

Emergence and Development of Earliest Newspapers in Nigeria:

A Historiography

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Abstract

This study investigated what prompted the establishment of Nigeria's earliest newspapers: *Iwe Irohin...*, *Unwana Efik*, *Obukpong Efik* and commercial printing presses in mid 1840s, 1850s and 1880s by two Christian Missions pioneered by Rev. Henry Townsend (CMS Abeokuta) and Rev. Hope Waddell (Presbyterian Scottish Mission, Calabar)

This study sought to identify their motives for establishing commercial printing presses and their newspapers. It sought how the earliest newspapers were produced, their involvement in the introduction and propagation of Christianity, the role of the newspapers in the religious campaigns and conversion of the natives leading to their adoption of Christianity.

The study ascertained whether the newspapers were dominant in the religious propagation or if other communication mechanisms were employed by the missionaries delivering religious messages to converts.

Historical method, In-depth interview method and Primary/Secondary sources were employed in this study for data collection using purposive sampling technique. The small samples were drawn from the two Christian Missions under study, the CMS and the Presbyterian. The samples size of one most senior religious Minister was picked in each Mission.

Data were analyzed using Discourse Analysis method which, Casell and Symon, (2004) defined as a method that examines how individuals actively use language to explain themselves, their relationships and the world in general. The two scholars corroborate Fairclough's (1992) assertion that discourse constitutes the identity of individuals, the relationship between individuals and the ideological system that exists in society.

Findings reveal that Missionaries established the printing presses and the newspapers mainly for strengthening the promotion of Christianity, spreading information, education and literacy and providing forum for their political participation in local community politics.

Findings also reveal the crudity of earliest newspaper production, their editorial policies and their schedules of news reportage, thus, filling some gaps in previous publications and our knowledge on how earliest newspapers evolved; their political biases, and their role in introducing Christianity, education and western civilization to the two communities.

Key Words: Earliest newspapers, Printing Presses, Diffusion, Missionaries, Religious Campaigns.

1. Background

Histories of the advent of earliest Nigerian newspapers and other media communication mechanisms adopted by two early foreign religious missionaries, Rev. Henry Townsend and Rev. Hope Waddell, in the introduction, diffusion, propagation and adoption of Christianity in Nigeria, have been given scholarly attention in many literary publications. A number of Nigerian Scholars have researched into the history of the country's press and their usefulness in the Christian missions' evangelism leading to upliftment of the people's literacy level; however they left some gaps in our knowledge about the Missionaries' prompts in establishing printing presses and publishing newspapers and other educational materials at the early state of their evangelism.

Evolution of Christianity resulting in planting Christian doctrines in some Southern parts of Nigeria from 1840s has been explained as the main factor responsible for changing the indigenous traditional and cultural religion to western cultural civilization, leading to introduction of early newspaper journalism and the printing presses, a precursor to early newspaper publications.

The Missionaries, Rev. Townsend, established the Church Missions Society (CMS) at Abeokuta in 1846, while Rev. Hope Waddell launched the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, at Duke Town, Calabar also in 1846. The two religious expeditions were synchronous and were similar in their ideologies.

Many scholars had published the parts played by Christian religion and the missionaries in the development of the earliest printing presses and the earliest newspapers, but with greater emphasis on Rev. Townsend's "Iwe Irohin..." while little attention is seen to have been given to Rev. Hope Waddell's pioneering initiatives in his religious and educational publications and on the roles of the two Efik language newspapers: "Unwana Efik" and "Obukpong Efik" belonging to the Presbyterian mission. Their establishments in 1885/86 were credited to Rev. Hope Waddell. Information on the two newspapers has been scanty in previous scholarly works, thus creating some gaps in our knowledge about how the earliest newspapers evolved with their objectives, and their editorial philosophies.

