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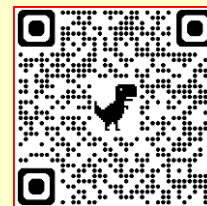
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UNBUNDLING OF MASS COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: ISSUES AND MATTERS ARISING

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzed the unbundling of mass communication programme in Nigerian Universities using Imo State University as a case study. It examined the transformative implications and challenges associated with the process through a comprehensive review of the evolving landscape of mass communication education globally, the research focused on the specific case of Imo State University to analyze the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of unbundling the mass communication curriculum. The study also explored the impact of this unbundling on students, faculty, and the overall educational framework, considering factors such as adaptability to emerging media trends curriculum coherence, and the ability to meet industry demands.

Additionally, it investigated the potential influence on academic collaboration, resource optimization, and the university's responsiveness to the dynamic communication industry. By examining the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders involved in this unbundling process, the research gave valuable insights into the broader discourse on restructuring mass communication programmes in tertiary institutions, offering recommendations for effective implementation and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Before the unbundling process, the mass communication programme at Imo State University was primarily a part of the Social Science Faculty. The department was responsible for several courses, including print journalism, broadcast journalism, advertising, public relations, film production, photojournalism, etc. The department had a dedicated faculty of instructors and professors as well as the required facilities and resources. It was well respected for its facilities and resources and as a result, it was considered as one of the strongest departments in the university. The department's

reputation attracted a large number of students, and its graduates were highly sought-after by employers in the mass communication Industry.

This was before the federal government through the National Universities Commission (NUC), in the 2020 academic year unveiled the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) designed for the education and training of undergraduates wishing to obtain first degrees in the different areas of Communication and Media Studies in the Nigerian University system.

The curriculum unbundled the Bachelor of Science in Mass Communication while establishing some emerging specializations in these fields as obtained globally. Mass communication in Imo state University as it was revealed was unbundled to create distinct disciplines of Communications comprising degree programmes in Advertising, Broadcasting, Development Communication Studies, Film and Multimedia, Information and Media Studies, Journalism and Media Studies, Public Relations, and Strategic Communication. The faculty for all these departments was named the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies.

The government said the approved programmes would promote an Interface between communication and media studies, social sciences, and other disciplines to respond to global and local needs.

Before these, all the courses were brought under Mass Communication either as two or three-unit courses but now, they would be individual bachelor's degree courses to allow undergraduates to choose their preferred field of study. The objectives stated in the curricula that Communication and Media Studies training should develop the student's understanding of communicative issues at the various levels of Nigerian and Global society and develop in the student the ability for objective and critical judgment, to observe, understand, analyze and synthesize socio-economic, political and environmental problems using communication and media studies techniques and methods, among others. The unbundling would give room for professionalism, create jobs, and provide more admission vacancies in what would become the new Faculty at Imo State University.

After the unbundling was unveiled, rumors spread around that the mass communication department had been scrapped but it was clarified by the government and the university authority that it was only separated into bits and units.

The unbundling of the courses has been described as a bold step. Some described it as over over-ambitious project given the state of development in the academia. Others complained about the inadequacy of facilities in the university and the new faculty. How do you teach broadcasting without functional studios and editing suites? How do you do Information Science without high-end computers where students learn coding, animation, and all the tricks of the Information Age? How do you do media studies at this age without dedicated internet facilities for staff and students? There would be the challenge of funding to equip the faculty for these emerging departments. Where does the new faculty begin and where will all these lead it to? These are issues and questions posing for answers that the research work needs to unravel.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The mass communication programme at Imo State University has undergone and will still undergo significant changes as a result of the unbundling process. Though there is scanty research on the effect of these changes on students' learning and outcomes, the research aims to investigate the specific effect of the unbundling process on the mass communication program at Imo State University.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the specific changes to the Mass communication curriculum at Imo State University as a result of the unbundling process
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of the new curriculum in preparing students for the workforce.
3. To explore the attitude of students and faculty members towards the changes to the mass communication program.

4. To recommend strategies for further improvements to the mass communication program based on the findings of the research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What specific changes have been made to the mass communication curriculum at Imo State University as a result of the unbundling process?
2. How effective is the new curriculum in preparing graduates for the workforce?
3. What are the attitudes of current students and faculty members toward the unbundled program?
4. What are the key areas of the mass communication program that require further improvement?

SCOPE OF STUDY

The study is limited to the mass communication department of Imo State University and not those of other universities in Nigeria.

Operational Definition of Terms

Unbundling: The act of separating parts which have been bundled together

Mass Communication programme: This includes courses that target the study and effects of newspapers, television, radio, the internet, and other forms of communication

Imo State University: A state university in Imo State, Nigeria.

