

Media convergence practices and production in Ghana and Nigeria: Implications for democracy and research in Africa¹

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In this era of globalization, information accessibility is becoming crucial to empower citizens in their political, economic and sociocultural engagements. In emerging democracies, economic, cultural and political factors have hindered and still hinder the vast majority of the population from inclusion in the media and democratic discourse. Nevertheless, a 'new' phenomenon of media convergence is evolving in emerging democracies like Ghana and Nigeria that appears to provide platforms for wide citizen participation in the political and social discourse. From a phenomenological and exploratory perspective, this paper presents an overview of the media convergence practices in newsrooms in Ghana and Nigeria and their potential impact on the countries' democracy. The article, on the one hand, juxtaposes this new trend against the need for the media to play a crucial role in sustaining and developing democracy in such countries, and on the other hand it opens discussions and research enquiry into the practices and genre underlying such media productions.

Keywords: convergence; traditional media; new media; citizen participation; Ghana; Nigeria

I. Introduction

The unique fusion of different formal media channels and often varied participants in newsrooms indicates interesting media production processes that have crucial implications for democracy and research. Democracy appears to have stabilized in Ghana and Nigeria from the 1990s, and this has opened up the socio-economic environment and provided opportunities for a participatory space in both countries. The liberalization of the countries' economies has seen relative developments in Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) (Sey 2011), which is improving and broadening the spheres of information flow in the societies. The mass media, in particular, are taking advantage of technological advancements in what has been referred to as *new ICT* or *new media* (Mabweazara 2010, 2011; Sey 2011), broadly speaking, utilities associated with the Internet and mobile telephony. The newsrooms of today are exploiting these utilities for more diversified, creative and inclusive ways in journalism practice than was the case before the 2000s, when ICTs in sub-Saharan Africa (hereafter, Africa) were not as developed as today, and when the economies and mass media systems of most of the countries were controlled and centralized under the governments (Myers 2008). ICT is thus providing the mass media with innovative opportunities for information sourcing, packaging and transmission that may have various implications for democratic governance in emerging democracies.

The potential of the new media to open up an information super highway to complement the traditional media in Africa has been noted (Nyamnjoh 2005; Mabweazara 2010). However, little research exists on the various dynamics, uses and implications of the new media in Africa in line with the relatively late and slow penetration of ICT in the continent. For instance, Mabweazara notes from the perspective of Zimbabwe, which may apply to West Africa, that:

Very little research has ... focused on the interface between the new media and the traditional mainstream media, particularly in terms of how it enhances day-to-day interchanges between journalists and ordinary citizens in transactions that collectively shape and sometimes define news and practices around its construction. (2011: 693)

Few studies so far have focused on the impact of a blend of aspects of new and old media, particularly mobile phone and radio, in broadening access to information and including more people in the social and political discourses of societies (Mabweazara 2011; Selormey 2012; Salawu 2013; Willems 2013; Ansah n.d.). A comprehensive impression of how old and new media converge in news production and consumption for a holistic understanding of the implications for democracy and research has been rare.

This article provides a general overview of a version of media convergence practices and production in news media communication processes in Ghana and Nigeria. Media convergence here refers to crossmedia communication, which involves not only

the 'process whereby more than one media platform is engaged at the same time in communicating related content' (Erdal 2007: 52), but also the inclusion of discussants and audiences in the programme. Specifically, it implies the interaction of traditional and new media platforms as well as varied participants and audiences in media communication. Willems (2013: 224) has used 'convergence' to imply the use of Internet and the mobile phone in gathering and disseminating information through the traditional media. Therefore, drawing on Erdal's (2007) and Willems (2013), we use media convergence in this study to imply the practice in which a number of media forms as well as discussants and audiences are brought together on the same platform to communicate related content to varied audiences. Specifically, this media flow implies a unification and interaction (in various formats) involving radio, television, newspapers, new media, and various participants and audiences on the same platform of media communication. Thus, we conceptualize 'convergence' anchored on 'old' media, which still remain the dominant source of public information in most parts of Africa.

