



THE NEW MEDIA IN NIGERIA: EVOLUTION, IMPACTS, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary societies can no longer be conceived of without the impact of the new media technologies. The evolution the evolution of new media has brought a radical shift both in media consumption and in the total ways of life. These technologies bring the world together in variety of ways that could never have been thought possible in the years gone by. Anchored on Technological Determinism theory, the paper examined the evolution of the new media and its implications on socio economic development in Nigeria. Findings showed that, in spite of the plethora of challenges that came with the evolution, especially on the conventional media of communication, the new media has enormous potentials, which if harnessed, can translate the dream of Nigeria's socio-economic and political transformation into reality. Thus, the paper concluded that Nigeria, and indeed the world at large, stands to experience unprecedented transformation, if the new media is proactively used with these objectives in focus at all times. From this standpoint, the paper recommended, among others, legal and ethical prescriptions to regulate usages as applied to traditional media; while the security agencies, especially Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation should be on guard to checkmate extremist and tendentious criminal usages.

Key words: New Media, Evolution, Traditional Media, Challenges & Prospects.

Introduction

Accelerating technology in the twilight of the twentieth century has continued to witness unprecedented technological revolution with so dizzying rapidity that it may be a herculean task to project the kind of world the future holds. The revolution has given rise to the emergence of what is now known as the 'newmedia'. The new media as Ellison (2011) avers, has maintained a rising wave of impact on the global community influencing the ways people do things generally. Today, people can communicate, receive information, anywhere, anytime. Thus, the evolution has dismantled the hitherto barriers to distance and time in communication. The use of computer and Internet has transformed the world beyond human imagination as a result of the new media.

Also, the emergence has witnessed a huge shift in media consumption as people constantly migrate to the use of smart phones commonly used as access to new media and social platforms. Consequently, the new media has brought about more options of communication, access to information online, and helped individuals to upload their businesses online and get customers for their products and services. This is made possible as the new media allows creative expression of ideas and knowledge, using tools such as blogs.

Although the evolution of the new media has come with plethora of socio-economic issues on its trail, it has however, come to stay with extra-ordinary telling impacts on human beings and their environment. Across all fields and human inclinations, the impacts are pervasive, with intended or unintended effects. Affirming this view, Langdon Winner, in Asemah et al (2016) note that changes in technologies sometimes give rise to unintended or unexpected results and consequences. He describes the phenomenon as technological drift where the changes in technologies cause people to start drifting more and more among a sea of uncertain consequences.

Indeed, the wave of the evolution of new media in Nigeria is bound to result in unintended socio-economic effects, positively or negatively. This suggests that the new media is likely to determine the success of social change agenda in Nigeria owing to its powerful influence on the people. As the gale of the new media continues to permeate facets of the society, it seems that the Nigeria stands to experience and unprecedented transformation in virtually all sectors of her economy.

Against this background, this paper looks into the evolution of the new media in Nigeria, with particular searchlight beamed on its impacts on the socio-economic developments, the attendant challenges, and the resultant benefits of the dawn of the new media in the Nigerian milieu.

Conceptual clarification

New media

The concept of 'new' in the new media refers to the application of microelectronics, computers and telecommunications that offer 'new' services or enhancement of old media (Agboola, 2014). New media technologies cover a wide range of changes in media production, distribution, consumption. The changes also reflect textual and cultural. The new media captures both development of unique forms of digital media, and the remaking of traditional media forms to adapt to the new media technologies, owing to the ravaging effect of new media (Ellison, 2011).

The new media is generally used as collective noun to refer to many different forms of electronic communication that are made possible through the use of computer technology, (Friedmann & Friedmann, 2008). These include those internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online.

The new media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web, and are usually associated with web 2.0, which describes websites that provide opportunity for a user to interact with the sender of a message, (Dashora, 2011). Expounding on the term, Dashora (2011) notes that web 2.0 refers to the state of the web from 2004 till date; a period when interactive website emerged as opposed to web 1.0, which describes the static web prior to 2004. Web-based communities, social networking sites, video-sharing sites, Wikis and blogs, are among the examples of web 2.0 sites. The new media is the most engaging form of communication today.

The idea of new media as a concept came into use as a distinction from the old media products of newspapers, magazines, books, radio, television films. The 'new' in new media, as Agboola (2014) points out, suggests a somewhat breakaway from the 'old', a kind of top-down technologies.

