New Media and Education: An Overview of Its Impacts on the Academic Performances of Nigerian Students

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Abstract

Over the years, the transitional advancement in digital technologies and the increasing numbers of new media platforms have revolutionized the ways in which people communicate and share information. The new information and communication technologies have impacted on the society positively and negatively. These technologies have affected the socio-cultural, political and economic structures of the contemporary society. Advancement in technologies have eased and expanded the frontiers of communication and information reception and dissemination among people. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), particularly the Internet, have impacted greatly on the society; increasing access to information and creating fresh challenges for the society. This study appraises the relationship between new media/ICT and education in Nigeria. It also examines the impacts of new media on the academic performances of students and the society in general.
Keywords: New media, ICT, education.

Introduction

Variations exist in the use of terms, describing the new technologies that revolutionized the processes of information gathering and dissemination. Terms such as "social media," "new media" or "ICT" are used interchangeably to describe these new technologies in the communication industry. These terms are used to describe the digital and computerized communication technologies. New media are platforms with highly accessible digital technologies such as blogs, podcasts, social networks, wikis, micro-blogs and message boards that can be used by the general public for interactions across distance. Nevertheless, new media are products of globalization and scientific innovations which stems from the expansion of information and communication technologies. The concept has been defined and explained in different ways by its users, ICT experts, and authors. Nwabueze (2009:146-147) rightly asserts that, it is still difficult to accurately state what comprises the new media. According to her, new media refers to products of the on-going information technology revolution which have separated the old communication technologies, basically those used prior to the advent of computer (land-line telephone, electronic news gathering camera, analogue radio and television, video text, wireless intercom system etc) from the new communication technologies (computer, Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS), digital radio and television systems, the Internet and World Wide Web, GSM phones, etc). Today, the Internet and World Wide Web constitute major components of the new media. New media specifically refers to web facilitated communication channels which have redefined journalistic information sharing and dissemination with a more interactive sender-receiver relationship in a mass communication environment.

New media can be described as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the World Wide Web (WWW) and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated contents. Accordingly, Compaine (2002) cited in Idiong (2012:2) observes that, the technologies described as "new media" evolved from the miniaturisation and digitisation of communication gadgets that took place in the decades following the 1980s. As a result of these processes, the media became increasingly manipulable, networkable, compressible and interactive.

Social media are "read-write Web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing of Web content to actually contributing to the content." One thing that is common in most definitions of social media is the point that it is based on user-generated participation. The opportunity to enjoy user-to-user interaction distinguishes social media from the traditional media which is characterized by top-down news dissemination arrangement. Another attribute of the social media which distinguishes it from the traditional media is the choice it accords to its users. Choice enables people to access the information they like to learn about through the social media, eliminating the gatekeeper role of traditional media. On one hand, the choice offered by social media reduces the shared experience that viewers of particular traditional media channels usually have; on the other hand, it creates a network of individuals with like interests and similar preferences. Two primary tools that have enabled people to socialize and connect with each other online are social networking sites and electronic messaging. More than half of America's teens and young adults send electronic messages and use social networking sites, and more than one-third of all Internet users engage in these activities. In Nigeria, over 3 million people have Facebook accounts, while about 60,000 people are on Twitter. Most people who use social media tools access them mainly through computers and mobile devices such as phones and Tablet PCs. Analysts

suggest that majority of phone purchases in the coming years will be more for using online networks rather than making phone calls. Thus, phone communication is now tending toward one-to-many sharing rather than the usual one-to-one conversation. Social media technologies take on different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, podcasts, pictures, and video (Baekdal, 2008; Sweetser and Lariscy, 2008; Jones and Fox, 2009; Asuni and Farris, 2011 cited in PALC, 2011:5).