This discussion of this article is underpinned by the dominant normative role of the news media in a liberal-democratic society. The media is expected to provide and disseminate relevant information to empower citizens so that they can engage and participate in the political and social discourse within the media sphere of their societies (McQuail 2005). Thus, this article is informed by a re-conceptualization of Habermas's (1989) public sphere. In this context, the media performs the critical function of providing a forum, not necessarily for elite and reasoned debate, but for broader inclusion of citizens in the public domain to interact and discuss issues of general interest in the socio-political and business space. In this study the concept implies different public spheres that represent various constituencies and interests. For instance, the convergence platform brings together constituencies made up of readers of newspapers, political parties, popular culture and ordinary citizens. In this way the media is said to champion various interests.

In emerging democracies like Ghana and Nigeria faced with numerous political, economic and cultural challenges, which impact on the democratic process, the media have a challenge of sustaining and consolidating the democratic process. One way of addressing these problems is through providing a platform for political debates. This platform will encourage citizens' participation in democracy, reviewing of government policies, actions and activities that, according to Coleman et al. (2011), are central to democracy as it brings the public closer to government and vice versa. There is therefore the need for a multi-directional communication flow that reflects the diversity of news sources and interests in the society.

Proceeding from the phenomenological and exploratory perspectives (Welman and Kruger 1999; Groenewald 2004), this article's aim is twofold: first, to juxtapose this evolving trend in media communication against the need for the media to play a crucial information role in sustaining and developing democracy in such countries; and second, to open discussions on and enquiry into the practices and genre underlying such media productions. In line with this objective, overarching questions

underlying these media convergence practices of concern to this paper include: what inform(s) the practices and processes? To which extent does the platform provide a forum for wide inclusiveness? Does the practice have the potential of enhancing or negating the democratic aspirations of the emerging democracies? What implication does this practice have for research in the field in Africa?

2. Transition politics and participatory journalism

Both located in West Africa, Ghana and Nigeria share similar political, economic and cultural histories and are regarded as emerging democracies that recently started their democratic processes in 1992 and 1999, respectively, after series of failed attempts (see Ogbondah 2004; Ojo 2003; Akpojivi 2014). The mass media is the cornerstone of this change because of the significant role they played in the democratization processes. The overwhelming suggestion in the literature is that without the mass media, the democratization processes in pre- and post-independence era (in both countries) would have been futile. According to Nyamnjoh (2005), early nationalists such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria used the media to advocate the decolonization of their respective countries. The current drive for democratization was likewise initiated and facilitated by the media (see Ocitti 1999). The media have the potential to sustain and consolidate the democracy and are considered to be 'strongest features of democracy' in any country, due to the platform for debates that encourages citizens' participation in the democratic process (Ette 2000: 67).

Before the transition to democracy, the mass media were commonly regarded as the mouthpiece of government, because they were largely centralized, owned and funded by the government (see Anokwa 1997; Alhassan 2005). The few available private press were gagged or forced into 'development' or sport reportage as restrictive media laws hindered the private press from creating the space for rational debate and citizens' participation. For instance, Ghana's Minister of Information in the early 1990s pronounced that the Ghanaian society did not need a critical media but one that will partner with government (The Democratic Journalist 1990, cited in Eribo and Jong-Ebot 1997: x). Consequently, the media was limited to reporting government activities and were unable to facilitate transparency and accountability in governance by acting as a marketplace for ideas and a platform for citizens' participation. This strained the relationship between the government and media, media and the public, and between the government and public (Adebayo 2001).

However, the transition process in Ghana and Nigeria has brought about new orientation and new rules of engagement and interaction between the government, media and citizens (Voltmer 2006: 7). This transformation witnessed the liberalization of the media sphere following the implementation of communication policies like National Media Policy 2000, National Telecommunication Policy 2005, Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development Policy 2003 and the 1992 Constitution in Ghana and National Telecommunication Policy 2000, FOI Act 2011 and 1999 Constitution in Nigeria. Therefore, a new kind of participatory journalism, which

promotes active citizen participation in the public domain, has characterized the media sphere in both countries. According to Karikari (1998: 204), the political discourse since transition has significantly changed as participatory journalism has expounded political debates and engaged oppressed people in the advancement of democracy in new democracies like Ghana and Nigeria. The engagement of these different actors in the media sphere will lead to a rational debate that will largely influence the quality of information available to the public, consequently enhancing the quality of democracy and the democratic processes (see Voltmer 2006; Coleman et al. 2011).

