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Mass Media

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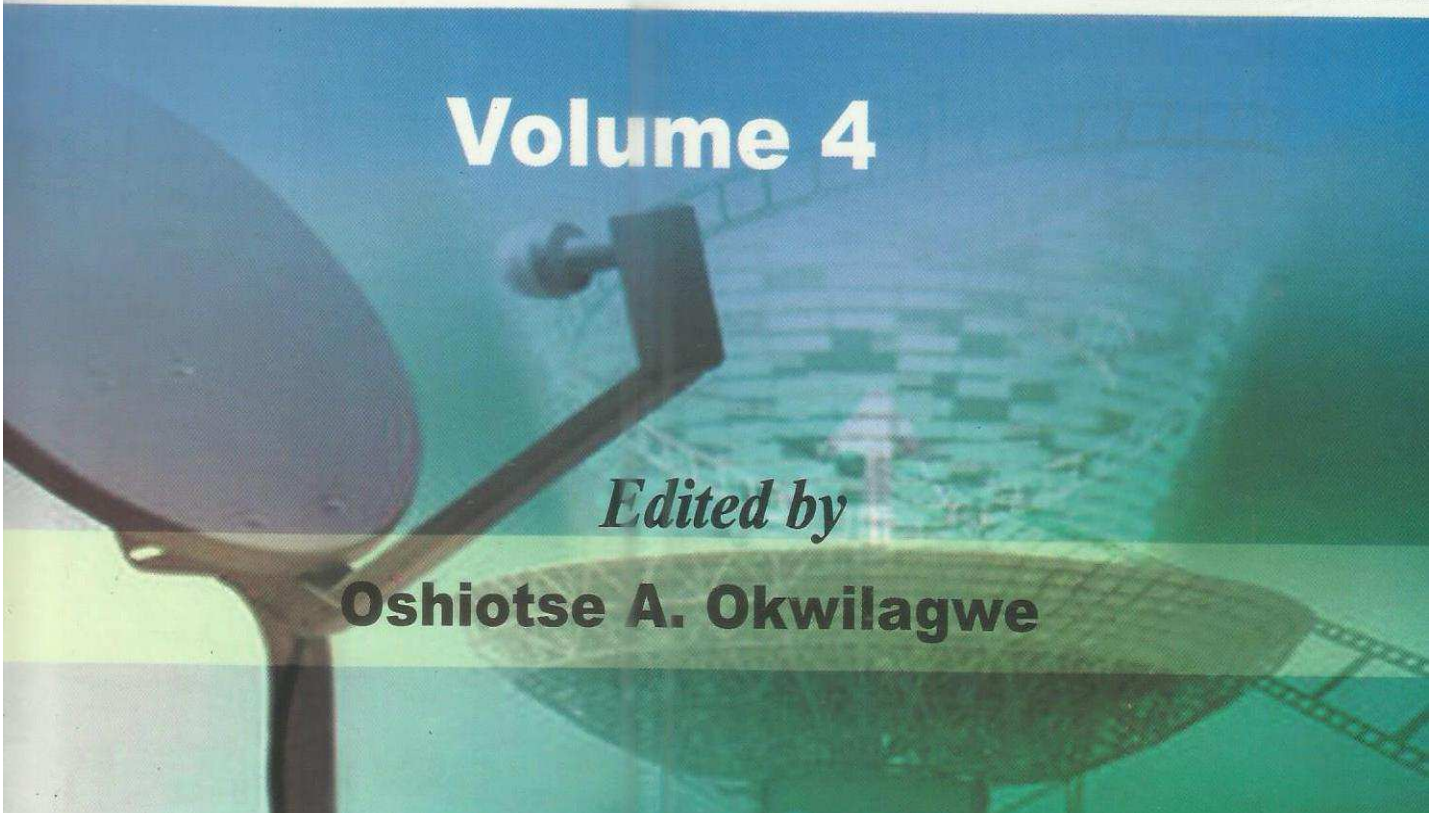
Communication

Technological Imperatives

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The Nature and Content of Communication Textbooks in the 21st Century: New Approaches, Dimension and Scope

Introduction

The field of communication the world over is to use what might seem an obvious cliché here, a burgeoning marketplace. It is not only growing at a terrific pace, it is an electric, disciplinary field which has made itself relevant to all human disciplines. And because communication is critical to all disciplines, it has lent itself to some intellectual quackery where every man or woman in every discipline assumes he or she is an expert.

