



ISSN: 0975-833X

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# THE MASS MEDIA AND MODERN COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE SERVICE OF TRUTH AND PEACE IN THE HUMAN COMMUNITY: OBSTACLES, CHALLENGES AND PRESCRIPTIONS

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 04<sup>th</sup> November, 2013  
Received in revised form  
10<sup>th</sup> December, 2013  
Accepted 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2014  
Published online 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2014

#### Key words:

Media, Technologies, Truth,  
Peace, Human Community,  
Information, Communication,  
Propaganda, Manipulation,  
Techniques.

### ABSTRACT

We are in the age of information explosion in quantity and quality, as communication has been made easier, faster and accessible to almost any place in any part of our planet, which enables cultures, peoples, experts, specialists, ideologies, interact and confront each other. All these are possible thanks to the development in the quality and variety of the modern media and communication technologies. These quick and easier accessibility to information and exchange of ideas through these modern media and communication systems, have proved to be a great source of help to humanity in many dimensions and directions, for example, in the aspect of knowledge generation, transmission, and production, greater interaction and dialogue between peoples and nations and bringing the world and peoples closer to each other. It could also have its negative dimension, for example as a big source of manipulation, exploitation, and misinformation. Hence one of the challenges of our time is to find out how best to use and employ these media technologies for the advantage of man, especially for truth dissemination and to promote harmonious and peaceful mutual co-existence among peoples, nations and cultures. This is the task which this article tries to accomplish.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Man is an information seeking being

Ours today has been branded the information age, the age of communication, the media age. This is simply to highlight the overwhelming influence, which the communication/information technologies are having on the life of individuals and society as a whole. Information and communication are not new phenomena in the human society. In fact, man is essentially an information seeking and communication being which are inextricably bound with his natural desire for knowledge, and information, an imperative of rational nature. Communication is a basic dimension of human existence. Man is endowed with diverse innate faculties for communication and mankind owes much of its success and survival as a specie to this ability as a communicating being. One only needs to analyse the human DNA, in the nucleus of the human chromosome to discover the billions and billions of information stored and the survival of the species is to a large measure dependent on the ability to communicate unhindered and correctly these information. We have been using almost interchangeably the words information and communication not because they are exactly the same, but as a relationship of means to end. The end of communication is to pass a message, to transmit ideas, values, in short, to inform. Broadly

understood, communication is a collective activity embracing all transmission and sharing of ideas, facts and data. (Mc Bride, *et al.* (1980), 283). In fact, basic to the idea of man's social nature is the idea of communication and exchange of information for it is unimaginable to talk of regular relationships, friendship, without a system of communication (especially social communication) and information holding. Communication and exchange of information lead:

*...peoples from instinct to inspiration, through variegated processes and systems of enquiry, and command control. It creates a common pool of ideas, strengthens the feeling of togetherness through exchange of message, and translates thought into action, reflecting every emotion and need, from the humblest tasks of human survival to the supreme manifestation of creativity... (Mc Bride et al. (1980), 5).*

### Media, Communication and information

Throughout history, human beings have sought to improve their ability to receive and assimilate information about their surroundings and at the same time to increase the speed, clarity and variety of their own method or transmission of information. This organization and openness to information have been considered necessary for the survival, development and man's awareness of his social possibilities. This is why man has always tried to devise means of amplifying his natural communicative ability by creating artifacts, tools, instruments which will increase the volume, density, rapidity, reach,

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audience, authority and impact of his communication and information. As man has continued to develop, both in his material and social conditions, mental capacities and technology, so also have his communication and information-gathering tools, and instrument. Communication has graduated from the face to face manner of giving messages to that effected from a long distance. It has grown from being targeted essentially to very limited groups to that affecting the whole community at a time. What we have been alluding to is the gigantic evolution in the means of communications, or the types of media, which have been developed by man. This is the evolution which has gone beyond the rudimentary and poor communication infrastructures of the traditional societies, with very limited range and audience, very slow, and most times with the aim of reinforcing traditions, authority and the strengthening and conservation of the established order. For example, in my traditional Igbo society, examples of such rudimentary communication apparati would include, gongs, drums, musical instruments, traditional flutes (uja); artistic symbols, gunshots etc.

From these very ancient tools, there have emerged in modern times, communication systems of immense variety; from the simple to the sophisticated print and electronic media, complex communication infrastructures and systems of advanced technologies, machines which collect, produce, carry, receive, store and retrieve images. And as Wibur Schram observed:

*what has happened in the last five centuries is that man has developed some remarkable machines that can be inserted into communication processes to duplicate a message almost without limit, and to extend almost indefinitely a person's ability to see and hear and record and thus to share information. (Schram, (1974)).*