3. Technology, convergence and news flow

Africa is presently experiencing its fair share of the digital revolution, necessitating radical adaptation and transformation of not only the media industry but also audience composition and how people access information. The Internet, telecommunication, radio and television have made relatively significant penetration on the continent with diverse possibilities for broadcasting. Almost every African country has at least a mobile network providing a range of services including voice calls, messaging and Internet connectivity, among others to users (Otieno 2009). Added to this is the utility of current mobile handsets on the market: photography, video, music, recorder, publishing, etc. For instance, in 2007 alone, there were about 65 million new users of mobile phones, with average accessibility at 30 per cent (Otieno 2009) spreading significantly to villages. In Ghana and Nigeria, mobile phone usage has become 'ordinary' even in the remotest part of each country making up about 85 per cent penetration.

The radio is also no more a preserve of the affluent as it used to be some time ago. FM radio stations now dot almost all parts of the continent. In Ghana and Nigeria, there are currently 220 and 104 radio stations, respectively, scattered throughout the countries. Most of the stations in the countryside are syndicated to big ones in the cities. Thus, at certain times, these affiliated stations carry same news and some popular programmes relayed from those in the metropolis. In addition to the significant numbers of public broadcasting stations across the countries, there are also many commercial and a few community stations as well.

Television may not have a similar penetration rate like those of telephone and radio in the rural areas but is strongly represented in the cities and semi-urban areas. There are significant public (or semi-public) service stations as well as free to air commercial TV stations, together with pay-for digital satellite opportunities. With television in Africa evolving towards full digital migration by 2020 (2013 for Ghana and 2015 for Nigeria, which Ghana has missed), the media industry portends massive opportunities and possibilities, but this demands innovative programming and practices to reflect the equally changing dynamics and composition of audiences as well as the need to broaden inclusion in political participation.

Media studies in most parts of Africa have been largely on the formal or traditional media, i.e. newspapers, radio and television. The interest, in this regard, has been

the extent to which the media is playing its democratic role of helping to safeguard and enhance governance within the liberal-democratic model (see McQuail 2005). The developing imperative vis-à-vis the governance and development paradox in most African societies has necessitated this expectation, which has been firmly entrenched in media research on the continent. Recently, Wasserman in his study titled *Popular Media, Democracy and Development in Africa* reaffirms this position that:

Media in Africa are widely regarded as having the potential to contribute to the exercise of civil rights and responsibilities, the communication of political information, the (re)construction of cultural identity and the achievement of development goals. (2011: 5)

Although one of the critical pillars of this model is participation of citizens in the political processes in the general sense, most of the studies have focused on the media's positive or negative role in the periodic activity of 'democratic' elections. Little attention has been paid to interactions in the political space between political authority and ordinary people for the kind of continuous engagement and participation that can enhance democratic governance and lead to informed voting decisions and policy initiatives. Moreover, as Willems (2011: 46) has argued, the dominant liberal-democratic model mostly in the form of the formal media are 'often shaped and accessed only by an elite minority'. Willems (2011) therefore makes a critical suggestion for popular (or informal) media in Africa – here referring to music, video, comical shows, etc. – to engage with formal media in the media space to enhance communication between authority and ordinary people within the context of 'convergence culture' (see also Jenkins 2006).

Consequently, with the relative advancement of ICT in the continent, the (traditional) media organizations in Africa are evolving a type of innovative convergence practices described earlier perhaps as a competitive strategy in the liberal capitalist market and for a lifeline within the upsurge of new media. In a discussion on the creative use of language in Ghanaian newsroom practices under the rubric of 'political talk radio',² Ansah (n.d.) identifies some characteristics of convergence practices, which may serve as a basis for our discussion. The author cites the following as key characteristics of the convergence platform of news flow:

- It has a regular individual as a host
- The host constitutes a panel with different people to discuss issues
- It features interviews with different individuals.
- It includes listener participation through call-ins, i.e. live broadcasts of conversation between the host and somewhat screened listeners;
- The show is usually segmented with advertisement.