Asemah (2011:204-205) describes new media in the following terms, noting that, new media is a broad term that emerged in the later part of the twentieth century to encompass the amalgamation of traditional media such as film, images, music, spoken and written words, with the interactive power of computer and communications technology, computer-enabled consumer devices and most importantly, the Internet. New media holds a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as, interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. According to him, new media are a disparate set of communication technologies that share certain features apart from being new, made possible by digitalization and being widely available for personal use as a communication device. The new media are not only or even mainly concerned with the production and distribution of messages, but at least, mainly concerned with processing, exchange and storage. Hanson (2005) cited in Nwabueze (2009:147) notes that, these (new media) are often referred to as "dot-coms." Most significant are the independent sites zines, weblogs, webcams, and gossip pages – that are operated by anyone who wants to be a publisher and has a website.

The term new media is construed broadly to encompass all the digital, computerized, or networked information and communication technologies that have emerged since the later part of the twentieth century (Wikipedia, 2011 in Idiong, 2012:3). Idiong puts forth that, within this range of technologies are such innovations as the Internet, individual websites and blogs, computer games, mobile telephony, and even small or digital media such as computer discs with read-only memory (CD-ROMs), and digital versatile discs (DVDs). The author, however, argues that this definition of new media does not include television, films, magazines, books or any paper-based publications – unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity, which is one of the cardinal characteristics of new media.

New media are seen generally, to include all online creations – blogs, feeds, Google books, podcasts, vidcasts, online video (youtube, blimps TV, etc), social networks, search engines, affiliate programmes, online games, virtual trade shows, online communities, ebooks, kiosks, to mention a few (Sponder cited in Makinmaa, 2007, in Nwabueze, 2009:148). New media emerged as powerful communication and development tools, adding to the potency of mobile telecommunications as drivers of economic and democratic change. New media technologies have significant impacts on organizational, professional and individual reputations.

From a more practical point of view, the new or social media includes web-based and mobile-based technologies that revolutionized the processes of communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organizations, and communities. Examples of these platforms include but not limited to the following computer or mobile applications and social networking websites: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, iTunes U, Second Life, Whatsapp, Yahoo Messenger, BlackBerry Messenger and MySpace. These platforms have a two-way (one-to-many and many-to-one) interactive process and options that enable communicators interact lively. Their features are common to what is obtainable in a face-to-face communication. These are referred to as media because they are tools which can also be used for the storage and dissemination of information. Unlike the traditional media such as radio and television, most of the social media platforms allow their users to interact and share contents such as photographs and videos, among others. According to Bennett (2003); Creeber and Martin (2009) cited in Salman et al. (2011:3), with the coming of new media, people who have long been on the receiving end of one-way communication are now increasingly likely to become producers and transmitters. The long-term picture of new media or mass media information flows is not easy to predict. Mass media news outlets are struggling with changing gate-keeping standards due to demands for interactive content produced by audiences themselves. Ordinary citizens are empowered to report on their political experiences while being held to high standards of information quality and community values. In the long run, these tendencies may be the most revolutionary aspects of the new media environment.

The main features which distinguish social media from the old media, as McQuail (2006) explains are; their interconnectedness, their accessibility to individual users as senders and/or receivers, their ubiquity and "delocatedness" (Cited in Nwabueze, 2009:147). Idiong (2012:4-5) itemizes the characteristics of the new media in the following terms; digitality, interactivity, virtuality and hypertextuality. All technologies categorised as new media necessarily possess certain qualities that distinguish them from their predecessors, the so-called "old media."

Conceptualizing the Impacts of New Media in Contemporary Society with Specific Reference to Information Flow and Education
New media includes a variety of web-based tools and services that are designed to promote community

development through collaboration and information sharing. These tools provide opportunities for individual expressions as well as interactions with other users. New media technologies have brought many diverse communities and societies around the world together. In fact, the world is fast become a "global village," resulting from the new information and communication technologies. We are living in a very fast developing and globalizing world. Scientific innovations and the advancement in technologies have eased the processes of communication and information sharing. Nwabueze (2011:145) asserts that, "technological advancement has expanded the frontiers of communication and information dissemination in contemporary society."