Part of its identity problem has arisen from the circumstances of its birth as a hybrid academic discipline. Having been midwived by various humanistic disciplines such as Sociology, Political Science, Psychology, Linguistics, Rhetoric, Language Arts, Theatre Arts and others; many of them have laid claim to its paternity as well as its distinctive products. Today, it is common to find disciplines suffering from professional diminution and lack of patronage, struggling for survival and incorporating or engaging communication in an academic marriage of convenience. The reaction to this emerging manifestation is not to urge for, but to allow bliss and see what would be the fruits of the harvest. It is believed

that time, the dominant partner will cause the weaker partner to take its place in the graveyard of unfulfilled marriage promise. What indeed the regulatory body needs to do is to allow for distinctive programme identities within the union in line with a reviewed minimum standards status of individual programmes. This way the students and products will not lose the basic requirements of certification in their profession.

The above situation, therefore, calls for both a retrospective look at the instructional materials available and usable in our tertiary institutions for the purpose of educating and training our students not only to fit into the Nigerian media and academic world, but also to be able to hold their own in the global village. The experience has been that most of the books and other materials currently used in Nigeria for training in our institutions have largely aped the texts used in Europe and America without reflecting the cultural sensitivities of Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Nigerian scholars have so much to offer the rest of the world what is essentially African and relevant in the unfolding media triangulation of the West, East and South in the field of communication. Trying to ape the West, in particular, has been largely unsuccessful. It is like trying to sing the American anthem in Ibibio. It can never sound the same and would not inspire the Americans in the same way a rendition in the American language would do. A British bibliophile, once said that he would not buy a Nigerian communication textbook except it discussed purely African concepts, because he believed there was nothing new we could offer in the area of mainstream media.

There are also some myths being perpetuated by scholars, that communication is all about radio, television and magazines. Clearly, if we must provide clear knowledge beacons in this field, we must be ready to de-restrict ourselves from certain self-imposed scholastic limitations.

We cannot understand humanity fully if we restrict ourselves to the study of mankind in their adulthood. It is obvious that these media are important and critical in our world. But there were other forms of communication before them. These later traditions are just vehicles which are more pervasive in their usage.

So for today's communication pedagogy to be fruitful and relevant, we must be able to situate its contents within the context of a developing and expanding spectrum of media and channels of communication which developed on the morning of human creation and which have continued to be used at various levels and contexts of human society and have continually developed new forms. The field seems like a never-ending and widening sphere of human technological possibilities. In spite of its dimension and scope, we have attempted to treat its pedagogical issues as revolving around a mechanistic process of honing the skills of journalistic craftsmanship. The field is just too eclectic to be reduced to a narrow pursuit of art and crafts, of which its pursuit necessarily boxes us into a limiting psychological closet. We have reached that stage in the development of the discipline, which should make it possible for us to free ourselves from the obfuscating influence of earlier scholastic propositions. We do not have any obligations to continue to limit ourselves to these narrow perspectives as we must now enhance the obligation to think for ourselves.

Contents of Communication Textbooks

When Nigeria's first university was established in 1948 as a college of the University of London, it marked the beginning of very serious internal scholarship in this colonial territory. Even though there were institutions of higher learning like the Yaba Higher College, Colleges of Arts and Science, Enugu, Zaria and Ibadan, they did not generate the kind of intellectual ferment, which the establishment of the University College, Ibadan brought about.

The textbooks used in higher education at the time, including secondary and even primary schools were written by foreigners. Collaborative efforts involved elementary school textbooks which the emergent local literati did with foreign authors and publishers. Most of such collaborative efforts were in the production of readers largely seen as a gateway to learning and knowledge in other disciplines. Their contents were made of fables, adventure stories and colonial perspectives of Nigerian history and culture. The science readers were for Nature Study, Rural Science, Agriculture and Geography.

It was in the early 1960s that Nigerian and other African academics began to explore true African history and stories of their heroes and warriors. In the literary tradition, Tutuola, Achebe, Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka and others blazed the trail of writers from whose stock of stories Heinemann developed its African Writers Series. Journalism brought its heroes fame among whom were Robert Campbell, John Payne Jackson, Horatio Jackson, Ernest Sesei Ikoli, Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe. These were all inspirers and progenitors of what we have today as Nigerian Journalism.