While these characteristics provide a sense for an understanding of the organization of the newsroom practice, many other issues are left out. Most studies have limited the practice to the radio and emphasized phone-ins (Selormey 2012; Willems

2013; Ansah n.d.). For instance, newspapers, which now depend on new media such as blogs and other online news sources in news production (Mabweazara 2010), appear to be left out in the conceptualization of convergence. Additionally, the focus on mobile phones appears to ignore the role of newspapers in communication flow on radio and television (TV). Thus, our conceptualization of *convergence* takes on board contributions made by new media to transform and improve information sourcing, broaden access to social and political news, and cultivate new forms of participatory culture in some Ghanaian and Nigerian newsrooms. This is occurring in a way beyond what pertained before the 2000s with just the traditional media. This practice has been noted as having implications for democracy. According to Kafewo (2006), the phenomenon has radically enhanced citizens' participation in the democratic processes in Ghana and Nigeria, respectively. It is therefore important to investigate the nature and prospects of the practice within the research areas.

A key concept underpinning media convergence is 'citizens' participation', which we acknowledge is a much contested issue depending on the perspective from which one views it. The controversy surrounding the term and its possible interpretations and implications have been extensively discussed in Willems (2013), for which reason this study will not engage in that discourse. What we have done is to provide an operational definition for an understanding of the term in the discussion of this article. Thus, we draw on Willems' (2013: 224) discussion of citizens' participation as 'solicited participation', where a radio or TV station 'actively invites listeners' to call in, SMS or e-mail their messages to be aired. The term is hence used here to imply any conscious and active effort by a newsroom to give voice to individuals as representatives of different constituencies and interests during news transmission and to make social and political happenings accessible and understandable to various strata of society. In this sense, participation may be active or passive. It is active when citizens listen to discussions on a station, call in or send their views by SMS, e-mail or any new media platform for it to be aired as expressive or mediated communication (Selormey 2012). It may also be passive when audiences listen to and understand discussions that inform their decisions and actions on their social and civic responsibilities.

4. Methods and data

The data presented in this study were collected in 2012 in Accra, Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria. Within the phenomenological paradigm, we used two qualitative approaches: passive participant observation (Hennink et al. 2011) of newsroom news production practices and in-depth interviews of programme hosts because they ran the show and determined the nature of the programmes. The use of phenomenology was informed by our aim to describe and explore newsroom activities (Groenewald 2004: 4), and to understand the practices and their influences taking into account the perspectives of the news producers and their activities (Welman and Kruger 1999: 189). The nature of this study demands an understanding of the methodological decisions and actions, which we provide below.

Prior to data collection, we monitored and documented the nature of the news review programmes of the major radio and TV stations with an almost nationwide coverage in Ghana and Nigeria from November 2011 to January 2012. This was to enable us note the general nature of news flow and the potential impact of convergence on citizens' participation. Our media monitoring revealed that the practices followed a similar pattern in the various media institutions in the countries. While the radio programmes had long airtime space of between three to five hours with many phone-ins and messages from new media platforms, TV had a far shorter time of between an hour and two. The similarities of the programmes seem to suggest that convergence practices are occurring in similar ways across radio and TV in both countries. Based on the near homogeneity of the programmes, we used a radio station in Ghana and a television station in Nigeria.

In Ghana, we used a current affairs morning programme called *Kokrokoo* on Peace FM, a popular commercial radio station in Accra. The choice of this station and programme was based on its reach, the popularity of the programme and language. This station has about 30 affiliate stations all over Ghana. The station also has affiliates in United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Canada and Italy. The morning show is relayed concurrently on all these affiliates, thereby making the programme accessible in most part of the country and beyond. Additionally, the station is currently believed to have the biggest listenership in Ghana. Peace FM is a mainly indigenous language station, broadcasting in Akan, the most spoken local language in the country (Ansah n.d.) and used across ethnic and educational categories. *Kokrokoo* further presents a linguistic balance to make the programme appealing to almost all Ghanaians. For instance, the newspapers, which are mainly published in English, are first read in English before being translated into Akan. Participants on the programme use Akan, but the discussion is often heavily laced with code switching into English. Thus, the programme has patronage not only among those without a significant level of education but also among many educated listeners.

Similarly, in Nigeria, we used a current affairs morning programme called *Sunrise Daily* on Channels Television. This station is one of the privately owned independent television stations with wide coverage across the country due to its transmission on UHF bandwidth, cable television networks like DSTV and Star TV, and live online streaming, which can be accessed on ipad, blackberry and iphone amongst others.