Also, the new media connotes the digital, computerized or networked information and communication technologies in the later part of 20th century. These technologies described as new media are digital, with the characteristic of being manipulated and compressible. They are also networkable, dense and impartial, allowing users to generate content and exchange same, (Agboola, 2014). This way, the content can be made available on-demand using different forms of electronic communication and can be viewed on any device. This provides new ways for people to interact real-time with the inclusion of user comments and making it easy for people to share ideas online with friends.

In an attempt to deepen understanding of the concept of new media, Lister (2003) provides a schema that helps break down the global term ‘new’ into more understandable constituent parts. Based on this, new media can be understood as follows:

-) *New textual experience:* new kind of genre and textual form, entertainment, pleasure and patterns of media consumption.
-) *New ways of presenting the world:* new media offers new representational possibilities and experiences (immersive virtual environment, screen-based interactive multimedia).
-) *New relationships between subjects (users and consumers) and media technologies:* changes in the use and reception of image and communication media everyday life and in the meanings that are invested in media technologies.
-) *New experience in the relationship between embodiment, identity and community:* Shifts in the personal and social experience of time, space and place (on local and global scales) which have implications for the way in which we experience ourselves and our place in the world.
-) *New patterns in organization and production:* Wilder realignments, and integrations in media culture, industry, economy, access, ownership and control.
-) *New ways of distributing and consuming:* Media texts characterized by interactivity and hyper textual format-the world wide web, CD, DVD, podcast and the various platforms.
-) *Computer-mediated communications:* emails, chatrooms, avatar-based communication forums for computer games, voice image transmissions, the world wide web, blogs, social networking sites and mobile telephony.
-) *Virtual reality:* simulated environments and immersive representational spaces.
-) *A whole range of transmission and dislocation established media:* this occurs in, for example, photography, animation, television, journalism, film and cinema.

From the above, it can be understood that new media is an important tool in this era of globalization; it has opened up unimaginable forms of communication between people a world apart and has become what Friedman and Friedman (2008:78), call a “death of distance”. Giwa (2012) agrees with this viewpoint when he says that, the Internet and new technologies are compressing time and space and that the world is shrinking daily. Personal blogs, websites and pictures can now be seen by friends who are living on different continents, and these pieces of personal content can become influential very quickly.

Theoretical Underpinning

Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism falls among the reductionist theories, which attempt to describe the philosophical positions that interpret a complex system as the sum of its parts. The theory offers a causative link between technology and society and it explains whom or what could have a controlling power in human affairs, (Nagel, 2012). It pries into the degree to which human thought or action is influenced by technological factors.

On their part, Asemah et al (2016) posit that technological determinist view originated with Karl Marx who, they say, noted that changes in technology, and specifically productive technology, are the primary influence on human social relations. Impliedly, social relations and cultural practices ultimately revolve around technological and economic base of a given society. This view is embedded in our contemporary Nigeria where the fast-changing technologies constantly alter the lives of the people

Specifically, the theory revolves around the proposition that, technology in any given society defines its nature. In other words, technology is viewed as the driving force of culture in a society and it determines its course of history. Subjecting the theory to further review, Marshal McLuhan in 1964 concluded that technology has the ability to drive human interaction and create social change. This view apparently focuses on the effects and impacts of ICTs or the new media on users, organizations and society.

On his part, Chandler (1995) avers that technological determinism theory bothers on social change, where technology is seen as the prime mover in history. Thus, Landon Winner, in Asemah et al (2016), identifies two hypotheses for this theory:

- i. The technology of a given society is fundamental influencer of the various ways a society exists.
- ii. Changes in technology are the primary and most important source that leads to change in the society.

Implied from the hypotheses above is the presumption that technology influences the various choices that we make and, therefore, a changed society can be traced back to changed technologies.

Evolution of new media

Scholars are hardly of the consensus regarding the specific time frame of the emergence of new media. Dominant views regarding the evolution of new media however, traced it to early 1990's emergence of digital and computerized media products like CD-ROM and WWW sites.

The last twenty-five years have seen the rapid transformation into media which are predicated upon the use of digital technologies, such as internet. Friedman and Friedman (2008) are somewhat categorical when they posit that the new media, also known as web 2.0 came into effect around 2001.

Friedmann and Friedmann (2008) present a timeline on the evolution of new media, laying emphasis on the sequence in which different technological innovation prepared way for final emergence of what is now

termed, new media. Accordingly, Friedmann and Friedmann (2008), say that the Internet relay Chat (IRC) was invented in 1988, leading to the WWW, and the Mosaic first browser, in 1991 and 1993 respectively.