As we wonder on the tremendous communication technologies in the modern times, our mind goes immediately to the mass media which can be defined as "all the impersonal means of communication by which visual and/or auditory messages are transmitted directly to audience..." Gould and Kolbs, (1964), 413. It is remarkable that the same unit of information is communicated to very many people at the same time, in an irreversible direction mostly without the possibility of reply by the receiver coupled with great persuasiveness of the information being passed, based on the exalted social authority of the source. (Quald, (1972), 64-65). There is the digital media comprising computers, cell phones, satellites, internet etc, which constitute what has been called the contemporary communication revolution regarded as the wonders of development today. (Dordick and Wang, (1993), 25). Prominent among these modern media which for all intents and purposes are the systems mainly targeted in the theme of this article are the print media like newspapers, the radio, cinema, television, satellite transmissions (dishes) Video discs, Cassettes, mobile phones, computers, etc. The radio, television and communication satellite now enable man to instantaneous communication from most corners of the world. Satellites offer to all in a society or from far away societies, to witness the same events, and exchange full information. Through the radio and television, leaders and opinion makers can pass their message to the public and to the masses. Television news cast, make a powerful impression by enabling viewers to see events

as they actually occur. It disconnects the world from its context and feeds it back to the viewer as an edited, moving collage of images. (Rex Miller, (2004), 59).

Video cassettes have added to quality of viewing material available. A network of interconnected computers makes it possible to hierarchically recognize those who emit messages and those who receive them, with reciprocity of emission. Internet can provide countless sources of information, documentation and education. Films can offer the musical, drama, comics, news and documentary. Digital media presents aural, visual, and textual information through sounds, pictures and text. In essence, thanks to the variety, and quality of the modern media systems, we are today in an era of information explosion. People are literally inundated and overwhelmed by the volume of information at their disposal. There was a time when it required heroes that travel by land and sea for years on end, for some piece of information about places, peoples and culture. But today one can sit anywhere at all on the planet and access the whole human experience on a computer screen. Billions and billions of information are being carried over seas, on the skies, in the air, over the mountains and over inhabitable deserts, thanks to the mysterious sound waves, electromagnetic waves carrying messages from one continent to the other; combined with recordings, films, radio and television, help to form a new culture in which the decisive is not the printed word or the abstract symbol but direct speech and vivid picture. (Haring, (1979) 177).

Giving an example of this modern information and communication glut with respect to the United States, George Will observed:

*America now has saturation journalism... one network or another from dawn until after midnight, all news radio, and radio call in shows, which are broadcasting's equivalent of letters to the editor. Its saturation journalism is like a shark, unsleeping and insatiable ravenous for new subjects to devour, when the media all jump feet first, on cue into the co-ordinated manipulation of public opinion... (Will, (1990), 8).*

Expressing the situation further, Pope John Paul II would say that the communication flow of the new information technologies is capable of "breaking down the traditional barriers of time and space by crossing frontiers and avoiding practically every type of censorship". (John Paul II, (1999)). This is to say that the capacity of passing information, any message, any feeling, over an infinite number of spaces and beyond time lag has been possible through the different instruments and means of communication provided by modern media technologies.

### **Cause of joy and anxiety**

The extraordinary explosion of information through the modern media system and information technologies has become a great cause for joy and also of palpable anxiety given the tremendous power of the media over the life of man and society, and its potentiality as a force for good or evil. The modern communication technologies have drastically changed the ways people communicate, associate and form communities, learn about the world and engage with political

and commercial organizations. While many are optimistic about their marvelous positive chance for humanity, others are apocalyptically pessimistic. According to W. Schram,

*The mass media are potent tools. They put real power in our hands to do what we wish to our society. They can help us destroy that society or vastly improve it. They can help us elevate it or debase it. They can help us to share education and useful information or help us blunt the appetite for such improvement.* (Schram, (1974)).

On the positive side, there is no doubt that the modern media system and information technologies are among the greatest achievements of man, a miracle of human ingenuity. Its rich potentiality for human development and progress in most areas of human life and society are no longer matters of speculation but a reality indeed. For 'ab actu ad posse valet illatio' (from the reality we can conclude to the possibility). The modern media could indeed be a force of integration through its capacity to inform people in general about the goings on within the society and as a veritable channel of interaction, of dialogue among the various segments of society and philosophical, religious and ideological persuasions. The media could then promote "colloquium salutis" between peoples and cultures. They could be used to mobilize people for action for the common good, the promotion of the immediate, and ultimate aims of society and the promotion of solidarity. The educative potentiality of the media is enormous as a veritable access to knowledge or claims to knowledge and of course to truth. The extension and volumes of information citizens receive daily, give an impression of a free access flow of knowledge and truth. Thus they constitute an undeniable source of updating one's knowledge, and offer a constant reference course for those who drink from this fund of apparently free knowledge. So there is no doubt that the modern media technologies and information systems do fulfill its traditional function of informing, educating, and entertaining for presumably the good of man and society, as they inform, warn, encourage and capture the mood of society at any given time. Who will doubt the media as a vehicle of entertainment and exposition, to variety of recreational and leisurely programmes? We think of the diffusion of sports, of drama, of art, of music, etc.