The participant observation involved the presence of a researcher in the newsroom for the duration of a day's programme and detailed notes were taken on the happenings. As Hennink et al. (2011: 170) note, this method allows the researcher to situate people's behaviour and actions within their sociocultural context. Before the observation, the researcher frequented the station a few times and became acquainted with the media personnel in charge, which facilitated the exercise. As researchers have advised, care was taken not to interfere with activities and interactions during the observation (Hennink et al. 2011).

Second, interviews were conducted with the hosts of the programmes and other media practitioners to enable us get an insight into the ideologies behind the convergence practices from their own perspectives and experiences.

5. Findings and discussion

As indicated earlier, this article aims in part to show the innovative use of different media platforms and audiences is leading to a broader inclusion of citizens in the media discourse of Ghana and Nigeria. To appreciate the nature and impact of the contribution of this practice to political participation, one needs to first understand newspaper consumption patterns in these countries. This is crucial because newspapers serve as one of the primary agenda setters for public discourse not only during the shows, but also in the society of the two countries as a whole (see Hasty 2005).

In both countries, the newspaper is consumed by only a section of the educated audience. This is not just a matter of the currently unchallenged notion that the newspaper is an elite discourse but because almost all the newspapers are in English, and therefore only those with formal education could be logically included in such a medium. Thus, a greater majority of the population are excluded from the printed press. Although in Nigeria some newspapers titles are structured along indigenous languages, they are written in English language. For instance, 'Urhobo Voice', later known as the 'Urhobo Times', which is supposed to be the newspaper for the Urhobo ethnic group, is published in English. In addition, the high cost of newspapers has discouraged most people from buying newspapers. For instance, the cost of newspapers range between G¢1 to 2 and N150 to 250 in Ghana and Nigeria, respectively, depending on the print quality, which is out of the reach of peasant population in both countries. In West Africa, newspapers are largely used to set the agenda for the political and social interaction in the public spheres (Hasty 2005). The papers are reviewed and discussed on the electronic media each day and at various times, but mostly in the mornings.

The structure, organization and production of the programmes on radio and television we observed followed a similar pattern. There are varying durations for the shows depending on the radio station in question and the programme structure of each station on a day. On average, however, the shows ran anytime from 6 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The host of the programme and his producers took charge of and plan the programme or show, although it can be inferred that they worked within the general ideological principles underlying the establishment of the station.

The common media practice in Ghana was and still is that all newspapers delivered to the station are assembled. The host selectively reads out some of the stories making the headlines on the day in English. The headlines and their details are then translated into the local language by a translator or translators. By then the host and his team had arranged for a panel of discussants that come to the studio for a media debate. The panel is largely partisan reflecting the major political parties i.e. National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP), and sometimes, a member of a minority political party or someone not directly identified with a party also appears on the programme. The host introduces them as such, for instance, Mrs x of the M party, and Mr Y of the N party, etc.

The topic for discussion in the panel is based on stories from the newspaper, and the host moderates the interaction that ensues between panel members as they speak on

the issues one after the other. The debate is interlaced with phone calls to government officials and other personalities to clarify or contribute to issues under discussion. Most of the stations also have correspondents all over the country who call into the programme to report newsworthy events live all around the country. At some point in the programme, the host opens the phone lines and invites listeners to join in. People call into the programme, give their names and locations, and then express their views. The host also reads messages received on the phone as well as on the computer through the Internet (e-mail, Facebook, etc.).

The discussions (whether on radio or TV) have some unique features. They are characterized sometimes by heated exchanges, direct insults and insinuations, sometimes close to physical fighting, mendacious manipulations, etc. by and among discussants. The platform also gives the opportunity for discussants to add to, take away from and exaggerate matters pertaining to issues under discussion. There is also the tendency for humouring; the translators especially embellish the rendition from English to the indigenous language with entertaining techniques such as proverbs, witty coinages, anecdotes, allusions, etc.