Consequently, this laid the strongest milestone in the evolution of new media. With the invention of WWW, the web Crawler, the first web search engine, was made possible on the Internet in 1994. Following this breakthrough, AOL, Prodigy and CompuServe came on the Internet, closely followed by VOIP, which became a trailblazer for ICQ free instant messaging in 1995 and 1996, respectively.

About three years later, the success of ICQ free instant messaging gave rise to the release of Napster in 1999 as well as the invention of Google and iPod in 1999 and 2001 respectively. Also, in 2001 and 2002, Wikipedia, Friendster and Second Life emerged. The most significant era with spectacular breakthrough, that indeed marked the watershed in the evolution of new media platforms was in 2003, which saw the emergence of Myspace, Skype, Technorati blog search Engine and Google acquired blogger.

The year 2004 marked another turning point in the new media world; for it was the year when one of the most popular new media Platforms-Facebook-was invented. This was closely followed by Podcast-Internet audio programming and YouTube in 2005.

This historical perspective has helped to clarify the evolutionary stages that paved way for the more sophisticated new media technologies of today. Also, the historical account of the evolution of new media shows the rapid pace of technological innovation in the build up to what we have today.

New Media and Challenges of Traditional Media

Several studies on information and communication technologies have found that, with the evolution of new media, the conventional media-newspaper, radio and television, have been grappling with survival instinct. This is because; new media through internet is threatening the stronghold of the traditional media. In his study, Giwa (2018) found that, hard copy readership of print media is steadily declining, publishers are closing and journalists with decades of experiences are being laid off.

Niyi (2008) equally found that the traditional media audiences have been swayed in favour of the new media to satisfy their information needs. He observes that, people easily opt for Facebook status feeds or by following Tweets on Twitter or RSS feeds to get information on whatever they wish. Across the world, newspaper and television stations are being hit by declining advert revenues, with some organizations blaming this on the rise of the Internet, (Agboola, 2014).

Usually, the newspapers use their editorial content to gain massive attention of the audiences and in turn sell the attention gained to advertisers. This explains why advertising rates of a newspaper are determined by the percentage of the attention of its audience and the rates vary among newspaper organisations. But with the Internet becoming the main forum from which audiences are getting news and information, advertising revenues accrued to the print media seem to be on the decline. Thus, the new media is constantly threatening the survival of the traditional media in Nigeria by depriving the old media of their strongest and most viable revenue source.

Factors influencing the curve for the new media

One of the major factors that help the new media to steadily overtake the traditional media is its *participatory capacity*. The excitement generated when citizens contribute photos, video and news updates to the mainstream news, gives a strong edge to new media over traditional media known for their rigid one-way paternalistic approach to generating content in the sender-know-all manner. Advocates of citizen journalism are quick to point out that participatory journalism builds trust and inclusiveness.

Another factor in favour of new media is *blogging*. It is a phenomenon threatening the survival of traditional media. The rise of easy-to-use software has put a printing press in the hand of every citizen. No longer can anyone be denied a seat at the table and those at the traditional printing press can only deny that at their own peril. Through blogging, news events can be accessed in the same instant that they occur. The digital generation of news with video makes the new media to be interactive and thus turn people away from traditional ways of getting the news.

Next factor is the *economic advantage*. The hard economic reality in Nigeria easily lends support to why people tend to be more inclined to new media as a means to satisfy their information thirst. For instance, the web has the advantage of allowing people to distribute news without needing to buy printing presses, thus requiring them to spend less to satisfy their information needs.

Survival of the old media in the age of the New Media: Strategies and prospects

To cope with the onslaught of these challenges, the newspapers are currently adapting to having news widely available online where advertisements can as well follow and go viral through the entire new media platforms. This has helped to make up for the lost revenue through advertising on printed copy.

Aliagan (2015) highlights some of the creative and innovative strategies as follows:

Minimizing the online content

As a tactical measure, the newspapers upload only a part of their contents online as a way of making the hardcopy more comprehensive and relevant. Most Nigerian newspapers upload only the lead stories online. These lead stories are also not uploaded all at once, but sequentially. Many readers who are in a hurry to get the entire stories of the day could opt for the hard copy which carries all the news for the day. By this tactics, which make readers see the online versions as incomplete, the hardcopies will continue to maintain relevance.

Publication of advert and important notices only on hardcopy

In order to draw interest to the hard-prints, newspapers choose to publish some very important advertisements and public notices only on the hard print versions of their newspapers. Such public notices and advertisements by government agencies and industrial giants relate to jobs, recruitments, calls for interviews scholarships. This tactic makes hardcopy relevant for the targets of such advertisement who must read them.