All the above great positive dividends notwithstanding, we equally know that the media in many cases may have proved themselves a great source of destruction and subjugation in the hand of villains, totalitarian states, despots, demagogues, ideologues, and religious bigots. This has become very dangerous today in the midst of this deluge of uncontrollable information explosion which individuals have practically no means of checking. Many today are being rendered useless with ever growing volume of information and at times indigestible messages that keep them confused and in crisis. The worse is that much information does not necessarily guarantee useful relevant information or even the information people really need, or even the correct and true ones. Pope John Paul II has lamented "that most of the media information, offers extensive knowledge but it does not teach values, and when values are disregarded, our very humanity is demeaned and man loses sight of his transcendent dignity". (John Paul, (2002)). The internet for example provides an almost unending

flood of information, much of which passes in a moment. In a culture which feeds on the ephemeral there can be easily the risk of believing that it is facts that matter rather than values.

### **Obstacles and challenges to truth and peace**

Let us now consider two very negative and dangerous ways of employing the modern media which constitute grave obstacles and challenges to the modern media in exercising the mission of truth and peace in the human community.

### **Media propaganda**

The word propaganda was originally not a negative word. For example, we have in the Catholic Church an institute called the "Propaganda Fide", which meant an effort to spread a belief. This is no longer the case today, when the word propaganda has become a pejorative word suggesting dishonesty and immoral way of spreading belief. In the context of this article we will see "media propaganda war" as meaning, the dangerous ill-intentioned, dirty and competitive employment of the power of the media by rival and opposing groups and philosophies in order to outdo, dominate or even diminish the other to further one's selfish and at times illegitimate interest. Such rivalry can pitch one nation against the other; one ideology against the other, one economic system against the other; one government against the other. Media analysts and psychologists have alarmed man to how the media are frequently used as an instrument of mass deceit and dupery. Much of the so called news items and information coming out of the media are seen as messages already treated and packaged to serve certain ideological, cultural, institutional, political or economic interests. The modern media houses and institutions most of the time, have their ideological leaning, and news items and information are bent to serve these parochial interests. Behind the moving machines are a host of faceless beings and institutions, selecting, controlling, rewarding and orientating the reports as they come in from different regions and places. Intelligence agents of some countries do infiltrate the media houses and their structure, and do recruit paid agents who masquerade as media men while they are essentially devoted to distorting information in order to blackmail opponents or sing the glory of their pay masters.

This was the case during the cold war between the communist East and Capitalist west; between the former USSR and the USA. Some countries have propaganda ministries whose work is to send out false information, and misrepresent issues through the media, about some other groups and peoples. The media indeed have shown itself to be a vehicle of ideological brainwashing and indoctrination. To this an author said:

*The mass media brings images of the world and discussions of idea to an optimal public and this must be welcomed. Nor should it be forgotten that the media also provide the idea governing the selection and arrangement of images and the comments formulated there on; not just any idea but the idea or vision of the world of the select few who have the political and economic privilege of disseminating ideas and images to the whole world together with comments...there on. What is of momentous importance are the constraints inherent in the nature itself of the mass media and which turn them into*

*something other than mere vehicles, transforming them into mechanism of thought....* (Debray, (1979)).

We experienced this in our country, during the Nigeria versus Biafra war, as both belligerents perfected their propaganda machine, and process of disinformation. It was equally so, some years ago, when George Bush (Jnr.) the former president of U.S.A. was preparing to attack Iraq, using the powerful media technologies to persuade the American people and the world that he was trying to disarm Saddam Hussein of his weapons of mass destruction. On his own part, Saddam Hussein used the same technologies to tell the Iraq peoples and the Arab world that the United States was coming to steal the Arab oil. The media propaganda war raged on with each side trying to win countries and the public opinion to their side. In the realm of the economy, propaganda right or wrong is not ruled out. We have seen how the Western media have succeeded in making capitalism the legitimate world economic system as they try to demonize any other system. It was equally the same with the former communist block. The growing sophistication has been evident in election campaigns where the media are daily used to brainwash and indoctrinate people about non-existent achievements and virtues of candidates. Recently, the tobacco companies in the U.S.A employed the modern media technologies and experts and advertisements to portray smoking as glamorous and healthful and not as the threat to public health as opponents claimed. Not long ago, the U.S.A was engaged in polishing and laundering her image in Muslim countries through media propaganda adverts portraying the religious tolerance and general well being which Muslims enjoy in the U.S.A. This was aimed at counteracting the widespread views in Muslim countries that America hates Muslims, propagated by Anti-America propagandists in those countries. One grievous consequence to be drawn from the media propaganda wars among ideologies, countries, and cultures, is the suggestion that modern media systems have become an instrument of insidious slavery and domination under the forms of mental and ideological colonization and imperialism, for he who controls the airwaves control the entire society, the entire culture, the entire nation, the entire continent, the entire humanity. Thus paradoxically, the more information modern man claims to have through the modern media systems, the more danger, he faces of being more ignorant and more irrational as he is daily swallowing, and assimilating many untested information, uninvestigated data and unfounded rumours; feeding on the delicacies of lies prepared by invisible hands. For as an author observed, if access to the media is confined to the politically or culturally dominant groups, the economically and ideologically powerful, whether at the national and international level, there is a grave risk of imposing patterns in conflict with the values of ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.