The emergence of new media has also made tasks less tedious in many professions (business, banking, entertainment, and so on). With e-commerce, e-banking, among others, one can make monetary transactions, place order for goods and services with instant delivery using computer or mobile phones with Internet connectivity while in his/her bedroom. In journalism, the impacts are both positive and negative, as contended by scholars in mass communication. Asemah (2011:271) explains that, every major advance in communication technology has affected the medium that uses it. There is no doubt that the introduction of information and communication technology (new media) has created a world different from what use to exist before their arrival. The task of journalism has become less tasking and new communication equipment are frequently introduced thereby moulding and restructuring newsgathering methods and away from what used to exist. Idiong (2012:2) illuminates that, in no other profession are the effects of these changing times more keenly felt than in the journalism profession; no other professionals have to depend on the latest media technologies for their day-to-day tasks as much as journalists do. These new technologies, known in communication parlance as new media, have both complemented and complicated the traditional reportorial tools and tasks of the would-be journalists.

Media revolution on the social media sphere is transforming, fundamentally and irrevocably, the nature of journalism and its ethics. This implies that publishing is now in the hands of citizens, while the Internet encourages new forms of journalism that are interactive and immediate. Our media ecology is a chaotic landscape evolving at a furious pace. Professional journalists share the journalistic sphere with tweeters, bloggers, citizen journalists, and social media users. The rapid and pervasive growth of social media technologies and their relative ease of use and availability have made social media a popular form of communication. The world over, a certain trend is emerging. Social Media is distinct from the conventional, industrial media such as the print media because of certain characteristics. It is proper that we make this distinction very clear to appreciate the dynamics of social media as an agent of change (John, 2012:4-6).

Computers and the Internet have brought new ways to journalism in terms of production and dissemination of news. The so-called "new media" has emerged as a new field of news media industry, promising unbounded opportunities and threats at the same time for journalism and journalists. The Internet looks like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides the profession reaching everyone in the globe without having space restrictions. Its multimedia capabilities force the imaginations of journalists to construct their stories as creatively as they can. On the other hand, it brings tough challenges to news businesses in terms of revenue generation. Similarly, the problem of ethical standards in online publishing puts the profession's credibility in peril, challenging the profession of journalism more than ever. The Internet is the main driver behind this vast array of opportunities and challenges, creating an alternative medium for publishing and reaching others from anywhere, instantly. Indeed as a network of networks operating on the basis of multiple protocols, standards and interfaces, the Internet transcends national borders and removes barriers to the entry of everyone, ensuring the free flow of information. This new medium is the most capable of the communication networks throughout the history in terms of its basic attributes, the components that comprise it, its architecture, and the capabilities that it can support (Arslan, 2002:15).

Technologies have transformed our lives in many ways – positive and negative. The phenomenal change through close interaction and integration of cultures is rapidly impacting on the entire world. These changes branded globalization are propelled by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Kelvin (2005) in Asemah (2011:271) asserts that, "information and communication technology brought about a fundamental shift on human society and created profound change in the way we live, work or play."

Globalization is a phenomenon that is multi-dimensional and multifaceted. It has economic, political, socio-cultural and educational implications (Robertson, 1992; Guillen, 2000; Obilade, 2003; Yau, 2005 cited in Echezona et al, 2009:75). The negative impacts of these innovations in our social and educational pursuits overweigh its positives. This is in line with the fact that there is hardly anything invented by man, no matter its level of perfection that is without some flaws. Idiong (2012:1) corroborates this fact when he notes that, "as new information and communication technologies emerged and meld with other contending social forces in postmodern societies, new tensions and challenges arise, especially for professionals who work in cultural industries such as the media."

In the era of globalization, information revolution is a critical factor which is reshaping the education processes. Corgburn and Adeye (1999) note that, the driving force behind the current information revolution is the new technologies that goes with Information and Communications Technology (ICT). These technologies

continue to provide enabling environment for global education process in which geographical regions are benefiting one way or the other from the vast opportunities in the global education industry (Geleijnse, 1994 cited in Echezona et al, 2009:75).

