mind: printing Bibles. However, little did he realize that the cultural effects of mass printing would greatly affect the entire world.

- (a) Before the print innovation handwritten materials were expensive to produce, and the cost of education, in time and money, had made reading an expensive luxury. However, with the spread of printing, written communication was available to a much larger portion of the society, and the need for literacy among the lower and middle classes grew. The ability to read became less of a luxury and more of a necessity; eventually literacy spread, as did education. Traders, soldiers, clergy, bakers, and musicians all now had business at the printer's shop. They talked, they learned of things, both in conversation and by reading printed materials. As more people learned to read, new ideas germinated and spread and cross-pollination of ideas occurred.

More materials from various sources were published, and people were freer to read what they wanted when they wanted. Dominant authorities – the crown and the church – were now less able to control communication and therefore, the people. New ideas about the world appeared; new understanding of existing world flourished.

In addition, duplication permitted standardization and preservation. Myths and superstitions began to make way for standard verifiable bodies of knowledge. History, economics, physics, and chemistry all became part of the culture's intellectual life. Literate culture was now on the road to modernization.

Printed materials were the first mass-produced product speeding the development and entrenchment of capitalism. We live today in a world built on these changes. Use of the printing press helped fuel the establishment and growth of a large middle class. No longer were societies composed of rulers and subjects; printing sped the rise of democracy. No longer were power and wealth functions of birth, power and wealth could now be created by the industrious. No longer was political discourse limited to accepting the dictates of crown and church. Printing had given ordinary people a powerful voice.

The Print Media History

The above break-through in the area of printing by Gutenberg set the stage for the emergence of the fore-runners of modern day print media. The print media can be classified into books, newspapers, magazine and pamphlets.

The Evolution of Books

Books have had a very long history. Although no one knows for sure how long books have been in existence, the earliest records show that there were 'books' in the form of clay tablets in Babylonia more than 4, 500 years ago (Sandman *et al*, 1976). Books in their present form originated with the invention of paper in china in the first century A.D., though the earliest inexpensive writing material were made by the Egyptians from the Papyrus plant which grew along the river Nile.

The first known book, *The Book of the Dead*, was written in Egypt sometime between 1580 and 1350 B.C. (Sandman et al., 1976), but for a long time books did not become a 'mass' medium. The reason for this was that books at that time were hand copied; they were, therefore, in very short supply and very expensive. The few available books became the monopoly of the elite who bought them mainly for use as decorations and status symbols. Thus, while a tiny elite read (or rather admired) the meager supply of books, the mass of the people could only communicate through oral or story form of language (Okunna, 1999).

Gutenberg's innovations revolutionized the art of printing and ushered in the modern European era of printing when, in 1455 he printed his first book-the Bible. First put on sale at the Great Frankfurt fair, the book cost the equivalent of three years of wages for the typical laborer of that time (Dominick, 2008). The art of printing spread quickly throughout Europe. The Protestant Reformation and the writings of Martin Luther spurred the printing of religious books. Printed books appeared in England in 1476. So rapid was book development that by the year 1500, there were more than 35,000 different titles of books in existence, and more than 15 million copies of these books altogether were in circulation throughout Europe; nearly all of them printed by the Gutenberg method (Okunna, 1994). Subsequently, this historical development impacted the entire world, including Africa. One would want, at this point, to understand how Nigeria has been a beneficiary of this great invention. Of course this could be observed in the area of book publishing which I engage below.

Book Publishing in Nigeria

Book publishing industry in Nigeria like most other industries was championed by the colonial masters. This began in the early twentieth century. Book publishing in the country "was initiated in the 1920s when policies were formulated on the production and importation of English and Arithmetic text books from Britain" (Jika, 1990). The development of the European book publishers opened up markets and, later, subsidiaries in former colonies MacBride et al (1981).

The very first printing press in Nigeria was established in Calabar in 1846 by Rev Hope Waddell of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission. The press was used to print Bible lessons and later arithmetical books for schools. In 1854 another missionary based in Abeokuta, Rev Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), established a press, five years later (1859) he used it to print the very first newspaper in Nigeria "Iwe Irohin". From that effort grew what we know today as the CMS press, which has published thousands of books in Nigeria.

For many years, even after Nigeria's independence, these foreign publishing Companies, such as Macmillan and Longman, through their subsidiaries, dominated the book publishing industry in the country. Over the years however, indigenous publishing companies have been springing up, and a good number of them are waxing strong.