From the above exposition on the media propaganda war, we can summarily say that this is aimed at 'promoting the propagandists' prestige, power and glory; at demonizing or humiliating the competing rival, at distorting facts, at domination and enhancing the propagandists policies and ideology. Propaganda encourage this by agitating the emotions, by exploiting insecurities, by capitalizing on the ambiguity of languages and by bending rules of logic...' (National Post, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2000, 5).

## **Information manipulation**

On looking at the various forms of propaganda techniques one discovers that information manipulation is very central. Information manipulation covers all acts by media practitioners of dishing out to the audience deliberately doctored, falsified and distorted information, or news items aimed at misinforming, deceiving, and misrepresenting issues or events. It can at times mean giving out correct information for sinister motives. One sees then that information manipulation could come from the source, channel, the presentation, the content, the destination, the timing, and the goal of the information. The source will determine whether the information is reliable or not, publishable or not, happened or contrived, factual or rumour. The channel can affect the information like the effectiveness of the message; can magnify it, affect its tonality, extension and intensity and hence its perception for better or for worse. In other words the means of transmitting a culture, influences and transforms it. There is "message" exercised by the media on the modes of apprehending and perceiving the world and realities. The presentation concerns, the choice of language and words, the manner of expressions, gestures, the voice.

The content concerns the actual message being passed. Is it a lie, half-truth, a bundle of inaccuracies? The destination concerns the receiver of the information or message, the audience, the possible psychological and moral impact. Are they emotionally capable of receiving such information? The Timing and Situation – Is the information appropriate at the time? Is the situation auspicious for it? Is it too late? Is it overtaken, is it relevant? The goal – for what purposive is the information being given out? Is it significant, is it news worthy? Identifying some of the manipulation techniques Bernard Haring said:

*plain falsification is evident, while the method of partial information, over-emphasis on one aspect while ignoring important factors, distorting the proportion, and so on are not so easily discovered. Very frequently, the trouble lies with manipulated manipulators who are unaware that they are being manipulated or that they are manipulating others.* (Haring, (1979), 180).

These factors mentioned above are necessary to determine when an information is being manipulated and whether the issues, events are being misrepresented or even under-represented. In the light of the above let us now explain some of these dirty techniques used to manipulate information by the media.

## **Techniques of media information manipulation and falsification**

### **Outright lies and deliberate falsehood**

This is the worst form of information manipulation, and it vitiates all authentic communication. In short, this is an attempt to make what is not, to become and what is, to be not. Indeed the "mother" of all deceit. Unfortunately this happens in our media often and has been used to poison opinions against people's cultures and nations. We see such lies in some

sections of Western media about Africa in order to legitimate some of their government policies on Africa. It was the Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels who said that lies so often repeated turn into "truth". And this has been the Machiavellian attitude of most dangerous men in history. The Nigerian media experience especially the official media exhibit these same dissemination of half-truth. We see these come out of the propaganda units of state governments. There is no doubt that information is easily corrupted in the dissemination of half-truths and falsehood.

### **Eclipse of alternative or opposing viewpoints**

Information is manipulated when alternative viewpoints on an issue in society are shut out, and eclipsed, while creating a semblance of unanimity. At times minority viewpoints of the powerful are made the general viewpoint and therefore foisted on the whole society, because of their control of the media. We notice how the official media in countries shuts out the opinions of the opposition parties and politicians, while that of the ruling parties are made headline news items in television and in official media outlets.

### **Abuse of language**

There is a great power in words and demagogues and sophists will testify to that. We remember how the ancient Greek sophists claimed that they could turn black white and white black. Thus the way issues and information are expressed; the choice of words can have great impact on the viewers or listeners. It could distort, exaggerate or misrepresent or even under-represent an issue. People could purposely choose words that could trigger the reaction they want to create, like turning good news into bad news; infusing meaning which was not originally there. This could also happen when vague and ambiguous language or words are deliberately used which are susceptible to various interpretations. Of similar effect is the use of hyperboles and tendencies towards overgeneralization and the use of violent and emotionally charged words. In Nigeria here, we saw how the official media paint opposition voices as enemies of democracy; and contrary views to official positions are regarded as unpatriotic.

### **Manner of presentation**

It is related to the abuse of language but goes beyond it, for example, the facial expressions, the gestures, serious or otherwise. The presentation can slant the information or distort it. This always happens "when facts are presented in such a way as to cause misinterpretation by implication, where the implicit conclusions drawn by the audience are favorable to particular interests". (Mac Bride, *et al.* (1980), 158). Information could also be manipulated through name calling and labeling. Labels are invented and placed on people from which all information about or from them are interpreted. This can easily be seen in the way in which leaders who do not share ideological position of some powerful countries are portrayed and labeled by the media in such countries. Such labels could include; "warlords", "dictators", "Isolated", "outcast in the international community", "war monger" etc. Talking of labeling, a commentary in the National Post said:

*there seems to be a nearly endless supply of nasty words that promote and exploit hatred towards particular racial, ethnic, or religious groups. The name-caller hopes that the label will stick. If people reject the person or the idea on the basis of the normative label, instead of weighing the evidence for themselves, the name-callers strategy has worked".* (National Post, (2000), 5).