But the contents of books on communication or journalism as it was known in its earlier years were largely on the principles and practices of the media as they existed in the developed world at the time. These contents have remained largely unaltered even when new communication technologies have formed new principles and practices in the discipline. Some key examples of these contents include the following:

- writing for the mass media;
- newspaper/magazine production;
- radio-tv production;
- public relations and advertising;
- documentary (radio, tv);
- business/organisational communication;
- speech/rhetoric;
- media law and ethics;
- theories of communication;
- sociology of communication;
- development communication; and
- pictorial communication (cartoons, illustrations and pictures).

In recent times there has been a grudging inclusion of traditional communication and with the forcible presence of new media in our

society, there has been a demand for the inclusion of new media such as Computer-Assisted Reporting and New Information and Communication Technologies.

Most of the local texts have been products of recycled opinions expressed in foreign textbooks. While local publishing of communication textbooks is growing by leaps and bounds, the quality of the texts is of concern to teachers. Apparently most of the senior academics are not writing and so their students have taken over their responsibility. Unfortunately, their efforts are not good enough. Maybe, because of the financial benefits which accrue to the author-publishers, there is a big growth in this area. What emerges is that rather than have well-reasoned ideas based on classroom teaching and research, there is an over concentration on recycling of experiences which are alien to the Nigerian culture. The students and readers therefore, cannot find grounding in these texts which can give them memorable anchor to their media practice. This is so because those who are supposed to be learning from others are busy trying to teach those who should teach them.

There is need for quality control in view of this situation. Even our journals are becoming theatres of empty rhetorics because of the seeming lack of academic mentoring and the avuncular practice of some editors politicising the selection of manuscripts for publication. Again, academic leadership is lacking in this area.

This is regrettable because journal articles which are the flagship of academic writing are falling into disrepute because of the practice of neglecting quality and allowing sentiments and financial contributions to overshadow it. Our institutions of higher learning do not even have a uniform criteria for the advancement of scholars. Where these exist, they are frequently ignored to favour some who may be in the good books of the local authorities. Sometimes, quality is ignored for quantity and vice versa. In the sciences, it is difficult to see how some scientists publish scientific findings, where there are no functional laboratories consumables! This situation creates room for suspicions that some of the things published may either be rehashed from undergraduate projects or outright fraud! All of these incongruities have emerged from a long-held bogey which forces some academics into some form of academic

treason, which includes plagiarism and fraudulent research. At a time like this, it is important that we examine a possible detour from the primrose way which could lead us into academic destruction. At this point, it is suggested that in order to stem the tide of the devastating academic storm, Nigerian institutions must insist on their staff publishing with groups that are registered with the Nigerian Publishers Association as a first step in returning integrity to academic publishing.

In preparing this paper, a sample selection of published communication texts which were available to him were selected from his collection of titles from local publishers present at ACCE conferences nationwide. Foreign texts were left out because his focus was on local authors and publishers.

Of the thirty (30) selected texts, which contained a total of 7,997 pages averaging about 267 per book, we had an average of 13 chapters per book. Within 1990-1999, 5 books representing 16.6% of the selected titles were published while 18 books were published between 2000 and 2005 representing 16%. Between 2006 and 2008, the selection had 7 books representing about 23.3% of the selection. While these figures do not represent the actual number of titles published, they gave an indication as to the quantum leap from the 1990s. (See Table 1. pp-9-11).

The data also show that the main centres of book publishing are university towns. Ibadan stands out as the number one publishing town taking up (30.0%) of the total selection. Enugu comes next with 6 (20%) and Uyo with 4 (13.3%).

In the area of topics covered 5 (16.6%) of the titles were on general communication issues, 4 (13.3%) were on the print media; development communication had 3 (10%) as well as broadcasting. Titles on writing were 2 (6.6%) as well as theory and media. There was one each on international communication, public relations, media aesthetics, ethics, health communication, research and entertainment (3.3%).

The titles all attempt to address the needs of the NUC curriculum even though some of them are not sufficiently well written nor do some show originality of ideas.