Global Evolution of Newspaper

The historical development of the newspaper shows that chronologically, the newspaper came after books. The earliest publications that could be called the forerunner of the modern newspaper appeared in China in 500 AD. In Europe, the newspaper came into existence to satisfy members of the commercial class whose greatest literacy need was for news rather than books. Newspapers also began as handwritten news letters which circulated among the

employees and customers of commercial companies. In the early 1550, the first printed news reports originated in the form of news books or pamphlet-like publications and most of them were weekly whose contents were almost made up of financial news. The first regular newspaper appeared in England only in 1621 while the first English daily newspaper, the Daily Courant was founded in 1702 (Okunna, 1999).

Edeh (2006) notes that the earliest newspapers were handwritten news sheets that governments posted in public places. The earliest news sheet was probably the *Acta Diurna* (Daily Events), which began in Rome in 60 B.C. it reported the proceedings of the Roman Senate and such news as births and deaths. By the A.D 800s, the Chinese had started *Tichau*, a newspaper printed from carved wooden blocks. The first regularly published printed newspaper in Europe was *Avisa, Relation oder Zeitung* of Strasbourg, Germany. It started in 1609. England's first newspaper, The Weekly News, was established in 1622.

Early newspaper publishers had to obtain a government license for anything they wanted to print. In 1644, the English poet and political writer, John Milton criticized such licensing in his pamphlet "Aeropagitica". This work was one of the earliest arguments for freedom of the press. England lifted its licensing system in 1665 and several other countries ended theirs in the 1700s. But certain restrictions on the press remained. For example, many countries tried to limit the number of people who could afford to publish newspapers by making them pay a heavy tax on each page they printed. As a result, publishers made their pages as large as possible to print more materials for the same tax. By the 1800s however, these taxes had been ended and the press in many countries had considerable freedom.

Before the 1700s, the American colonists relied on pamphlets, handwritten newsletters, English newspapers and town criers for their news. In 1704, John Campbell established the "*Boston Newsletter*" the first regularly published newspaper in the colonies. In 1760, Benjamin Harris of Boston founded "*Public Occurrence*" the first newspaper published both in the colonies and in America. But the colonial government stopped it subsequently.

John Peter Zenger founded *The New York Weekly Journal* in 1733 and soon won a victory for a free press. In the newspaper, he criticized the royal government of New York. The governor's council had Zenger arrested and in 1735, he was tried for libel. The jury found Zenger not guilty after his attorney argued that Zenger had printed the truth and that truth is not libelous.

By 1765, the American colonies had more than 30 newspapers. That year, the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act. The Act required that special tax stamps be placed on all newspapers, legal documents and other printed materials. The colonies protested strongly. Newspapers continued to publish without buying the stamps and they supported the colonies in protesting. Newspapers remained a powerful force against British rule and helped to propel America towards the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). It was a story of continuous progress towards mass distribution, independence and authorities in the society or a series of struggles.

History of the Nigerian Press

The press in Nigeria dates back to 1846 when a printing press was established in Calabar. It was established by the Presbyterian Church and the essence was to print religious books and pamphlets. The establishment of the first newspaper in Nigeria can be traced back to 1859 when Reverend Henry Townsend of the Anglican Mission (A missionary) established a newspaper that was called "*Iwe irohin Fun Awon Egba*" meaning, the newspaper for the Egba people.

Tador (1996) notes that ‘*Iwe Irohin* was set up to help the overall development of the Egba people’ was produced fortnightly. The newspaper was sold for 120 cowries. It was first produced in Yoruba language but in 1860, the English version was added. The *Iwe Irohin* was principally designed to teach the masses different subjects like religion, mathematics, geography and how to spell. *Iwe Irohin* was devoted to announcement of marriages, Church and post office news. The newspaper also carried adverts of vacancies for house boys and clerks. It was also used to teach the public about the politics and history of the nation. The audiences of *Iwe Irohin* were the interior Yoruba villages, Lagos inclusive.

The newspaper folded up after involving itself in the crises that engulfed Egba land in 1867. The Europeans were expelled from the town while missionary buildings were looted and destroyed. Most of the vernacular newspapers we have today have been patterned after *Iwe Irohin*. The newspaper set a standard for newspapering in Nigeria. The *Iwe Irohin* stimulated the establishment of the Anglo African Newspaper. Reverend Henry Townsend was seen as the father of Nigerian press. He printed modern newspapers despite the fact that he was a religious man.

The next newspaper to be established after *Iwe Irohin* was the Anglo African Newspaper. It was the second newspaper that was established in Nigeria by a foreigner—a West Indian immigrant called Robert Campbell. The newspaper was established in Lagos in 1863 to promote the interest and welfare of Lagosians. Campbell who was a printer was publishing the newspaper in English language and it was a weekly newspaper that was sold for three pence. The news coverage was more than that of *Iwe Irohin*. It carried both local and international news. The first page of the newspaper was devoted to advertisements, notices and announcements. The newspaper folded up in 1865.