For example, in Nigeria, a political party, P.D.P, had her national convention to nominate their presidential candidate some years ago, during the process the supporters of one of the candidates Obasanjo, were busy calling their opponent Ekwueme and his supporters Biafrans as a strategy to create an anti-Ekwueme feeling in other Nigerians, because Biafra made a secessionist attempt from Nigeria. A further technique of information manipulation through the manner of presentation is making appeal to emotions, appealing to prejudices and playing on fear and insecurity. This is the normal practice of xenophobists. This happens when new items are presented with a background of past events that have some emotional mark on people lives. Emotion can cloud right reasoning, factual claims and logic or arguments.

### **Focusing on the negative and the trivial**

At times, information manipulation can take the form of focusing not on the general picture but on simply the negative patches, and on the inconsequential elements. It could even be on playing on the differences while neglecting the similarities or the common elements. Particular views or half-truths may be presented as the whole truth. The media are accused of concentrating and bringing to the knowledge of the greater public mostly the darkside of human nature, the ugly side of society and scandalous examples of riotous living which are considered to be news-worthy, possibly because it will attract more economic patronage, and more viewer rating. Critics have argued for "the need to place events and issues on a broader context thereby creating awareness and interest and to ensure their accurate presentation, as objectively as possible... they criticize, the widely held concepts of news, values, for its excessive stress, on the departure from the normal and lack of attention to positive news". (Mac Bride, *et al.* (1980), 158).

Equally, the media concentrates on the trivial to the neglect of the essential. In a dialogue with journalists a onetime Adviser to President Carter, Mr. Brzezinski was quoted as saying,

*...I will be very curious to see what comes out of this luncheon. It is on the record. My guess is that there will be more emphasis given to the one, or two hard news items in it...such as who might be going to Vienna. Or some response to a question than to the basic theme that I tried to present to you....* (Mac Bride, *et al.* (1980), 158).

### **Selective reporting and decontextualization of information**

This technique of information manipulation follows directly from the last one. The media can focus attention on some events, images and not others, depending on the goal, they want to achieve, and how they want the audience to be affected. This is clear when raw images of tragedies, dead bodies and violent scenes are beamed through our sitting rooms

and bedrooms. At times they are used to excite compassion or vengeance. Few years ago, Los Angeles was nearly burnt down when a video camera caught some white police men beating mercilessly a black man. When this brutal beating was shown on the television, the blacks went on the war path. The damage was colossal. At times the images are played over and over again to realize maximum impact. In this respect, Winston Churchill writing about the World War I said: "...only a signal is needed to transform multitudes of peaceful peasants and workmen into the mighty hosts which will tear each other to pieces". (National Post, (2000), 5).

What is presented, how it is presented, when it is presented, the order it is presented, make manipulations very possible. A dangerous manipulation is also realized when issues and information are given without context or thrown on the people without commentaries. How many times here in Nigeria, have public officers, prominent politicians and leaders protested that their statements made in certain situations are published by the media and removed out of context to present the alleged speakers in bad light or to demonize them. To be included here is the tendency of media houses to focus on the sensational and explosive; or placement of explosive information on places or pages where it will make more impact, command more respectability, or assume more significance than it ought to (e.g. as when a small news item is given a frontline position or form a banner headline in newspapers). Lamenting on the negative image of selective reporting of the media on Africa, Anver Vesi said:

*We in the media do not focus sufficiently on the wonderful heroic work by millions of Africans to help and support each other. We do not talk sufficiently about the enormous sacrifices being made by mothers and fathers to educate their children. We do not mention the gruelling hours they work to scrape together the money they need to buy medicines and clothes for their children or the children of their neighbours or just any children.... It is rubbish to say that Africans are not doing their level best to help those in need. But at this time in the continent's history, they just don't have enough for the task before them.* (Vesi, (2005), 14).

Even timing of an information can be a manipulation tactic. Is an event or issue given prime time or a time when no one is paying attention. At times information that ordinarily are not important are published because of some events that make it assume an unmerited status.

### **Insidious advertisements**

Some media advertisements could be a form of information manipulation. Advertising can betray its role as a source of information by misrepresentation and by withholding relevant facts. The glaring cases was the way the Tobacco, used the media to glamorize the smoking of cigarette, while deliberately hiding the negative consequences from the smokers. Some time too, the information function of media can be subverted by advertisers' pressure upon publications or programmes, not to treat questions that might prove embarrassing or inconvenient. Pontifical Council for Social Communication, 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb., 1997. From all we have said, we can now see that media information manipulation is a very serious issue for man and society at

large, given the enormous influence of the media, as a pervasive powerful force shaping attitudes and behavior in today's world. And as we have seen, what the media offer us, the information we receive, and exposed to, have a dramatic influence on how we see our world, and other people, how life is itself perceived, the value system and the ways of choosing and behaving. They can condition our mental sets, and leads to the invidious stereotyping of particular groups that place them in disadvantages in relation to others. Hence the necessity of ensuring, that the media system offer us authentic and helpful information.