Artistic and Aesthetic Elements in Communication Textbooks

SN	NAME OF AUTHORS	TITLE OF BOOK	YEAR OF PUBLI.	PUBLISHER/ CITY	TYPE OF TEXT	LENGTH	NO. OF CHAPTER
1.	Uwakwe, Onyeka	Media Writing and Report	2005	Enugu: Afrika-Link Books	Media Writing	p.XII, 287	15
2.	Ndolo, Ike S	Mass Media Systems and Society	2006	Enguu: Rhyce Kerex	General	P. XII, 280	15
3.	Oso Lai (ed)	Communication and Development: A Reader	2002	Abeokuta: Jedidah Publishers	Devcom	P.XII, 303	18
4.	Wilson, D	New Perspectives in Applied Comm.	2005	Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, Ibadan	General	P.XI, 183	10
5.	Wilson, D. (ed)	Introduction to Print Media: Readings in Nigerian Journalism	2000	Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, Ibadan	Print	P. XIV 183	10
6.	Moyajye, E. M <i>et al</i> (ed)	Globalisation and	2008	Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.	Globalisation Dev.Com	P. XIV 241	27
7.	Wilson, D.	Fundamentals of Human Comm.	2006	Ibadan: Stirling-Horden. Ibadan	General	P.XI, 183	13
8.	Igboanusi, E.C.	Normative Media Ethics	2006	Owerri: Edu City Publications	Media Ethics	P. XII, 253	9
9.	Nwosu, I.E.	Communication for Health and Sustainable Dev. in Nigeria	2008	Enugu: Rhyce Kerex	Health Comm	P. XIV. 344	34
10	Nwanwene,	Fundamentals of Business and Economic News Reporting	2001	Makurdi: Aboki Publishers	Business Reporting	P.IX, 100	7
11	Udeze, S.E.	After the Whirlwind: A Discourse on International Communication	2002	Enugu: Echrisi and Co. Nigeria	International	P.XIII, 149	9
12	Okwilagwe O.A.	Book Publishing in Nigeria	2001	Ibadan: Stirling-Horden	Book Publishing	P.XIX. 245	14
13	Lasode Olufemi	Television Broadcasting: The Nigerian Experience (1959-1992)	1994	Ibadan: Caltap	TV Broadcasting	P. XII, 266	12

14.	Folarin, Babatunde	Foundation of Broadcasting	2000	Ibadan: Atlantis Books	Broadcasting	—	14
15.	Koroma, David S.M, <i>et al</i> (eds)	Mass Comm. and..	1999	Maiduguri:University	General	P. XIV. 265	16
16.	Daramola, Abayomi C.	Fundamentals of Professional Public Relations: A Global Overview	2003	Lagos: CMCIN	PR	P. XV. 323	15
17.	Soola	Communication for Development Purposes	2003	Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd	Print	P.V 210	13
18.	Udoakah, N	The Nigerian Press and Political Comm: The Place of Political Cartoons	2003	Nigeria: Mediamark Associates Ltd	Print	P.108	7
19.	Agba, P.C.	Electronic Reporting: Heart of the New Communication Age.	2001	Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd	Oramedia	P. XVIII343	12
20.	Nwosu, I.E.	Trado-Modern Comm. Systems Interfaces & Dimensions	2006	Enugu:Immaculate Publications Ltd	Oramedia	P.XXI, 270	26
21.	Adesanoye, F.A. & Ojeniyi, A (ed)	Issues in Book Publishing in Nigeria	2005	Ibadan: Heinemann	Book Publishing	P.XXI, 270	15
22.	Iyoho, Lawrence, U.	Humour: Plan Humour	2004	Entertainment/ Cartoon	Ikot: Ekepen: Otungide Press Ltd.	P. IV. 120	1
23.	Mabadeje,	The Nigerian Press Under the Military	2004	Print	Uyo: Robert Minder Int. Ltd.	P. X, 126	4
24.	Akpabio, Eno	African Comm. System: An Introductory Text	2003	Oramedia	Lagos: B. Print Publications	P. V, 88	12
25.	Wilson, Des (ed)	Introduction to Communication Principles and Practice	2007	General	Uyo: Modern Business Press	P. V.164	9
26.	Akpan, E & Etuk, U	Aesthetics: Philosophical and Artistics Dimensions	1990	Media Deothetics	Uyo: Modern Business Press	P.IX, 64	4
27.	Ohaja, Edith, U	Mass Comm. Research and Project Report Writing	2003	Research Theory	Lagos: John Letterman Ltd	P. VII, 152	10
28.	Akpan, E	Prologue to Comm.	1993	Theory	Lagos: Newswatch	P.VII74	8
29.	Agbese, D	Style: The Newswatch Style Book	1996	Theory	Lagos: Newswatch Books Ltd.	P.VII151	13
30.	Nwanze,	Broadcasting in Nigeria: Private Broadcasting, Challenges Legal Aspects	2003	Broadcasting	PortHarcourt: Renaissance Commuication Ltd.	P. IX, 326	