Cutting operational cost and Improved graphics

The print media can achieve this by cutting down on staff recruitment and increase reliance on news agencies as one of the major news sources. This however does not suggest a total reliance on subscribed news. It is only a measure to maintain wide coverage by print media organization with fewer staff. Newspapers are striving to put

great premium on the aesthetic value. High quality photograph, beautiful graphic designs and excellent layout are becoming inalienable part of the newspaper selling point.

Niche publications

The newspapers and magazine not only sustain pull-out celebrity magazines known as niche publications but are improving the quality and sophistication of these pull-outs to attract readers' interests. These pull-outs are sometimes included either in mid-week papers, weekend or Sunday editions. They are usually printed on beautiful matt or gloss papers with alluring names. They contain soft content like interviews, fashion tips home management information, among others.

Social media interface

As a way of appealing to younger generation of readers (who indeed constitute highest percentage of social media users), newspapers and magazine try to cope with the stiff competition from the internet, by introducing online social media interface. That is why a number of newspapers and magazines in Nigeria are now on Facebook, Twitter, Googlet, etc. through which they popularize their news content.

However, newspapers should go beyond this level to creating chat rooms where readers can interact with one another and discuss the full news read in hardcopy on issues of national importance. It is instructive that vanguard newspaper has blazed the trail in this regard with the floating of Vanguard Online Community.

Mobile online newspaper

Newspaper online platforms are being floated. The measure is designed to prompt a subscriber once there is a news update, and then hard-print copy can be obtained for details. What is coveted in the mobile prompting is the reader's curiosity towards the news or information since mobile platforms are expected to have restricted contents.

Fundamental to the survival to the survival of the traditional media, in spite of the strategies discussed from the foregoing is the issue of credibility of content. Already, there are segments of the society which see the mainstream media as the mouthpiece and propaganda tool of their owners. Although the competition may be very stiff, but with strict adherence to credibility of the editorial contents, traditional media can still maintain and sustain their relevance.

Beyond this, traditional media can benefit from adaptation and application of the thrust of the *Creative Destruction* theory, (Obagwu, 2008). Creative Destruction theory, according to Nolan (1995), says that an organization can maintain a competitive edge in an industry by dismantling old order of activity (technological, organizational and managerial) and simultaneously invent and build new ones. This, as Nolan explains, is achieved through adopting new ideas and abandoning older ones. Creative destruction theorist, according to Nolan, warns that although an organization may be successful, may have reached its height; if it's non-innovative in its activities and operations, it can still be eventually driven out of the scene by a more innovative company. As a panacea, Nolan admonishes organisations to constantly strive to meet the needs of customers at all times.

With the insight offered by this theory, it can be understood that the traditional media in Nigeria are in what Aliagan (2015, p.9) calls “cultural lock-in,” as disruptive innovations such as blogs, social networking sites, mobile devices and new aggregators like Google, Yahoo, Facebook, among others are challenging traditional media. Apparently, the stability the old media enjoyed over the years has been threatened by the emergence of new media technologies.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the survival of the old media or, whether the new media can displace the traditional media, will be contingent on the extent to which the old media respond to the innovative approaches discussed, to counter the onslaught of the new media.

Economic and social implications of the new media in Nigeria

The combined values of the new media transcend the realms of communication and exchange of information to cover enormous economic potentials in the society. The economic implications of the new media reflect in man’s quest to acquire, conserve and enjoy wealth. New media has enormous economic potentials, which if optimally harnessed, can translate into a sustainable socio-economic transformation of Nigeria.

Advertising: In the world of social media network, advertisers have far better and more cost effective means by which maximum target audience can be reached. Many advertisers these days prefer digital sales channels to traditional media to place their products and services for sales. Digital sales channels are faster, more convenient and ensure reach maximization (Ellison, 2011). Furthermore, Ellison opines that, “digital sales channels are the best choice for advertisers. Channels such as Amazon, eBay, Facebook, Etsy, Cafe press, Bonanza, Cratejoy, Craigslist, Google Shopping, are now the advertisers’ coveted channels for the sales of their goods and services”. (p.28)

There have been host of opportunities and new ways to market and promote products and services using *iAd* and *icampaigns* and with new content operator called *ichannels* and *iNetworks* come new sponsorship opportunities as well.