### **Consequences of media propaganda war and information manipulation for peace and truth in the human community**

In the culture of media propaganda war and information manipulation, truth and the Human person are the first casualties and the entire human society is thrown into a perilous situation. When lies are enthroned as the basis of human and social relationship, then all that makes for authentic and salutary relationships are completely undermined; the whole fabric of human society will collapse, and when these happen, the Hobbesian state of nature is the immediate consequence – the war of all against all, life being nasty, brutish and short. This in some way can be said to be the fate of global society today inspite of all the façade, deception and pretensions, which we are calling "International Community" or "the global village".

Trust is built in the idea of truth as in the idea of peace and hence the virtue of truth telling is important in the idea of man's social nature, because social life and cohesion will evaporate in the absence of trust. Hence truth telling is imperative for media practitioners and users because without truthfulness, all social communication and dialogue will breakdown, social mistrust will increase. Basic to social life is social exchange, social discourse and dialogue which are possible only on the basis of truth and trust. Infact our world today is basically conflictual, a situation of one culture against culture, religion against religion, race against race; ideology against ideology, unbridled quest for domination, for control and for advantage. And to some degree, media propaganda war and information manipulation are contributory to the situation because they administer falsehood, half truths and play on man's negative and base instincts: selfishness, bias and hostility towards others. By transmitting lies, misusing language, negative labeling, and "imaging", name calling, biased focusing, playing on prejudices, fear, our media system poison and pollute the human society at all levels, and become an ugly instrument of incitement, mass hysteria, uncontrollable out burst of raw and aggressive emotions, infusion and effusion of hatred, and distrust. Thus reuniting all the ingredients, which make for instability and culture of distrust and suspicion. These had naturally led to the worst cases of racism, incomprehension, stereotypism, and lack of fellow - feeling. The situation becomes more explosive when it is added to the media's power of mobilization and massification. By mobilization is its ability to reach at many people at the same time, and to show events and images in audio-visual forms, which can condition people to react the same way. Worse still, when it is for wrong and dangerous ends, as media propaganda and information manipulation are generally disposed to.

When all sense the same image, hear the same information (blackmail, lies) have the same ideas (wrong ones); see the same personalities like (demagogues, fundamentalists and negative Role models) focusing on the same frivolities (the negative, the violent, the base) then there is the danger of massification, where people lose their individuality and become objects for manipulation. In such a situation individuals lose their authentic freedom and the right environment for enlightened choice. This paralyses thought, prevent clear thinking and discernment and condition individuals to act in mass. This is how most of our wars are bred and nourished, ethnic and civil wars are fanned; ethnic cleansing, genocide, and many other crimes against humanity which plague our world today are promoted. Hence the dangerous state of our world today. Peace at any level can only thrive on the basis of respect for the dignity of the human person; respect for the human right, justice, honesty, fairness, mutual respect and tolerance, human solidarity and the sense of decency, factors indispensable for human and social development. And these are exactly what media propaganda and information manipulation target and destroy, erode and corrode.

### **Modern media technologies in the mission of truth and peace in the human community**

As we have severally observed in the course of this write up, the modern media system is a great force and an enormous potential for good or evil. As an international commission for the study of communication problems, set up by the UNESCO in 1976 said:

*Communication can be an instrument of power, a revolutionary weapon, a commercial product or a means of education; it can serve the ends of either liberation or of oppression, of either the growth of the individual personality or drilling of human beings into conformity. Each society must choose the best way to approach the task facing all of us and to find the means to overcome the material, social and political constraints that impede progress.*

The media propaganda war and information manipulation have shown us its dangerous potentiality for evil, for mutual and social destruction, the erosion of authentic cultural and social values and peaceful co-existence, yet the media is a great achievement of man's ingenuity and creativity and an indispensable tool for global peace for human and social development, it its power to form, and to inform, for mobilization and spreading information and knowledge if well harnessed and employed. The power of the media is further echoed by Pope John Paul II, in his *Aetatis Novae*, instruction written to mark the 25 years of *Communio et Progressio* as he wrote:

*The power of the media extends to defining not only what people will think but even what they will think about. Reality for many is what the media recognize as real. What the media do not acknowledge seems of little importance. Thus de facto silence can be imposed on individuals and groups who the media ignore..."*

And he, who controls the media, controls a large segment of the population in any nation and controls the direction of

events of the national and international levels. Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, thinkers and scholars have grappled with the ethical responsibility that go along with opportunities that human beings have to communicate. Griffin, (2006). As we have seen, communication can be used for the good of individuals and communities and can also be used to exploit manipulate, corrupt and dominate, hence, the need to raise the ethical and perhaps epistemological questions of whether a particular act or form of communication contributes to authentic human development and helps individuals and communities to attain, peaceful and truthful co-existence. (Foley, (2002); Yina, (2009)).