Concerns over educational relevance and quality coexist with the imperative of expanding educational opportunities to those made most vulnerable by globalization. Global changes also put pressure on all groups to constantly acquire and apply new skills. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) – which includes radio and television, as well as, newer digital technologies such as computers and the Internet have been touted as potentially powerful enabling tools for educational change and reform. When used appropriately, different ICTs are said to help expand access to education, strengthen the relevance of education to the increasingly digital workplace, and raise educational quality by, among others, helping make teaching and learning into an engaging, active process connected to real life.

Education is a very essential aspect of societal and individuals' lives. Education to a society is more important than anything. Advancement in technologies has eased the processes of academic and professional researches. However, the educational effectiveness of ICTs depends on how they are used and for what purpose. And like any other educational tool or mode of educational delivery, ICTs do not work for everyone, everywhere in the same way.

Information revolution, powered by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has given impetus to a new information economy. Information and knowledge have become very critical factors of production just like land and capital during agrarian and industrial revolution. This revolution is tremendously impacting in all aspect of human life particularly in critical areas like education. Globalization has opened up a wider horizon for coresearchers, not only in Nigeria, but also in other developing countries. Internationalization of resources has permitted researchers and scholars with different culture and locations to show-case what is obtainable in their environment. Scholars in Nigeria can as a result of globalization, today access simultaneously resources in other Universities without traveling to the physical locations. Today learning opportunities have improved markedly in Nigeria since the advent of information technology and the globalization processes. The ubiquitous learning resources on the web have spurred scholars to take collaborative strides in the pursuit of knowledge. More importantly is its influence in distance learning, in which a learner can register as a student at their base and receive instructions online (Echezona et al., 2009:74-76).

Findings reveal that, today, students show very much interest in using social networks, which in turn affects education severely. As noted earlier, the negatives of social media on the academic performances of students and education, in general supersedes the positives. The emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) or the new media has eased the processes of research thereby providing unlimited access to information on virtually all spheres of human endeavours. Considering the quality of information available on the Internet, one can agree with the fact that most of the information accessed on Internet or new media platforms are fabricated, treacherous, inaccurate, nonfactual and misleading. This is because anybody who has access to the Internet can write, post, share and publish information of all sorts, regardless of the quality. This has demeaned the quality of academic research in the contemporary society. ICTs provide enormous opportunities such as storing, processing, retrieving, disseminating and sharing of information. Its use in educational institutions in developing countries is still plagued with many problems that hinder effective and efficient management.

John (2012:1) asserts that, we are now faced with the challenge of deploying the new media platform for effective management and dissemination of information. In fact, there is so much information in the cyber space that our basic challenge now is how to manage it for the optimization of society's ends. The rapidity with which information moves today confirms what McLuhan (1948) visualized which have helped to integrate our world into a community networked in real time with intercommunication that Marshal McLuhan could never have foreseen when he projected that the world would become a 'global village' through the media of mass communication.

Accordingly, the dependence of students on the Internet or new media to source or gather materials for academic and professional researches have degraded the value of most academic works undertaken by students. Today, students are fond of plagiarism. One can access, copy and use other persons' intellectual works without acknowledgement. They regard creativity as a waste of effort. This has greatly affected qualitative research among students, especially in tertiary institutions. Communication skills, language usage and creative writing have decline among students, as the new technologies has reduced or taken away their communication skills. On other hand, students hardly speak good English these days. They mostly use slang words or shortened forms of words in writing as a result of complete reliance on computer grammar and spelling check features.

To a large extent, new media has lowered the standard and quality of education in Nigeria. It has grabbed the attention and concentration of students and diverted them toward non-educational, unethical and inappropriate activities such as examination malpractices. It has made students so lazy that they hardly resort to extensive study before sitting for any examination. Instead of studying very hard to write and pass examinations,

students now cultivate the habit of cheating through browsing on their mobile phones while in examination halls. Reading culture among students is on the verge of extinction.

Concentration in classrooms during lecture periods is now a thing of the past among students. While classes are being held, students lose more than fifty percent (5)%) concentration to chatting on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Friendster, Hi5, Mozat, BBM, 2go, among others. Social media brought about lose of concentration among students, thereby creating one problem or the other in their education pursuits and performances.