In our evaluation of communication textbooks published in Nigeria, a number of elements - artistic and aesthetic - are critical for a balanced discussion. In this respect, the elements of design, illustrations, quality of paper, contents, originality of ideas and typography are important.

Many of the locally published texts have displayed a lot of creativity in design concepts and presentation. There are many others with poor quality designs including poor colour separation, quality; and others. Many of the text designers seem to believe that every communication text must necessarily have a display of satellite, radio or television set, skin, drums, book page or newspaper and magazine pages on the cover. This weak conceptualisation turns these elements into some kind of schematic cliché. Some have preferred to use abstraction, which stimulate thought. This is to be encouraged.

Various kinds of illustrations including charts, pie graphs, tables, histograms, photographs (colour, black and white), cartoons and other diagrams are used to enrich and elucidate discussion. A book that is all words and which does not vary the page format through the use of varying fonts to show distinction is always a boring experience to readers. The basis of the use of illustrations, especially pictures, is anchored on the saying that 'a picture is worth more than a thousand words.' Existing printing technology has ensured high quality books and anything less is unwelcome.

A related element is that of the quality of paper used. The type of paper used in printing books is a factor in aesthetics, cost and visual appreciation. Most of the quality communication textbooks are printed on bond paper with gloss. There are a few printed on recycled paper, while some are printed on newsprint paper. The better the quality of paper, the higher the cost of production. Good quality paper also ensures durability of the text.

A textbook is also identified by the quality of its content. Some books may not be aesthetically produced but may have enduring and fascinating content. It is indeed the quality of ideas, information or presentation that is paramount in determining the true worth of a book. A book could well meet the acceptability standards of other design elements but could have little or nothing to offer in terms of its content.

Related to this is the fact that a book must possess originality of ideas. This does not mean that it should necessarily say what has not been said before. It can say what has been said before in its unique and characteristic way. The writer of the Ecclesiastes says there is nothing new under the sun. That may well be so but there are ways in which old facts are presented that they become refreshingly new. Even so, there must be something new in every book. A new edition of a book is different from the earlier one. A book's typography may also give it a unique character. This in addition to elegant variation in style gives the book artistic and aesthetic impressions which could be appealing to the reader and also remain long-lasting. Today, many communication texts are emerging with beautiful typographic and stylistic features which the computer has made possible. There is clearly a certain irreducible minimum in terms of quality which has been attained by many publishers and which cannot be lowered if the publisher wishes to achieve wide acceptability and recognition. The thirty selected titles used in this study have very interesting artistic and aesthetic features which make them productive examples in communication textbook publishing.

New Approaches to Communication Textbook Development in the 21st Century

The 21st century presents to authors and publishers new opportunities and vistas to communication textbook development. Currently, publishing in the multi-disciplinary area of communication is easily one of the most developed in the country. But because much of current publishing is done by printers who make little or no inputs to the authors' manuscript, the market for its distribution is limited to the localities where the author is domiciled. It has even become near impossible to be aware of what is being published elsewhere. Before effective textbook publishing can take place, all the stakeholders in the knowledge industry must be part of the media distribution outlets like bookshops, publishers, professional organisations like marketing, advertising, and teaching must be involved.

Again, the availability of new technologies has made the publishing process much more easier than in the past. And because of the growth of collaborative efforts in research and learning, it is now more credible for authors to carry out collaborative research and authorship rather than the profit-oriented single author efforts which currently dominate the market.