The onus then lies on man. This onus falls on all, the media monguls (barons) and practitioners, the political authorities and policy makers and the media users. The owners and media practitioners must know the ethical and social implications of their professions and their duty and social responsibility in this regard. The political authorities have a duty to protect society from the dangerous practices of some media establishments and practitioners. The media users must be conscientized on how to get the best from the media. This has become more urgent in this era of information glut and explosion. In all cases, peace and the right use of the media demand that all information must be determined by some basic imperatives of truth, justice and mutual co-existence. Pope John Paul II, expresses it clearly when he said that "the mass media must respond to the culture of dialogue, participation, solidarity and reconciliation without which peace cannot flourish". John Paul II, (2002); Vatican II, *Inter Mirifica*, (1963). Thus if the media has to be an agent for peace, and human social development it must also promote these basic values of these, in its policies, and in the selection of what to transmit, how to transmit it and when to transmit it and to whom. These basic ingredients to peace could further be reduced to Justice and forgiveness. "Justice...because there cannot be true peace without respect for the dignity of person and peoples, respect for the rights and duties of each person...but forgiveness too because human justice is subject to frailty and to the pressures of individual and groups egoism". (John Paul II, (2002); L'Osservatore Roman, (2002), 5). On the part of media barons and practitioners, this involves the adoption of certain attitudes and moral and epistemic dispositions:

### **A dispassionate presentation of events and information; the need for objectivity in reporting**

This is aimed at seeking for the truth. For the proper "exercise of the right to information demands that the content of what is communicated be true and within the limits set by justice and charity, complete...included here is the obligation to avoid a manipulation of truth for any reason". (John Paul II, (1987), 5). Truth and freedom and moral responsibility are inseparable. The exhortation by the Catholic Bishop conference of England and Wales are in order here.

*Journalists and their editors need constant reminding of the requirements to separate the reporting of fact from the presentation of speculation and comment, the need for fairness in handling allegations damaging to individuals and above all of a general sense of moral responsibility for the good of society... (1996).*

For the journalist and media communicators, their freedom and responsibility are indivisible. Freedom without responsibility invites distortion and abuses. The concept of freedom and responsibility necessarily includes a concern for professional ethics, demanding an equitable approach to events, situations or processes with due attention to their diverse aspects. Commenting further on the role of the media, in true communication of facts and events, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace said:

*...in communicating information, therefore, the primary duty is truth but a corollary of this is that the right to communicate the truth is not unconditional. The right must be guided by charity because it is not an end itself, the private life, and reputation of people must be respected as must, the common good. (Haring, (1979), 40).*

### **The need for peaceful language and language of peace**

If the media must promote peace, it must also employ the language of peace i.e. abhor all languages of violence and code words which give wrong signals.

### **The exercise of professional conscience and moral habit of prudence**

Journalists, and media practitioners should be animated by the highest sense of professionalism and nobility of intentions in promoting sound communication and not mortgage their professional conscience and the common good for merely mercenary and pecuniary interests. The self respect of journalists, their integrity and inner drive to turn out work of high quality are of paramount importance. "It is this level of professional dedication, making for responsibility that should be fostered by new media and journalist organizations". Prudence is always the mother of all virtues, which was classically seen by Aristotle as the pursuit of the mean, avoiding excesses and deficiency. This implies that media practitioners should exercise self-restraint and self-censorship in their work. The right to information and the right to inform, and the freedom of expression cannot include the freedom to destroy, to destabilize or to set whole societies aflame.

*Discretion must guide all communication by words, gestures and deeds, for only thus can we truly share knowledge and search the truth that bridges all differences closes gaps, unmask hypocrisy, heals wounds, binds the members of the mystical body....Discretion is the sensibility of true love in the person dedicated to truth and truthful communication. (Haring, (1979), 40).*

It is this quality of professional conscience, freedom and discretion that Mikhail Gorbachev the former president of the former soviet union was emphasizing when he outlined the place of the mass media and press in his programme of *glasnost* (openness) and *Perestroika* (restructuring) for the country at his time. Referring to the role of the mass media and press in promoting various opinions and as a source of social criticism. He declared:

*Criticism is first and foremost responsibility and the sharper the criticism, the more responsible it should be... Criticism*

*should be based on the truth and this depends on the conscience of the Author and the editor on his sense of responsibility for the people. (Gorbachev, (1987), 79).*

Surely, sense of responsibility will make the practitioners of the media and communication systems to realize that the media and information are for man and not man for communication technology. Hence the communication industries and the media must go beyond mere technicity, functionalism, pragmatism, and profiteering to a consciousness of the impact of their work on the human person and human good. The moral habit of prudence demands that media practice and the use must not be abstracted from the unique conditions and situations of various peoples and cultures, their capacity to handle certain information, their fragility, and vulnerability. This perhaps was the point Gorbachev was making when he said: "I want to emphasize that the press should unite and mobilize people rather than disuniting them and generating offence and a lack of confidence. Renewal of society also means striving to assert the dignity of man, his elevation and his honour..." (Gorbachev, (1998)).

### **Balancing parochial interest with common good**

The language we often hear in this individualistic and market-oriented world are "economic interest" "national interest" "individual good". Under the canopy of these "so called parochial interest", a lot of evil and crimes are perpetrated. These also determine a lot of the manipulation that are in the media. However, media practitioners and owners should also know that there are things like "human interest", "common interest" and "common good" or the "moral good". Hence while media houses as economic enterprises have a right to pursue their economic interest, these should not be pursued to the detriment of the common good, or even the moral good. The general social and global peace and human interest should not be damaged for mere parochial interests masquerading as "national interest" or "economic interest".