The main purpose of this particular form of media communication, according to the hosts Kwami Sefa Kayi and his producers, was to broaden access and participation in the political space much beyond the narrow audiences of the formal media. The host of *Kokrokoo* explained the rationale of the programme thus:

In this *Kokrokoo* programme, our aim is to serve people of lower status for them to get information and to participate in local and national issues. Our aim is to educate the people, so we are careful with stories we choose for discussion each day. (Personal communication, 18 January 2012)

In terms of gate keeping, newspapers that were considered ‘credible’, usually across the ownership and partisan divisions were those that were read out in terms of topical stories making the rounds on a day. It was on such topics the debates were based.

On considerations and rationale for discussion panels, the host and his producers said they were very particular about partisan representation for two main reasons. First, they thought people enjoyed political news more than anything else, and indeed political issues featured more prominently than anything else in the debates, so it was a matter of giving to society what it wanted. Second, they were also conscious of the professional and ethical demand of balance in journalism. According to the host of *Kokrokoo*, ‘We always bring representatives from the two big parties because they have huge followings in elections, so in spite of the sometimes negative fallouts, they cannot be ignored in the debate’ (personal communication, 18 January 2012). Similarly, the producer of the programme added that they looked for such people with ‘information who were humorous and/or aggressive’ in their presentation (personal communication, 18 January 2012). All these were to make the programme interesting, thereby attracting audiences. They explained that the majority of callers into the programmes

and others who sent text messages were ordinary people who hitherto did not have access to such a media platform. As the host of *Kokrokoo* puts it:

Those who called in, you saw that I put them on air immediately they called. These are ordinary people, low class people and they now have the chance for their voices to be heard directly in the media. (Personal communication, 18 January 2012)

Many such audiences were also ordinary party activists who called to support or oppose issues depending on how those issues affect various social groups and their functions in the political and social system.

The media professionals were emphatic about the positive contribution of the practice to democracy. They said that, although the forum opened an avenue for occasional exaggerations, distortions, ‘propaganda’, mendacity, insults, etc., it nonetheless reached a wide audience with information from which they could make up their minds on political and social decisions. To this end, they believed the programme was promoting democracy. The host of *Kokrokoo* put it strongly thus:

Democracy is about choice, and you can't choose well if you don't know about the people or group who wants you to elect them, what they stand for and so on. The programme gives people the opportunity to have first-hand information from various competing individuals and groups and to query them directly so that when they make their choices, they know why. (Personal communication, 18 January 2012)

Similar media practices were observed in Nigeria. The programme *Sunrise Daily*, which is a current affairs and news programme, starts at 7 a.m. till 10 a.m. daily (Monday to Friday). The programme, which is popular with the public, acts as a platform or forum for debate of issues that are of national interest. As one media practitioner puts it: the basic issues discussed are those issues affecting the ordinary Nigerian daily, that is infrastructure, health, education, security, corruption, what government is doing right and not doing right (personal communication, 10 January 2012).

The host and co-hosts of the programme i.e. Maupe Ogun, Chamberlain Usoh and Sulaiman Aledoh take turns in reading the major news headlines and stories of the major national newspapers (such as *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Thisday* and *Tribune*). This comprehensive review of the different newspapers in Nigeria will enable excluded public to have an idea of what is happening in the country. According to another media practitioner, not many people can afford to buy the dailies ... hence such newspapers review gives them the opportunity to know what is actually happening (personal communications, 22 January 2012). In addition, to the newspapers review, the hosts of the programme bring in different panel members i.e. government officials, civil societies, opposition party members and NGOs into the programme to discuss the various topics of the day. These three hosts take turns in asking panel

members questions, and in the course of the programme, the hosts invite the public to contribute to the discussion by either asking the panel members questions or just share their views via short messaging service (SMS), e-mails, twitter and Facebook. Contributions from the public through these platforms are read out by the hosts. This, according to a senior news editor, makes the 'public central to interactive talk shows, as it affords the public the opportunity to voice their views and to be heard by the relevant authorities' (personal communication, 27 January 2012).

The structure of this *Sunrise Daily* programme is unique in that the different panelists on the show on each day are invited to discuss different issues, unlike in other stations where panellists discuss the same issues. On average three national issues are discussed with different panel members (either present in the studio or connected live through video or telephone) and the issue(s) for discussion are usually informed from major newspaper headlines and other events occurring in the country.