2. Problem Statement

Studies and scholarly publications on earliest Nigerian newspapers, such as those authored by some prominent scholars: Ajayi (1965), Coker (1968), Omu (1978), Akinfeleye (1986), Ajibade (2003,2010), Alabi (2003), made references to the role of the Presbyterian Mission in establishing two local newspapers, 1885 and 1886, but provided little information on them, whereas they credited Rev. Hope Waddell with pioneering the first printing press, (1846) and Rev. Townsend with the first newspaper, "Iwe Irohin"... (1859).

Their literatures on what prompted the advent of the newspapers and printing presses; the extent of their involvement in the religious campaigns and diffusion of messages; the editorial policy and production method of the newspapers; type of printing machines used by the missionaries and the news reportage schedule of the newspapers, are some of the vacua which are devoid of more knowledge and which this study aspires to fill. It also would ascertain whether the Missions' newspapers were combined with other communication channels in the campaigns.

3. Research Questions

The following five research questions were formulated from which interview questions for the respondents emerged guiding the study and eliciting appropriate responses.

1. Why did the Missionaries consider it important for their Missions to own and establish printing presses at the time they did?
2. What necessitated the establishment of the earliest newspapers; in what way did the newspapers serve the Missions' objectives?

3. At what stage of their evangelism were the newspapers introduced into the religious campaigns? With what technical methods were the newspapers produced? What types of printing machines were they?
4. Were there other communication channels, beside the newspapers, that were adopted in the campaigns for spreading of the gospel, and for educating the subjects?
5. Which was the dominant communication mode used by missionaries in preaching and delivering evangelical messages, ideas and new attitudes to the people?

4. Method, Sample Size and Data Collection

The study adopted historical method, (Historiography), In-depth interview survey as well as gathering data from primary and secondary sources. The population of this study consists of numerous denominational branches and parishes of the CMS and Presbyterian Missions all over Nigeria, but only two dioceses were picked, purposively. This is because of their similarity in evangelical communication patterns, and in their printing press and newspaper establishment phenomena. The two missions were also synchronistic in their evangelical characteristics.

5. Significance of the Study

The study, apart from reinforcing and filling gaps in existing knowledge about the earliest newspapers, findings will be useful, significantly, to general readers, professionals in mass communication, academics, religious institutions, government, non-governmental and commercial organizations in designing, and transmitting their messages to large audiences and promoting social, political and cultural changes in their environment .

The study would expose major, effective communication methods used by the early missionaries to achieve success in their missions, since it was assumed that their communicative acts were majorly responsible for their people's adoption of new religious behaviours different from the previous beliefs.

6. Theoretical Foundation

In order to provide a sound foundation for this study, it is anchored on some of the Step-Flow Communication Theories.

Two Step Flow and Multi-Step Flow (Lazarsfeld + Katz (1940s), (1955)

Diffusion of Innovation Theory: (Lazarsfeld, Berelson + Gaudet (1944)

Esimokha (2014) asserted that media effect theories refer to the ways in which mass media and media culture affect how audience think and behave.

Thus, media effects are typically defined as social and psychological responses occurring in individuals, dyads, small groups, a result of exposure to or processing of or otherwise acting on media messages, Esimokha (2014).

7. Method of Data Analysis

The study employs 'Discourse Analysis' method for analyzing data generated from in-depth interviews. The interview questions as answered by the respondents and data from primary and secondary sources are analysed in linguistic construction.

Discourse Analysis has been defined as a method that examines how individuals actively use language to explain themselves, their relationships and the world in general (Cassell and Symon,2004).

The two scholars corroborate Fairclough's (1992) assertion that discourse constitutes the identity of individuals, the relationships between individuals and the ideological systems that exist in society. This assertion according to him implies that discourse is concerned with how social actions, social practices, social relations, identity of bodies of knowledge are shaped by language.