To this effect, the Bishops of England and Wales, observed:

*we are concerned about the dangerous consequences for the common good when market forces in the mass media are pushed to their logical conclusion, a process of which we see some evidence. Contrary to the optimistic expectations of the beneficial fruits of competition that were made by Adam Smith, here are signs that it is a characteristic principle of newspaper economics that bad journalism will drive out good.*

### **Need for reflection and discretion by users**

On the part of users, there is need for discernment in what they hear and see. Hence the importance of evidence and greater sensitization by the government, social groups and consumer advocates on the masses, on the various mechanisms of manipulation and propaganda by the media houses. This is to underline the fact that media users must be critical users, critical listeners and critical viewers; to be able to see beyond the surface and beyond mere language and beyond the glamorous, in order to overcome credulity and suggestibility. And as Bernard Haring observed "many people live constantly in a condition of over information. They expose themselves so

long, so frequently and so uncritically to the message of the media that they become confused and end up in a state of passivity". (Haring, (1979), 170). It is necessary to create an overall news awareness on the part of users, who must be put in a position where they can refuse their condition as passive receivers of the message that flood their homes, involving their families. This calls for users to develop a sense of deep reflection and critical spirit, and sound judgment, i.e. development in creative freedom, in the reception of the offering of the mass media. On this Pope John Paul II advised:

*...Human beings have a vital need for time and inner quiet to ponder and examine life and its mysteries, and to grow gradually into a mature dominion of themselves and of the world around them. Understanding and wisdom are the fruit of contemplative eye upon the world, and do not come from a mere accumulation of facts, no matter how interesting they are, the result of an insight which penetrated the deeper meaning of things in relation to one another and the whole reality. (John Paul II, (2002)).*

With reflection is the need for the users to display selective discretion which is the judicious selection of reading, programmes, motion pictures, and television offerings which fosters psychic, moral, and religious development and shun all that jeopardizes them. The selective discretion then implies the need for users to practice moderation and discipline.

### Public vigilance

Public authorities and leaders, must be aware of their grave responsibilities to safeguard the common good, and to protect the weak and poor of the society against any destructive influences, including that of the media. This means that national commissions, media councils, ethical boards, bodies with whatever nomenclature charged with the regulation and monitoring of media practices and promotion of sound communication in societies should realize that their task is directly linked with human development and promotion and therefore should be held with utmost dedication and sincerity and should not become mere pawns in the hand of politicians and exploitative accomplices of communication barons and governments. Without playing the role of inquisitor, or manipulator themselves, legitimate public authority, must intervene when the public good is threatened, and peace is being compromised to control the excesses of the media houses especially through dialogue or through just legislations. Our juridical systems must be courageous, effective and fair to ensure justice, as a place where individuals and groups whose rights have been violated by media abuses like libels, character assassination, innuendoes, and falsehood, could recourse for justice and hold the culprits to serious accountability. By this the courts will serve as serious deterrents to media manipulations. (Tubbs and Moss, (2008)). The citizens themselves the consumers of information can also help through moral pressure to improve the quality of media practice and communication in society. This means that the citizens should be more alive to their rights and be courageous to protest and denounce the misuses and abuses of the public media funded by the tax-payers money. In a document "Ethics in Advertising" by the "Pontifical Council for Social Communication," public authorities were called upon to

promulgate laws and oversee their application to ensure that public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered through misuse of the media. Such laws must also involve the contribution of representatives of consumer groups, ethicists, and church and religious groups.

### Conclusion

Our discussion so far has demonstrated that modern media technologies are wonderful achievements of man's creative ingenuity with a great potentiality for being a vehicle for truthful human and inter-cultural communication, dialogue and understanding for the human family, the fruit of which is peace. It is equally true that, its abuses, as in cases of media propaganda and information manipulation are dangerous activities that have already had their devastating blow on humanity in modern history, in almost all parts of the world and should never go unchallenged if there is going to be global peace, and authentic human and social development. Perhaps there is no better way of recapitulating our ideas in this essay than in these noble words of Pope John Paul II, to Mr. Paolo Scandaletter, President Catholic Union of Italian Press:

*it should be stressed that in large strata of today society, there is a strong desire for good which is not always adequately acknowledged in news papers and radio-television, news bulletins, where the parameters for evaluating events are often marked by commercial rather than by social criteria. There is a tendency to favour 'what hits the headlines' what is 'sensational' instead of what would help people understand world events better. The danger is the distortion of truth. To prevent this, it is urgent that Christians (I add all peoples) involved in the information sector, work together with all people of good will for greater respect for the truth, by stressing themes such as peace, honesty, life, the family and by not giving excessive importance to the negative facts, they can help establish a new humanism that opens the doors of hope. (L'Osservatore Romano, Oct., 1999, 4).*

When this is done, the mass media and communication technologies will realize their enormous capacity and mission of fostering connectedness, communion and understanding between individuals and communities, sharing ideas and opinion; maintaining positive contact across distances, fostering research dissemination of knowledge by bringing researchers more closely through easier access to documents, sources, scientific discoveries, through more collaborative effort from different locations, thereby contributing to social progress. (Cf. Benedict xvi, (2009)).

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