

# **Imperative of New Media Technologies in Nigeria's Quest for Sustainable Development**

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## **Abstract**

*The advent of ICTs has resulted into a polemical discourse on the potentials of new media technologies as vehicle for social change and development among media scholars. The obvious manifestations of these technologies can be seen in education, commerce, banking and the media; they have become drivers of development. This paper explores the value of new media technologies in societal development. It discusses how new media technologies can be used to foster sustainable development. Anchored on literature modelling as methodology, and the development media theory as theoretical foundation, the paper concludes that Nigeria's quest for development and the sustainability of such development rest with the appropriate use of new media technologies to promote such ends.*

**Keywords:** Imperative, New Media Technologies, Sustainable Development, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

The innovation and cyber-revolution in ICTs have changed the course of time, as they brought tremendous benefits and improvements on our communication landscape. When compared to the traditional means of communication with their drudgery, there is an obvious change in human relations. New media technology includes all forms of social media platforms such as facebook, youtube, twitter, whatsapp, instagram, google plus, linkedin, my space, metup, and a host of others. These communication platforms have proven to be the life wire of any development initiative as they enhance quick access to information that can bring about any desired change or development as the case may be. These platforms help to create awareness on any issue and allow people to reach each other regardless of time and location.

Furthermore, these platforms have been used to fight corruption, promote education, open governance, political mobilisation, life skills and almost every aspect of life and economy. For instance, during and after the 2015 general elections, there were hate campaigns and issues based engagement with the citizens. The central issue was the sustainability of the nation in the heart of the insecurity, poverty and lawlessness that appear to be the lots of Nigerians.

There is a high level of animosity now, even with the present administration headed by President MohammaduBuhari, the slogan among the masses is "change the change." The debates and arguments among the citizens on social media platform is the perceived inability of the government to address the woes of the nation and the contestations that the rot confronting the nation cannot be addressed within the short period of this administration.

Another vivid example of how the new media can be used to foster change in the society can be seen in the case of “an alleged kidnapped and forceful marriage of EseOruru” by one Yunusa and was taken to the Emir’s palace in Kano. This singular act attracted a lot of comments on the social media platform, and because of the pressure from the masses, the emir issued a statement that the said Ese was not in his palace and that security agencies should arrest the master mind. As a matter of fact media converge on this issue and made it a matter of public concern. The impact of media convergence on society lies in the submission of Defleur & Dennis (1991, p. 235) that:

At the ownership level, media are coming together with large firms owning many different kinds of media organisation from newspapers, magazines to cable companies, broadcast stations, data bases, and other media. At operations level, computers are connecting business and editorial operations and blurring the lines between them. As for media content, new technology is integrating various media functions: information, opinion, entertainment and advertising/marketing... for the consumer, this convergence means wider communication choices, more advantaged services, and possibly even a bit of information overload. It also means an increase in the price of information and a wider gap between information-rich and information-poor people.

Apart from these, the new media platform is a potent tool to effecting any desired change. For instance, in the wake of the deadly Ebola scare, the new media provided platforms for Nigerians to discuss and share ideas on how to manage the virus. The massive information flow contributed in no small measure to curtail it within the shortest time. There is no area of human life that technology has not touched. This has brought about new ways of doing things. In Nigeria, in spite of the functional relevance of new technologies, it seems there is a slow pace of adoption and use of these technologies for societal development. In an era where technology drives education, the media and the economy, it appears that relevant authorities are yet to key into the potentials of these technologies by involving citizens’ engagement with them to promote sustainable development.

In a society where new media technologies have become part of the society quest for development, issues about use no longer occupy the front burner in public discourse, but the sustainability of the technologies for future generations to benefits. Where this is the case, succeeding generations build on technology for their own development. It is not certain the level of new technology exposure and use among Nigerians, and how they can be used to promote sustainable development. It is against this background that this paper seeks to explore the potential of the new media technologies for sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on technological determinism theory and new media theory. Technological determinism as a theory emanates from the postulations of Marshal McLuhan. The basic thrust of the theory is that technology causes social change. The theory postulates that technology is the force which shapes society or the main force for change in human society. McQuail (2005) states that the accelerating pace of technological inventions witnessed over the years have advanced social changes in culture and communication. For instance, through the invention of writing and later printing press through the movable type to the mainframe computer, the world has continued to witness great changes in her communication culture.

Today, computers and satellites have shown a shift- over time in increased speed, wider reach and greater flexibility; these have facilitated communication and accelerated social changes which are not only fundamental to the society, but helping to make McLuhan's 'global village' dictum a reality.

The new media theory finds its source from the work of Dennis McQuail. McQuail asserts that the change being witnessed in mass media circle today is tied to the convergence of technologies. The basic assumption as McQuail (2005) observes is the fact that a disparate set of communication technologies (ICTs) that share certain features apart from being new, are made possible by digitalisation. Consequently, this has also brought about convergence between all existing media forms in terms of their organisation, distribution, reception and regulation.

