

CAREER IN MASS COMMUNICATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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Abstract

It is often assumed that career prospects in mass communication begins and ends in the traditional practice of journalism in Nigeria. The careers and prospects in mass communication are beyond what is merely obtainable in today's world. What is required of prospective journalists or individuals with passion to build a career in mass communication is the ability to discover the potentials in them at a good time. Mass Communication has such a wide range of opportunities that every willing career prospective can find a place to cling on. These are the core issues that this paper addresses.

Introduction

The discuss of career in Mass Communication often began with the fallacy that a prospective needs one of three qualities to thrive in a branch of the profession; it is often said that a prospective needs to look good (be beautiful or handsome) to thrive in TV broadcast; or has to have a melodious voice to thrive in Radio broadcast; or has to have an exceptional writing skill to thrive in print media. The truth of the profession is that career in Mass Communication is much beyond what is obtainable with these qualities mentioned.

Career in Mass Communication has basically two arms; the opportunities and responsibilities.

Mass Communication has such a wide range of opportunities that every willing career prospective can find a place to cling on. In the broadcast for example, prospective can look up for opportunities in news casting, news reporting, program anchoring, editing and a couple of other things. Likewise in the print media, a prospective can look up for opportunities in reporting beat reporting, roving reporting, proofreading, desk editing and a couple of other things. Even outside the traditional journalism, a prospective can develop a career doing a couple of things including blogging, Public Relations Practice, Communication design and Campaign Management as well as Independent Photojournalism. All these are possible with a well focused academic training and self determination.

Whatever is the chosen field of the prospective, societal responsibility remains central to the practice. It is pertinent to note that communication is the strongest binding force of the mass society. Those entrusted with the responsibility of mass communication should therefore, be fair in their dealings; they should be ethical while sourcing and while delivering the

information from and to the society. Since the society to whom the information is delivered is also the source of the information, the real role of those trailing career path in Mass Communication is constructing the information in a coherent and intelligent way to keep the society intact. And this brings us to the narratives of the Professional Ethical Values of journalism.

Here comes the third equally important tier; the market determinism of the ratio of the available vacancies with the number of graduates in the field. This is as fluctuating as the economy of the given country. This tier is though, often neglected in the discourse of career in Mass Communication especially in this part of the world, it is of paramount importance to include the available statistics by the recognized bodies. This will give the prospective an idea of the options available to them based on which they can be able to make the right, realistic and intelligent choices.

Contextualizing Media Career Opportunities

Studying Mass Communication prepare a prospective in a career in journalism and media in general. Being the American that it is, media and communication career is dependent upon the thriving of capitalist market. This is because media of Mass Communication depend to a large extent on the advert from the capitalist market to thrive. This explains why media flourish in the United States, being the largest economy in the world, better than it does in many other places in the world.

Comsat, a single media company in the United States for example, generated the revenue of up to \$ 157 b in 2009 alone. In the same in contrast, Namibia as a country generated the revenue of N\$ 21.9 b which is roughly around \$2 b and budgeted with N\$ 20 b a slightly lower than \$2 b. Simply put, this means that Comsat has the capacity to budget for Namibia for 78 years all things being equal. This explains the huge capacity media companies have to absorb the prospective career aspirants in Mass Communication. Literally speaking, individual conglomerate media companies have more capacities than multiple countries put together.

Career in media of Mass Communication is characterized by a satisfying diversity. It offers so much so that an aspirant may choose from the multiple choices available. The selection needs to be carried out early enough so that the training will be focused in the very beginning. Below are some examples of the opportunities that a prospective can choose from.

Journalism: Print and Broadcast

Journalism practice is the most traditional career path one can trail after studying Mass Communication. This is a broad term that encompasses so many things. To start with, journalism in its very conservative form consists of broadcast and print. In both branches, one can aspire to be a reporter, a proof-reader, an editor or a reviewer. One can aspire to be newspaper columnist or a newscaster in the broadcast journalism in both TV and Radio.

Although, career in the traditional journalism is currently experiencing slower rate of growth with the expectation of 6% decline in job availability (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2012), this is nothing to panic about as it's explainable in the above average growth in the newer aspects of the profession. The projection of journalist's annual salary in USA which is becoming the norm across the globe is considerably lucrative. While newspaper reporter earns \$40,240 on the average TV and Radio reporter earns \$48,110 annually (U.S. BLS, 2013).