Between 1863 and 1879, some other newspapers were established in Nigeria. In 1880, *Lagos Times* and *The Gold Coast Advertiser* were established in Lagos. The *Lagos Observer* was established in Lagos and it survived till 1890. *The Eagle* and *Lagos Critic* were first published in 1883 and survived till 1888. These newspapers criticized the policies of government and helped to fight for independence. The *Nigerian Pioneer* was established in 1914 by a Nigerian named Kitoyi Ajasa in Lagos. The publisher was a reputable Lawyer. He was always corroborating the colonial government because, he was educated in England and was used to the style (life). It folded up in 1937. *The African Messenger* was established by Earnest Okoli in 1921. It was a weekly newspaper and was sold for 3 pence. It was however bought over in 1926 by the *Daily Times* and Okoli was employed as the Chief Editor. In 1925, Herbert McCauley established *The Daily News* which was printed in Nigeria and was the first political newspaper. It served as a voice of McCauley’s party called NDP.

The *Nigerian Daily Times* was jointly established in 1926 by a Nigerian called Adeyemo Alakija and a Briton called Richard Barrow. Earnest Okoli who was the publisher of the *African Messenger* was employed as the Editor because his own newspaper had already collapsed due to lack of fund. In 1948, the *Nigerian Daily Times* became an affiliate of *London Daily Mirror*. The duo eventually went under due to lack of funds. *London Daily Mirror*, however, became an affiliate to *London Daily Mirror*.

In 1937 when Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (popularly known as ZIK) was an editor of a newspaper called, “*The African Morning Post*” he also established the newspaper, *The West African Pilot* in Lagos. *The West African Pilot* carried news on the plight of farmers, the unemployed, market women, among other groups. It sought to redress the problems caused by the colonizers, criticized their policies and demanded for self rule for Nigeria. Dr. Azikiwe was

determined to fill the partial journalistic vacuum in Nigeria and he gave attention to change of layout, headlines, length of sentence and paragraphs, style of presentation, editorials and the effectiveness of pictures. The commercial success of *The West African Pilot* boosted in the 1940s and Zik was encouraged to embark on the first chain of newspapers. He sold about twenty thousand copies (20,000) a day and it was the highest then in Nigeria. He established the *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* in Port Harcourt in 1940, *Nigerian Spokesman* in Onitsha in 1944, *Daily Comet* in Kano in 1949, *Northern Advocate* in Jos and *Sentinel* in Enugu in 1947. He gave all these newspapers the name, 'Advocate.'

The important thing was that Zik's chain of newspapers was produced with sophisticated materials. He used the *West African Pilot* to mobilize people against the colonial rule in Nigeria. With the *West African Pilot* based in Lagos as headquarters and with branches under different names in strategic areas of the country, Zik then became the doyen of modern Nigerian Journalism. He was very imaginative in his plans of awakening political consciousness through the print media – (press). His own journalism was the type that replaced the archaic and improvised journalism that had previously existed. The first edition of the *West African Pilot* appeared on the streets of Lagos and other places within the country on November 22, 1937. The mass audience the *West African Pilot* took away from other newspapers was so great that the *Nigerian Daily Times* quickly reorganized in order to meet the challenges of the *Pilot*. Azikiwe was a frequent target of the anger of the colonial masters because of the kind of stories his newspaper carried. Thus, in 1945 the *Pilot* in Lagos was banned for 6 weeks. As a nationalist, Zik never relented. He continued his criticism of the colonial policies. When the *pilot* was banned in Lagos, he established the *Southern Nigerian Defender* to fill the gap created by the absence of the *Pilot* in Lagos.

In 1949, the *Nigerian Tribune* was established in Ibadan by Obafemi Awolowo. In 1951 when Awolowo became the leader of the *Action Group* (AG), he used the *Tribune* for extensive campaign. The *Tribune* was also used to struggle for independence by Obafemi Awolowo.

The late Saruwa of Sokoto established a newspaper in Kaduna in 1956 and it was called *Gaskiya Tafi Kobo*, meaning 'truth is more than money.' His main reason for establishing it was to project the image of the Northern area because he felt Zik and Awolowo 'are only projecting the interests of their zones.'

Contemporary Nigerian Press

These categories of newspapers constitute a new dimension in newspaper production. This is because their production was technically superb and they were excellent in content and more importantly on news coverage. The periods between 1960 and 1966 saw many government newspapers springing up. Among them was the *Morning Post* which was established in 1961 by the Tafawa Balewa government. The paper ceased to be published shortly after Balewa's government was toppled in a military coup in 1966.