In relation to this paper, if technology is the main force for change in human society, the receiving society must take measures to adopt, use and sustain the technology if it must survive the ever changing nature of technology. In other words, Nigeria cannot talk about sustainable development until it anchors its development on the platform of technologies that can drive and sustain the process.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Tiamiyu (2003, p. 35) conceives Information and Communication Technologies as the electronic technologies for acquiring, storing, processing, communicating and using information. Before the advent of modern communication technologies, as Ekhareafu & Uchenunu (2014) observe, communication flow was largely driven by analogue systems such as the use of message runner and traditional communication system. Over time, communication has evolved from human speech to signs, signals, symbols, writing, printing, Telegraph, postal service, Telephone, cinemas, radio, television, satellites, data communication, interactive media, internet and new media technologies. These stages of development in communication and its associated media climaxed in the modern information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The primary drivers of modern communication are information and communication technologies (ICTS). They are electronic cum communication tools used in the acquisition, processing, storage, synthesis, transfer, retrieval and exchange of data, through the instrumentality of the computer. These processes have resulted into what is called information digitalisation (Ekhareafu&Uchenunu, 2014). They assert that digitalisation makes it possible for all kinds of information to be manipulated and integrated into a communication system. This is why Baran (2004) observes that ICTs have made communication easier and more democratic. People can consume some media as wanted and needed rather than allowing media producers to schedule consumption time and content; the consumer, rather than the producer, has more control over meaning making; new technology enables participation by groups previously media neglected (blind, handicapped, etc), users can participate anonymously, which leads to less prejudice; in some cases, new technology enables communication to be accomplished at a fraction of the cost previously established by the order.

Mesch (2009, p. 51) opines that "technology generates new patterns of expression, communication, and motivation." Dwelling on the view of Bimber's (1994) position that technology is an independent force that drives social change, Mesch (2009) argues that "technology itself exercises causal influence on social practices and technological change induces changes in social organisation and culture regardless of the social desirability of the change."

Change, according to (Okolochaet *al*, 1999, p.217), “is often used synonymously with development, progress, evolution or process.” From this stand point, it is established that the media are powerful and potent tools of social change. Through their factual news, features and editorials, the media can set agenda for the society that could lead to evolution of any kind. Also, through documentaries, the media can feature issues that bring transformation to the society. The media have the power to build and destroy a person, government or an institution.

The media can also be used for developmental purposes; the new media through agenda setting can direct the public on the path to thread on public issues. The benefits of the new media, no doubt can bring unprecedented changes in the society. These platforms can be used to attract and bring people together to participate in development initiative of their respective communities, thus engendering social change. Ate(2014) says that the mass media are potent tools for social change and that if well harnessed and husbanded by the appropriate stakeholders, they would bring change at the grassroots level.

Human existence has continued to metamorphose from archaic ways of life to modern innovation, invention and social change introduced by technology. This technology popularly known as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have continued to transform every facet of our lives and making the world a global village as postulated by Marshall McLuhan, in the 60s. Olayinka (2013, p. 13 ) says “the world has been compressed into a single electronic room where information from far and near can be shared with either a click of mouse or a torching pad on a mobile phone.”

The technologies that are making this development possible and easier are of phase. According to (Olaitan, 2014, p. 26) they include, but not limited to the following devices: Smartphone, digital camera, tablet, computer, modem, wireless, internet, etc. Social media such facebook, twitter, instagram, youtube, whatsapp, wechat, blogs, emals (yahoo.com, gmail.com, outlook.com, aimmail.com, icloudmail.com, etc), search engines: e.g google.com, yahoo.com, bing.com, ask.com, Aolsearch.com, etc. Blogs: Laittos.wordpress.com, lindaikeji.blogspot.com, naj.com, afriwatch.com, etc. Social media: is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 which allow the interaction, creation and posting of messages and other information on platforms such as facebook, twitter, youtube, blog sites etc and used to mobilise and sensitise people on issues.

It is important to note that social media are elements of the new media and according to (Danny, 2010, p.) have become the highest activity on the internet today. “Social media” or “social network site” is broadly used to refer to Web sites that enable users to articulate a network of connections of people with whom they wish to share access to profile information, news, status updates, comments, photos or other forms of content. Elshout (2012) writes that social networks form a good platform for organising countervailing power by political activists and consumers. Deducing from the above statement, the same platform can also be used to convey developmental messages through advocacy or mobilisation as the case may be. Social media is a form of electronic communication which facilitates interaction based on certain interests and characteristics. As Boyd & Ellison (2007) put it, social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. They use web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogues. They support the democratisation of knowledge and information and transform people from content consumers to content producers.

Olayinka (2013) observes that the rapid growth of social media activities that has been observed over the last two to three years is indicative of its entry into mainstream culture and its

integration into the daily lives of many people because it disseminated information at a very high speed, cheaper and enhance immediate feedback been an interactive media. Social media are web-based and mobile technologies that facilitate interaction between organisations, communities and individuals. Important characteristics are that the technologies are ubiquitous, communication instantaneous and that they enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

Social media are now powerful tools for political and social mobilisation in Nigeria and Africa in general. This is because they have the potential for crystallisation of political consciousness, as well as democratisation of values that connects to popular struggles which is what most African societies need (Omeruo, 2010). In fact, political office holders, politicians, including president and governors now have and manage social media account such as facebook, twitter, youtube among others. Political leaders and political candidate now share their political agenda and mobilise people towards it propagation.