The programmes in both countries act as a platform for insightful discussions and interaction between the three hosts, panellists and contributing public. Such interaction creates an opportunity for government policies to be scrutinized and for the public opinion to be heard. The main purpose of this particular form of media communication is to broaden access and participation in the political space much beyond the narrow audiences of the formal media.

The rationale for the discussion panels was mainly to create a forum to promote accountability and transparency in the society and this explains the wide range of issues debated in the programme ranging from security, economy, politics and policies, etc. As an underdeveloped country with high level of corruption but with huge natural resources, this platform for debate uses the available technology to enable the Nigerian public participate in public debates and promotes good governance. As one media practitioner described:

The last ten years since the embrace of democracy in Nigeria, we are now experiencing convergence of ICT – information communication technology – in journalism. The impact of this convergence cannot be overemphasized, because it has expanded the scope of freedom as people are free to voice their concerns and contribute into news production. ... We are presently in the age of citizen's journalism facilitated by this convergence. (Personal communication, 26 July 2012)

Although these new technologies that allow public participation are expensive, there is high level of citizen participation in programmes like *Sunrise Daily*, because such media interaction and convergence is essential in the emancipation of the public and in promoting good governance.

6. Conclusions

What do we discern in this type of media flow regarding journalism, communication and democracy today and in the future, and what are the implications for research? Concerning the issue of journalism, communication and democracy there

are many angles to the phenomenon. Obviously, this study has shown that one of the major motivations for these innovative practices has been the need to broaden access to media information and enhance inclusiveness of the hitherto excluded citizens in the public space of the two countries. The use of local language ensures that accessibility to issues making the headlines in the political sphere is enhanced. Newspaper stories are brought to the doorstep of the majority of ordinary people who could not have had direct access to such elite discourse, although this access is limited to those newspapers reviewed and the stories read and discussed. Additionally, the platform gives vent to different and alternative perspectives coming from the different discussants, callers and those who send messages. This is particularly significant because these contributors or participants represent various constituencies within the social structure. In this way, an inclusive and participatory ambience that brings those in authority and ordinary people into direct interaction is created to overturn the hitherto mostly one-dimensional flow of mediated communication from top to down. In Nigeria, in particular, the convergence practice has further enhanced the democratic process as more people are keen to participate in the media debates in order to advance accountability and transparency in society. All these serve the interest of the democracy of these emerging democracies, and if these trends continue good governance and democracy will be consolidated.

However, the study also suggests strongly that the platform could also harm democracy if not 'controlled'. This is particularly in Ghana, which has a more liberal media environment. In Ghana, this citizens' engagement facilitated by the convergence of technology has given room for partisan politics which is often grossly abused. It has also created a platform for incitement to violent and hate speech. Apart from the panellists having such an opportunity, faceless callers have the chance to defame and use unprintable language when contributing to the debates. There have been several instances of these acts, some of which have resulted in court cases in Ghana.

Therefore, in the scheme of democracy, this practice has positive or negative implications depending on how the practice is managed. These findings call to question ethical as well as professionalization issues. We argue that society, made up of government, the media themselves and civic society groups and ordinary citizens, have important roles to play to enhance and harness this participatory opportunity for the development of democracy in both countries.

In terms of research, this new phenomenon is an almost virgin ground for conceptualizations in terms of theory and practice in the context of communication technologies and the continuing transformation of communication and journalistic practices. How do we conceptualize the kind of 'public sphere' informed by this kind of communication flow? What philosophical foundations and methodologies should underpin this practice in the face of the media products generated and how they are received within a developing environment? What is the future of mass communication, journalism and research in such developing societies where professionals have found ways of exploiting the continuous proliferation of information channels in various communication practices? These are issues that we argue should engage researchers in the field.

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Notes

1. Transparency declaration: Preliminary findings from this research have previously been published elsewhere. This article is an extended version of the published preliminary findings.

A total of fourteen interviews were conducted with media practitioners in Ghana and Nigeria. However for ethical reasons the identities of the interviewees are not revealed in this study.

2. Ansah's (n.d.) discussion proceeds from the perspective of 'political talk show' on radio and is based on the notion of 'call-in-shows that emphasise discussion of politicians, elections, and public policy issues' (see Barker 1999: 528). The work does not provide a holistic view of the 'media convergence' as envisaged in this article.

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