Marketing/Business Collaboration: New media serves as platform for marketing /business collaboration. The interactive features of the digital social media constitute a unique combination of powerful capabilities for marketers. Commenting on the marketing potentials of the new media, Akasike (2008, p.69) points out that:

Facebook and other social media such as Snapchat, Pinterest, and Vine have made significant impacts on how businesses advertise on the internet using the social media frenzy. New media offers excellent tool for marketing; businesses use this means to get exposure at much lower cost than any other means of traditional marketing. Everything is just a click and one post away.

This way, new media technologies provide opportunities through which marketing and collaboration are achieved among entrepreneurs in various ways.

Socially, through a platform like MySpace, career musicians connect with their colleagues and promote their songs. Other social networks such as LinkedIn and Xing are oriented towards enabling people build and maintain professional contacts for career growth (Prospective Technological Studies, 2018).

Skill acquisition: People can improve and enhance their skills by sharing ideas, knowledge and information with millions of other people across geographical locations. Chukwuma (2018, p.49) offer more clarifications to this view:

Through new media platforms users can learn new skills and improve their existing skills by collaborating with others, particularly colleagues in a given field. There are sites where professionals such as health practitioners, lawyers, teachers, media workers, writers, and indeed, any imaginable career group interact to exchange ideas, explore new skills and knowledge towards mutual growth. Such forums serve as opportunities for social interaction and economic empowerment through improved knowledge and skills.

Through the platforms like YouTube, keen-minded individuals can acquire a number of skills as learners follow the live demonstrative teachings. By providing opportunities for skill acquisition, the new media helps in grooming competent workforce for the society. Consequently, individual users are empowered to build their personal wealth and improve their living standard thus, making the society much more productive.

Boost small capital investment, build brand: These days, one observes Facebook users engage in all kinds aggressive marketing of their small business investments directing their followers to call for patronage. It is indeed, a new era. New media platforms have helped in attracting customers and engross them with products which make their brands popular. It enables the business to get new information about their customers and their customer services.

Having discussed the social and economic potentials inherent in the new media, it must be made clear that the possibility of these potentials translating to fruition in Nigeria is contingent on some basic factors, some of which are briefly highlighted as follows:

Penetration Factor: The extent to which new media are available and penetrate among the vast population spread across the length and breadth of Nigeria, will determine the level at which these potentials are crystalized into reality.

Infrastructure factor: New media is driven by technologies. And because they are technology-based, its thriving requires availability of relevant information and technology hardware and software. This is referred to as ICT infrastructure. However, Agboola (2014) expresses regrets that, ICT infrastructure is yet to be satisfactorily developed in Nigeria.

Similarly, the issues of credibility of information, threat of hackers, and cyber bullying could hamper optimal realization of the enormous potential opportunities offered by the new media for socio-economic development in Nigeria. New media is like a newsroom with pool of reporters without the editor. The timeless and noble concept of gatekeeping in conventional journalism is lacking.

Conclusion

To all intents and purposes, the new media evolution brought a radical change to the world order. The new media is ubiquitous, revolutionizing every sphere of human endeavor. In spite of the unintended effects, the new media and the values it has offered the world, has come to stay.

As the wave of the new media continues to permeate facets of the society, Nigeria stands to experience and unprecedented transformation in virtually all sectors of her economy. This therefore, makes the need for regulation of the new media an urgent necessity, particularly when the traditional mass media, with their limitations in reach and speed compared to the new media, are operating under strict legal ambits and ethical prescriptions. The new media with their unprecedented reach, speed, impacts, and easy access, cannot be insulated from strict legal framework. The call for the regulation remains an abiding imperative.

The old media will still continue to maintain relevance if they eschew complacency and remain awake to innovative approach to the content and designs. The insight offered by *Creative Destruction* theory clearly underscores the view that the traditional media cannot go extinct now or in future, so long as owners are awake to more imaginative and combative strategies

Recommendations

Arising from the conclusion, it is the recommendation of the paper that:

1. Given the capacity for unprecedented speed, reach and accessibility of the new media, usages must be regulated within legal and ethical prescriptions as it applies to traditional media; while the security agencies, especially Central Intelligence Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation should be on guard to checkmate extremist views and other tendentious criminal usages.
2. Educational curricula from primary to post-secondary institutions in Nigeria should integrate new media, their potentials and benefits to societal development; while the teaching of skills and technical competencies in the use and operations of these media be accorded priority attention.
3. Finally, owners of the traditional media-private and public must be awake to the challenges arising from the impact of the new media revolution and thus evolve creative approaches in content production to sustain their relevance in this new era.

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