Furthermore, the Internet provides us with opportunities to easily establish linkages with our colleagues in Nigeria and in other parts of the world. Such linkage provides further opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas in teaching and research and encourages international perspectives to our book development efforts. Materials are readily made available to authors and publishers as attachments to e-mails. This facilitates manuscript preparation and editing, which before the advent of the new technologies was drudgery.

Conferences provide good source materials for the development of communication textbooks. Papers presented are easily collated, edited and published. Because perspectives are diverse, conferences can be organised around specific themes which may fit into the company's publishing programme.

In addition, training workshops can be sponsored by publishers where authors and budding authors are given technical orientation in textbook writing. As we know, the style of a textbook is different from that of a journal article. Many scholars do not make the distinction because they do not know. Besides there are several scholars who may be bursting in the seams with a lot of ideas which need to be expressed in a book form but unfortunately, they often lack both the courage to say it in a context where there are academic masters and also lack the skill to do so. Publishers should not always be shortsighted in their approach to book publishing. Putting back some of their profits in an enterprise like this can be beneficial to them more than it can ever be to the author.

Dimension and Scope of Communication Textbook Development

The magnitude and extent of textbook development in the present century can be placed in the context of regional publishing. Since at present we do not seem to have an effective mechanism for the distribution of textbooks, communication textbooks can be developed regionally. Plants can be established at certain regional centres where there is a concentration of institutions of higher learning and where cultural perspectives may differ with respect to theoretical and conceptual issues.

Today, there are some texts that may be limited to a handful of copies and that are produced directly from the computer. Some of them are produced for the purpose of establishing a case for promotion. Very few publishers ever bother to get beyond 5,000 copies. Indeed most revolve around 500 to 1,000. By virtue of this fact, the size and latitude of communication textbook development in Nigeria is very small. Each communication textbook development effort at the moment seems to be propelled by a pecuniary desire and hopes of advancement in the work environment. Even though some of them may proclaim their desire to meet the academic needs of the National Universities Commission's minimum standards, the shoddy nature of their contents always reveals the contrary.

It is clear from our present efforts that we sometimes have a greater urge to write a book rather than write journal articles, this is because we also sometimes misperceive our roles as university teachers or as teachers in tertiary education. Thus, while we may all agree that the primary functions of a university are; to teach/train, research and provide community services, many have added a fourth, which is to make profit. This is inspite of academic union's efforts to improve staff welfare.

As university teachers, we should see ourselves as authorities in our disciplines. This authority image must be implanted in the books and articles we write. A teacher whose student does not see him as an authority loses his or her credibility. No amount of textbook writing can restore his or her image as a credible source. In view of the

help the growth of textbook development in the short and long term shall be provided in this paper. They are as follows:

- i. large printing facilities and book depots should be set up to cater for regional book needs. These should be located strategically in areas with intense educational activities which will help reduce piracy;
- ii. more technical manpower should be trained for the publishing industry;
- iii. book publishing programmes should be established in tertiary institutions;
- iv. inputs used in the publishing industry should be subsidised to facilitate the production of textbooks and other educational publications;
- v. in order to improve the quality of scholarship, academic publishing should be done with members of the Nigerian Publishers Association;
- vi. more multi-author collaborative -editorship and publishing, should be done;
- vii. more conferences and training workshops on publishing should be organised for authors, academics and young publishers. Regional communication textbook development should be encouraged to embrace regional, cultural, educational and social sensitivities; and
- viii. long term collaborative arrangements should be made with some key regional and national publishers to produce relevant foreign texts for the Nigerian market.

Conclusion

In this paper, our focus has been on examining the nature and content of communication instructional materials, in the present century as well as pointing at some new approaches, dimensions and scope.

While this paper dwelt largely on textbook production for tertiary education, its main focus has been on communication textbook development. It was not possible to come up with developments in the field of communication since there has been no known study on this aspect. The year 2000 report by Wilson was still largely based on tertiary publication with a limited reference to communication textbooks.

This paper concludes that there is a growing increase in the number of communication textbooks produced by Nigerians showing a marked increase from the 1990s which the paper took as its benchmark. This increase has been helped in part by the growing number of new institutions which have mounted communication courses by various names.

The new approaches suggested in this paper are products of the New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) which drive the book development and production processes. The Internet also provides a lot of resource material for authors and publishers and facilitates research.

This paper concludes by making recommendations for the development of the communication textbook production industry.

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