Faculty: A group of departments in a university concerned with a major division of knowledge

Department: A division of a university, dealing with a specific course or area of activity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors that led to the Unbundling: These factors consist of internal and external factors. The internal factors derive from the mass communication department of Imo State University while the external factors emanate from the mass communication programme of Nigerian universities.

The first factor is the size and complexity of the mass communication programme. It counts as both internal and external factors. As the department grew, it became more difficult to coordinate all the different programmes and courses. There were more students to manage, and the department was struggling to keep up with the demand. The sheer number of courses and programmes was creating a lot of administrative work for the Social Science faculty and it was difficult to keep track of everything.

One example is the scheduling of courses. As the department grew, it became more difficult to find time slots for all the different courses. There were not enough classroom spaces available, and it was hard to coordinate the schedules of all the faculty members. This created a lot of frustration for both students and faculty members.

Another problem was related to the size and complexity of the department was the lack of funding. As the department grew, it needed more resources to support its programmes and faculty members. However, the university was not able to provide all the resources that the department needed. This created a lot of stress for the department and it was difficult to keep up with the demands of the students and faculty members.

The next factor was the need for more autonomy. As the department grew, the faculty felt that they were not able to make decisions that were in the best interest of the department. They wanted to be in a position to set their policies and procedures, rather than having to follow the policies of Social Science faculty.

An external factor is the increasing diversification of media technologies. As new media technologies emerged such as the internet and social media, they equally created new opportunities and challenges for mass communication departments all over the country. This has led to a need for departments to adapt their curriculum to keep up with the changing landscape of media technologies. This created a lot of uncertainty for the department, as it was not clear how to adapt to these new technologies. In the past, the department's curriculum focused on traditional media such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. However, social media is becoming an important part of the media landscape and the department needed to adapt its curriculum to reflect this change.

Equally, the changing landscape of higher education in Nigeria posed another challenge. The mass communication department was facing a lot of competition from other institutions. For example, other universities were offering more specialized programmes and cutting-edge technology. This makes it difficult for the department to attract and retain students and faculty members.

The final factor was the changing expectations of students. In the past, students expected a more traditional college experience, with lectures and textbooks. However, in the 21st century, students have new expectations such as hands-on learning experiences and online resources. This created a disconnect between the department and its students, as the department was not meeting their needs. The financial implication of this factor was significant. The department's budget was already over-stretched and the loss of tuition revenue made it even more difficult to maintain its programmes and facilities. This created a vicious cycle, as the department's lack of resources made it even harder to meet the changing expectations of students.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Brummet, Barry. "Unbundling the Mass Communication Department: The case of Digital Media Studies" *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8, No1 (2015): 102-114.

According to Brummett, the current departmental structures are no longer as effective as they once were and are out of step with new developments in the field, the rapidity of technological change, and the unprecedentedly fluid nature of the contemporary cultural, economic, and communication environment. What he is saying here is that the current departmental structures in universities aren't able to keep up with the rapid changes that are happening in the world of digital media.

One way to respond to these developments and to begin to address the many problems inherent in our current ways of organizing the field of mass communication is to unbundle the department, in other words, he thinks that digital media should be separated from other forms of mass communication and become its department within the university system.

It would be multidisciplinary, drawing on elements of cultural studies, film and media studies, sociology of culture, computer science, communication technology, and more.

Napoli Philip: "Unbundling Mass Communication as a Field of Study: A Convergence of Theories, Methods and Models", *Journal of Communication* vol.58, No.4, 2008, pp 735-752.

If the field of mass communication is to continue to evolve and remain relevant, we must work to bridge the divides that have developed, not only in terms of our theories but also in terms of our methods and our models of the media system.

By taking an integrated multi-paradigmatic approach to the study of mass communication we can begin to break down the disciplinary silos that have been created and create a more coherent field of study.

Napoli goes on to suggest that the field of mass communication needs to adopt a "multi-paradigmatic" approach in which different theories, methods, and models are brought together to create a more comprehensive understanding of the media system. This would allow for a more integrated and holistic approach and would help overcome the challenges outlined in the previous paragraphs.

To him, the rapid pace of change in the media landscape makes it increasingly difficult to make sense of the shifting media environment using traditional theoretical perspectives and research methods. A multi-paradigmatic approach offers a way to cut through the complexity and confusion, providing a more dynamic understanding of the constantly changing media landscape. He says that this approach would allow for 'real-time' research that can adapt to changing circumstances and respond to new developments. This would be particularly useful for studying new media technologies and platforms which are constantly evolving.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Digital Disruption Theory: This theory posits that the rapid evolution of digital technologies has fundamentally altered the communication landscape. Unbundling is seen as a strategic move to address the specific skills and knowledge required in the digital era. This theory emphasizes the need for specialized training in areas such as social media management, data analysis, and multimedia studies to prepare for the challenges posed by digital disruption.

The term "Disruptive Innovation" was popularized by the American academic, Clayton Christensen and his collaborators in 1995.