The *New Nigeria* was the offspring of the *Nigerian Citizens* and came into existence in 1966. In 1968, the *Daily Champion* was started by Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyinwu. The *Vanguard Newspaper* was founded by Mr. Sam Amukapu in 1990. In the early 90's the *Third Eye* was also founded by Chief Akanni Aluko to propagate the activities of General Ibrahim Babangida. Similarly, *The Monitor* was established by Chief Arisekola Mao to do same for Late Gen. Sanni Abacha. During this period, the Nigerian government turned their weekly newspaper to a daily newspaper and changed its name to the *Outlook*. In 1964 the government of the Western Region established the *Daily Sketch* and Kwara State government also established *Herald Newspaper* in

1970. Then came the *Nigerian Standard Newspaper* owned by Plateau State government, *Observer* of Edo State, *Daily Star* of Anambra State and *The Chronicle* of Cross Rivers state government which ran from 1970 to date. Many daily newspapers have also been established by individuals. They include *The Punch* founded by the late Olu Abodarin and which introduced the act of captioning. *National Concord* was also founded by the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola primarily to promote activities of the then National Party of Nigeria (NPN) as well as propaganda tool for his presidential ambitions. In 1982, Chief Alex Ibru added colour to the print journalism with the introduction of a tabloid – *Guardian* newspapers.

In the 1990s, many community newspapers were published such as *Orizu* published at Ilaro, *Cradle News* at Ife among others. According to media surveys in 1999, over 250 community newspapers were established between 1990 and 1999.

Introduction of Magazine

Many magazines also sprang between 1970s and 80s. Among them are *The Drum* magazine published by the *Daily Times*. The main focus of *The Drum* was mainly on entertainment until 1986 when the trio of Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu and Yakubu Mohammed formed *The Newswatch* magazine. *The Newswatch* marked the beginning of investigative and aggressive journalism.

Apart from the *Newswatch*, many newspaper industries also established their own magazines to supplement their newspapers. For example, *Concord* established *African Concord*, *Guardian* introduced *African Guardian* while *This Week* also introduced *Daily Times Magazine*. In 1992 *Tell Magazine* was also introduced and *The News*, *Dataline*, *Tempo Magazines* were established between 1992 and 1993. There were many soft sell magazines which introduced another dimension into journalism. They were *Quality*, *Prime Peoples*, *Hint*, *Encomium*, *Ovation*, among others. These magazines featured stories ranging from non-fictions, human interest stories to pure fiction.

List of Newspapers in Nigeria.

Newspaper	Location	First issued	Publisher
Business Day	Lagos	2005	Frank Aigbogun
Business Hallmark	Ikeja, Lagos		Prince Emeka Obasi
Compass	Abeokuta	2008	Gbenga Daniel
Daily Champion	Lagos		Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu
Daily Times of Nigeria	Lagos	9 June 1925	Folio Communications
Guardian	Lagos	1983	Guardian Newspapers Limited
Independent	Lagos	2001	Independent Newspapers Limited
Leadership	Abuja		Leadership

			Newspaper Group
Mirror		2006	Global Media Mirror Limited
Nation	Lagos	2006	Vintage Press Limited
Newswatch	Lagos	28 January 1985	Global Media Mirror Limited
Next	Lagos	2004	Timbuku Media Group
Observer	Benin City	1968	Bendel Newspapers Company Limited
Osun Defender	Osogbo		Moremi Publishing House Ltd.
P.M. News	Lagos	1994	Independent Communications Network Limited
Peoples Daily	Abuja	30 November 2008	Peoples Media Ltd.
Port Harcourt Telegraph	Port Harcourt	1991	Prince Ogbonna Nwuke
Punch	Lagos	1971	Ajibola Ogunsola
Sun	Lagos	2001	The Sun Publishing ltd.
Tell Magazine	Yaba, lagos	1991	Tell Communication Limited
Thisday	Lagos	1975	Leaders & Company
Tribune	Ibadan	1949	African Newspaper of Nigerian Ltd.
Triumph	Kano	1980	Triumph Publishing
Trust	Abuja	2001	Media trust
Vanguard	Lagos	1983	Vanguard Media

Source: Wikipedia (2012)

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the print media evolved through long strenuous developmental years. Evolution of printing finally made the proliferation of information to a very large audience possible. In Nigeria printing emerged from the art of book publishing which was introduced by the colonial masters. This is also where newspaper publishing arose from. The genealogy of the print media in Nigeria has been captured in this paper indicating that radical proliferation of the print media has been radical and aggressive. A timely intervention that attended to the political as well socio-cultural aspirations of Nigerians, both the newspaper and the magazines in Nigeria have been presented in this paper as agents of mass mobilization and information.

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