The new media are designed in such a way that they become very easy to generate and share information with citizens in and out of the state, connect with thousands of people and also mobilize them towards a particular cause through social networks. For example, facebook has an application called facebook causes; this group connects people with common interest, videos from youtube has helped different group of people and organisations promote social and political causes successfully in their society. Social media makes for openness and democratisation of information like never before resulting in citizen journalism.

## **New Media and Development**

Communication plays a very crucial role in developing the society. Development on the other hand connotes progress or advancement. It is change of behaviour towards such social patterns that enhance the improvement of the peoples' social wellbeing as well as allow them greater control of themselves and their environment (Ibagere, 2009)

Rodney, cited in (Uwakwe, 2003, p. 14) says development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing..."He further states that "a society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science), on the extent of which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organised.

Development according to him "is a planned and deliberate attempt to ensure growth and effect social change in the society. In consonance with this, Rodney, cited in Uwakwe (2003) captured the concept of development: a widely participatory process of directed social change in a society intended to bring about social and material advancement including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of people through their gaining greater control over environment. He argued that some scholars view development as a changeover from a traditional to an industrial society. Development can take place at the local, national or international levels.

## **Relationship between New Media and Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is based on futuristic development planning, such that will not jeopardise the capacity of upcoming generation to benefit, without the present generation loosing. The Brunoltland Commission report cited in Amodu (20007, p. 9) defines sustainable development as the development that “meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The relationship between new media technologies and sustainable development can be inferred from Brown (2000) who opined that the internet is the two edge sword that is leading the process of globalisation, having the potential of wounding those who do not quickly grasp how to use it by leaving them further behind, but providing unprecedented benefits for those, with the courage and willingness to grasp its potential to drive change.” This suggests that any development plan that fails to incorporate ICTs will fail since the future will be technology driven. This is the thrust of sustainable development.

The new media or social media use web-based technologies or electronic communication, which use highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques to facilitate interaction based on certain interests and characteristics (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). There is no aspect of human endeavours that people cannot discuss and share issues. Thus, the sustainable development goals and the measures that can be taken to realise them can be shared through specialised blogs. Where this is the case, the ideas needed to realise the gains of sustainable development will not be lacking. The new media is basically a media for social interaction. Information sharing through social media can be used to discourage violence. To solve this challenge, Social media platforms can be used to share relevant information that can facilitate interaction among long distantly placed people allowing them to express their views and experiences. The mass media on the other hand can be used in facilitating social change because of their remarkable functions or roles they perform in the society. Communication is an important tool in achieving socio-political and economic developments (Okunna, 2002, p. 293) argues that communication is so closely interconnected with development that there can be no development without communication. The above postulations cannot be faulted because of the roles communication play in the development enterprise. (Nwodu, 2002) outlines some of the roles thus:

- Creating a climate of development by adequately informing the people and encouraging them to embrace positive changes that can enhance their well-being.
- Encouraging people to aim high as well as developing new taste to the point of desiring good things in life. Focusing people’s attention to developmental process thereby sensitising their maximum participation in development effort.
- Helping the people to understand and appreciate government policies meant to enhance their living conditions and environment.

For communication to have any impact in any developmental initiatives of a society, appropriate media must be selected to reach out to the masses at the right time. Amplifying this point of view, Nwosu, cited in Nwodu& Fab-Ukozor (2003, p. 75-76) observes that “in selecting the media for development, a thorough understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of each medium of communication will be required before deploying them for developmental purposes. He further states that the fact remains that both the traditional and mass media are crucial to the promotion of developmental programmes.

This is so because regardless of their appeal, they complement each other in the business of development. This is why communication researchers, scholars and practitioners recommend a

multi-media approach for effective publication and promotion of development programmes (Nwodu & Fab-Ukozor, 2003). The availability of social media platforms in our society today makes this task easier. Society needs communication and indeed the mass media to achieve any developmental agenda or initiative. Communication is indisputably an imperative for development of any nation. The sustainability of any development effort, therefore, lies in the degree to which new media technologies are employed to drive the process. In this way, every citizen with the eye for the future contribute and partake in the process since media convergence create opportunities for them to contribute, use and define the issues that shape the development process.

## Conclusion

The fact remains that Nigerians are not completely ignorant and unaware that government is corrupt and almost permanently guilty of putting square pegs in round holes accompanied by lack of commitments, corruption and embezzlement which are a major stumbling block and enemy to development. The advantages of the various new media channels of communication have not been effectively utilised. The paper recommends that effective communication through the new media platforms and open governance are the key to development and that government should brace up to the expectations of the masses and take advantage of the various new media platform for efficient communication and also prompt implementation of relevant developmental policies.

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