8. Findings

Data Analysis from primary/secondary sources and from in-depth interview surveys based on the research questions showed that out of dissatisfaction with the local interpreters' mutilations of their messages to their congregations, the missionaries learnt the native language to enable them communicate directly with their audiences; that they later set up their printing presses, first for purposes of publishing educational and religious publications for both religious and gospel teachings and for vocational training of native apprentices and to raise the people's literacy level, and later to print the earliest newspapers. In the case of Rev. Townsend, his newspaper, *Iwe Irohin...* published in December 1859 began to appear 12 years after the commencement of his Abeokuta Mission. The newspaper though was used to a greater extent to provide information needs of the people and to deride slave trade, it was designed complementing the interpersonal communication channels already established with the

community through Kings and the Chiefs. by the missionaries. At the collapse of the newspaper in 1867, after eight years of regular appearance, their evangelism continued without the newspaper.

In the case of Rev. Hope Waddell of the Calabar Mission, he started his evangelism with his printed religious literatures in 1846 and used his printing press to the maximum in producing religious books and educational books for the people's learning process. The two newspapers *Unwana Efik* and *Obukpong Efik* were found to have been established in 1885 and 1886 respectively long after Rev. Hope Waddell had retired from missionary work, thus correcting previously held notions that they were founded, edited and published by him. Findings reveal that he had quit the service of the Mission in 1858.

Findings further reveal that the two newspapers collapsed within few months of irregular appearance hence it has been assumed that they contributed little to the development and growth of the Calabar mission. Moreover, the Mission began its evangelism in 1846 while the newspapers were established forty years after. The Presbyterians were found to have relied heavily on printed matters, such as books, pamphlets, booklets and interpersonal channels etc for delivering religious and educational training to the people.

However, in the case of CMS Abeokuta Mission, findings reveal that two of the factors necessitating the establishment and success of *Iwe Irohin...* were the high literacy level and generation of political opinions in the Egba and Lagos Colony politics by Rev. Townsend and the CMS Mission.

This is apart from using the newspaper for religious promotion and publicity, and inculcating the habit of getting the people to read, i.e, "to beget the habit of seeking information by reading..." Townsend (1887)

Comparatively, the two Missions' printing presses were discovered, to be manually operated machines, whose printed matters were set by hand on a wooden frame; that they were both flatbed, hand-fed manually operated machines which printed one page at a time. It was also found that they had liberal editorial policies which allowed general news coverage giving the people both African and European news and advertisement information. The *Iwe Irohin...* was bilingual in its editorial arrangement (Yoruba and English) while *Obukpong Efik* and *Unwana Efik* published in Efik language, only.

9. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

From the findings, the study concluded that both *Iwe Irohin...* (1859), *Unwana Efik and Obukpong Efik* (1885 and 1886) in Calabar used the same printing method of manually operated, hand-fed press of the "Adana" brand; that *Iwe Irohin...* was established to complement the already established interpersonal communication channels and formal religious and educational teachings; that the newspaper, though covered religious and general news, became a political medium in the hand of Rev. Townsend, for his political maneuverings in Egba and Lagos Colony politics, and a forum to ventilate public opinion against colonial administration in Lagos and supportive of Abeokuta interests.

In the case of the Presbyterian Church Mission, Calabar, the study concluded that the two Efik language newspapers were published 40 years after the commencement of their evangelism and that each of them went defunct within one year interval of their appearance, hence the inference that they had minimal contribution to the religious campaigns. The Mission was found to have depended much on its religious and educational materials produced in the Mission's printing workshop for the people's education, training, public enlightenment and literacy advancement.

The study rendered as invalid the previously held views that Rev. Hope Waddell founded the two newspapers. Reasons are that Rev. Hope Waddell had retired from the Mission in 1858, and had returned home, according to Omoyajowo's (1995) account. The two newspapers were published about 17 years after his retirement.

In conclusion, it was found that interpersonal channels, traditional media, coupled with printed books and religious booklets, informal and formal teachings, were combined with the newspapers to achieve missionaries projected social change in the two communities.

From the conclusion, it is recommended that for the success of any elaborate publicity and spreading of economic policies, political or religious agenda to large homogenous and heterogeneous audience, a mixed media strategy embracing interpersonal channels, the new media, print and broadcast media should be adopted.

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