Transformed into Digital Disruption theory, it acknowledges the transformative power of digital technologies in reshaping the media landscape. Unbundling is considered a strategic response to the need for educational structures that align with fast-paced changes brought about by digital innovation.

Unbundling allows for the creation of specialized departments focused on digital media, social media management, data analytics, and other skills crucial in the digital age. This tailored approach ensures that students acquire specific competencies required for success in contemporary media environments.

The theory emphasizes the evolving nature of communication platforms. Unbundling enables academic institutions to address the distinct requirements of various platforms such as online journalism, social media communication, and digital advertising ensuring that students are well-prepared for the nuances of each medium.

Digital Disruptive Theory underscores the importance of maintaining real-time industry relevance in education. Unbundling facilitates the development of curricula that can be continuously updated to align with the latest trends and technologies ensuring that graduates are equipped with up-to-date skills sought by the industry.

The theory recognizes the global connectivity facilitated by digital technologies. Unbundling allows for the exploration of global communication trends and practices, preparing students to navigate an interconnected world where digital communication transcends

geographic boundaries.

In essence, the Digital Disruption Theory positions unbundling as a strategic move to address the specific challenges and opportunities presented by digital technologies. It advocates for an educational framework that is agile, technologically focused, and responsive to the evolving needs of the digital media landscape.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study was content analysis. Ohaja (2003) notes that content analysis is the examination of the manifest content of communication to discover the patterns existing therein. Thus the manifest content of the NUC BMAS curriculum and CCMAS curriculum would be analyzed to show areas of similarities and differences.

In addition, the study also adopted the interview method to gather data from faculty members and students on their attitudes and reactions to the curriculum changes.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Courses listed under Basic Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS) (See Appendix 1)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One

What specific changes have been made to the mass communication curriculum as a result of the Unbundling?

The answer to this question is provided in the attached appendix. Very broad changes in programme content and delivery were made. Entirely new courses which were technical were introduced. Examples are Venture Creation, Art Direction and Design, Quantitative thinking in Advertising, Online Broadcasting (Webcasting, Podcasting, and Streaming), Participatory Communication strategies for Development, Message Design and Production for Development, Community Theatre for Development, Agricultural Communication, Digital Literacy, Cinematography, Motion Picture and Digital Technology, Film and Multimedia design and editing, Peace and Conflict Resolution among others.

From the above, the CCMAS curriculum introduced some new courses that are technical in content. The implication thereof is that it will aid in the training and retraining of the existent mass communication lecturers, especially in the areas of emerging technologies to be able to deliver such courses effectively to students.

Research Question Two

How effective is the new curriculum in preparing graduates for the workforce?

The new CCMAS curriculum was unveiled in the year 2020 but was adopted by many universities offering Mass communication in the 2023/2024 academic year. Even at that, many universities are yet to bring into effect the new curriculum. Since the mass communication BSc Programme is a 4-year programme, the implication is that one will allow the 4 years to gradually elapse before the effectiveness of the new curriculum in preparing students for the workforce could be effectively conjectured. But at the face value, it appears to be.

Research Question Three

What are the attitudes of current students and faculty members toward the unbundled programme?

The results of the Interview research design carried out on students and faculty members of Imo State University revealed that students

were aware and happy about the unbundled programme. Ditto with faculty members. The consensus was the new curriculum was a good development and offered a great opportunity for students to specialize right from the onset instead of the former “Jack of all trades, master of none”

Research Question Four

What are the key areas of the mass communication programme that require further improvement?

From investigations carried out at Imo State University which by extension applies to almost all universities offering mass communication programmes in Nigeria, the Lack of basic infrastructure and equipment that will expose students to practical proficiency remains a major constraint.

Findings based on Research Question Four are that students need more practical resources and equipment for this practical. They also need to access education through the digital world. Following the Digital Disruption theory which Posits that Unbundling is seen as a strategic move to address specific skills and knowledge required in this digital era. The students also need a better communication network to help with reading and doing research, hence the need for infrastructural development.

The Finding implies that University authorities now know the aspects of this new unbundled programme that they need to improve on and what solutions are best offered. They should take learning to the next level by introducing digital learning.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The major findings of the study are as follows;

1. The major changes made to the curriculum were the introduction of new technical-based courses, reduction in credit workload, and course specialization.
2. The students have a positive attitude towards the unbundled programme and are happy with the new development.
3. The new curriculum is very effective in preparing graduates for the workforce.
4. The key areas in the new curriculum include practical, digitalization, computerization, and networking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the research hereby makes the following recommendations:

1. Nigerian universities offering the CCMAS curriculum in mass communication should upgrade their facilities to include functional studios, computers, wi-fi, routers, and stable networks.
2. Make provisions for practicals in their course delivery.
3. Train and retrain existing staff members in the new courses introduced.
4. Engage new faculty members with suitable qualifications and practical exposure.

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