Despite the limited Internet access in some parts of the world, as well as limited freedom of expression and information, social networking websites are increasingly being accessed in the developing world through mobile phones. Social media should be viewed by the governments as a tool for effective governance, transparency and accountability. It is also a good tool for governments to communicate effectively with their citizens. Like their counterparts in the mainstream media, social media aggregators can greatly promote efficiency, effectiveness and integrity as well as the delivery of quality, affordable and accessible social services if they improve their scrutiny of public, private and civil society organizations and institutions (John, 2012:13-14). The Internet is strengthening the capabilities of media watchdogs whose function is to check the application of ethical and professional standards of reporting and editing the practice of journalism. Utilizing technical advantages of the Internet as well as its freedom, "online media watchdogs" are having more means to serve the profession of journalism and thus becoming more credible and popular platforms than the mainstream media (Arslan, 2002:8).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Globalization and information revolution is increasingly changing the learning process in higher education. Globalization has caused librarians and higher institutions in Nigeria and developing countries to face new type of learning involving the use of ICT infrastructures to improve educational resources (Echezona et al, 2009:80).

Notwithstanding the opportunities following the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) or new media, the challenges posed to the society by these technologies are both multidimensional and multifaceted. The challenges are avoidable because they are not beyond control. It is from this, therefore, that some suggestions and recommendations that could be practical and viable means towards reducing the negative impacts of new media in the society will be drawn. Possible solutions (ways out) of these challenges are as follows:

Stakeholders in the education sector should encourage creativity among students. Creativity should be made competitive among students through scholarship and other educational grants to those who are creative, as this will motivate and boost the performances of others to be creative.

The provision of standard research and practical facilities in schools can also help the situation. Where students lack adequate research facilities like books and other relevant and referencing materials in libraries, they tend to resort to the easy "copy and paste" methods from the social media. Today, you will find out that students write and present final year project works without being able to defend what they claim to have written.

Moreover, there should be regulation in the education sector with specific regards to the use of social networks among students. Although, this task can be very tedious to achieve, but the provision of regulatory frameworks in this regard will reduce the challenges posed by social media on students' performances. There should be strict rules prohibiting students' use of mobile phone and other electronic gadgets in classrooms and examination halls so as to encourage full concentration.

The roles of parents in this direction are also vital. Through close-monitoring of their children's activities and academic performances, parents can help reduce the negative impacts of new media on students' performance. In fact, social media has demeaned culture and morality in the family system. Things were however a little bit under control prior to the emergence of new communication technologies. Today, children are fond of accessing and watching obscene (pornographic) contents on social media using their mobile phones. Parents should discourage their children from all kinds of immoral activities on social networks. They should monitor the activities of children (chatting and browsing) on their mobile handsets. Findings also reveal that parents also involve in social networking. Immorality ought to be discouraged by parents, thereby encouraging and instilling moral values in their children, as this will reduce the level of addiction to social networking among students which in turn, leads to lose of concentration in school and other academic activities.

The innovations of the new media cannot be measured as new ideas keep springing up on almost a daily basis. Technology has increased availability of new ways of reaching audiences – Internet websites, satellite-to-home, audiocassettes, videotapes, blogs, podcasts – along with the increasingly mobile nature of media reception and use, making it clear that it is no longer sufficient to contain the subject by distinct format or technologies of distribution. As Van Dan Dam (2010) puts it, "with the strong presence of the Internet, broadband and social software, the traditional roles of the media elite are being challenged. All the aggregation, filtering, distribution roles and the business models are changing. And social media are becoming part of all media streams" (Cited in

Asekun-Olarinmoye et al., 2014:14)

As sociologists rightly affirm, "change is one of the most fundamental phenomenon in the history of man. Change is the process by which alteration occurs in the structures and functions of a social system." Changes and challenges are natural and inevitable to anyone and anything that exists and survives on earth. As such, changes can be made on the negative impacts of social media in the education sector. It all depends on the approaches used to overcome these challenges. Implementing the best and most suitable approach will contribute greatly in this regard. There is the need for effective and efficient policy formation and implementation in the education sector, to avert the effects of social media on students' performance.

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