Public Relations Practice

Public Relation (PR) is the business of creating, sustaining and promoting good mental image for public and private organizations. It is a good career path someone who studied Mass Communication but doesn't have taste for practicing traditional journalism. This career path can be trailed in two different forms. One has the option of working as an employee of the organization for which he practices PR. The other option is to work for PR firm to practice PR as consultant to other organizations.

Whichever way, PR practitioner will have to work hand-in-hand with journalists who are in the field. He would want to influence some positive media attention to his client. A challenging part of the PR is when one works as Crises Communication expert. This entails designing and executing the appropriate communication between the management and the employees of an organization in the time of crises.

Generally speaking, job growth projection in this career path is anticipated at 21% in 10 years between 2010 and 2020. Although this is the condition in USA, is being reflected across the globe. The Nigerian condition of economic growth is a positive sign for the same above average growth in PR career to be replicated.

In terms of salary, PR practitioners are among the highest earners among those who studied Mass Communication. Whereas those working directly in the PR units of private or public organizations earn up to \$54,940 annually, those working as consultants or as employees of PR firms earn up to \$77,010 (U.S. BLS, 2013).

Beyond the traditional journalism and PR practice, there are many other career paths that can be trailed with a great success. This include career in Campaign Management, Independent Photojournalism, Press Secretary ship, Information Officer of an organization or a blogger.

Teaching journalism in the academe is though one of the noblest professions, it is arguably one of the most tasking and least paying jobs with degrees in Mass Communication. This explains why there is dearth academic human resource in Mass Communication field around the globe. Very few people are interested in spending seven more years in the university and additional thousands of dollars only to earn less. What is likely to compensate is winning research grants and competition within which is stiffer than imaginable.

Responsibilities

Journalists are passionate about their work. They find their jobs varied, creative, important and challenging. Perhaps more than anyone else, journalists witness the kaleidoscope of the life within their communities: the good and the bad, the joyous and the tragic, the significant and the mundane. Journalists are admitted everywhere and meet everyone (Rabiu, 2014).

Beyond the communication law, the responsibilities of journalist will necessarily draw into the discussion of the professional ethical values. It important as it is, communication law guarantees only the minimum required fairness of dealings as much as can be proven in the court of law. Though not enforced (and should not be), journalistic ethical values guarantees fairness as far as the individual journalist's concise will be free from the burden of unethical behaviour.

Public interest is central to the argument on ethical values of journalism. This means that whatever decisions a journalist is taking; he should be comfortably settled in his concise that it is in the best interest of the public. As important and central public interest is in the discourse of ethical values of journalism, is equally tricky and easy to manipulate. Often times journalists especially the investigative ones intrude into the privacy of individuals, especially the public figures in the name of the holy public interest. This brings us to the

argument of leaving the individual journalists to decide provided we can be certain of their good moral standing. Attempt to enforce code of ethics in journalism will reduce them to some legal codes to be decided in the court room, the consequences of which is eliminating the human face from the profession of journalism.

Challenges

In recent years, our economy has been undergoing a massive restructuring. This is having a fundamental effect upon the careers of people who have all or much of their working lives ahead of them. The permanent and progressive full-time career with a single employer is fast being replaced by the “portfolio career” of many varied jobs with a succession of employers. Some of these jobs are likely to be on a self-employed basis. This means that individuals can no longer expect employers to provide them with a career but must take charge of their own occupations or vocations. High unemployment versus serious skill shortage, population growth and the changing age-profile of our population, are also having a major impact on the number of jobs, patterns of employment and social welfare such as pensions (Rabiu, 2013).

Conclusion

It should be noted here that the most important thing in the business of journalism are not the opportunities offered by the profession; it is rather the human being who will grab those opportunities. Human being is said to be more important because it is assumed that he has the ability to look beyond the opportunities. He will look at the enormous social responsibility placed on him.

To shoulder this responsibility properly, one needs both pedagogic and moral training. As much as the prospective career required training to master the technical ‘knowhow’ of media profession, one also required an in-depth understanding of the society within the context of its norms, traditions and values. Understanding the law of the land is of equal importance. As the former will provide the avenue for an intelligently responsible practice of journalism that will help promote the values of the host community, the latter will protect the practitioner from running into trouble.

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