

ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPERATIVES OF THE NEW MEDIA IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The advent of the New Media as enabled by information and communication technology from the 19th through the 21st century has no doubt taken its toll on all fronts of human existence; especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Apart from shortening the distance between all parts of the world, technology and the new media has also succeeded in making the world a global village. Hence, it's now easy to relay live audio and visual signals across the length and breadth of the world in real time. People now contract and execute businesses across countries, conferences are held and ideas are shared with a simple push of a computer button. Likewise, political leaders and diplomats are now just a click away from reaching those important decisions that take their countries' fortunes to the next level. On the flip side, ICT and the New Media have also contributed in no small measure, in aiding global terrorism and general insecurity around the world. More interesting is the fact that as developing economies, African countries have massively embraced the information technology and this has helped them in keeping up with the trends in the polity of other model democracies around the world. This paper therefore examines how much effect ICT and the New Media have exerted on the economic, social and political lives of African nations with Nigeria as a case in point for the purpose of this study. It demonstrates the positive and negative influences the new media is having on the social, economic and political lives of African nations

Introduction

Much of the developed world in the last 20 years has been transformed by technology, which is positively linked to global economic power and prosperity. History also shows that technological innovation was essential for human development. This is evident in the gradual but steady transition

from the ancient to the modern ways of doing thing. Hence, the era of the “Stone Age” is now history because some more advanced tools have been developed to replace those carved out of stones and wood by the early men. No longer does man have to strike one stone against another to make fire, we now have match-sticks and lighters; just as the modern man no longer have to carve out spears and arrows from wood for hunting-he now has a barrage of sophisticated weapons in his arsenal to do so.

People no longer have to walk unimaginable distances because there are now cars, boats, ships and air planes to take them to all parts of the world. Neither does anyone necessarily need wait for someone to come home from the city so they can write a letter and send through him before they can communicate with kits and kin-there’s now the mobile phones to do so.

Technology has increasingly become a human development enabler, supporting people to increase their incomes and thereby increase the quality of their lives

A major impact of technology on Nigeria and Africa and indeed the world over, is in the area of communication as evidenced by the advent of the printing press, telephone, television, fax and the Internet, all of which reduced social isolation and enabled people to be better informed and hence more participative in the community and the economy.

The use of technology has often been seen as synonymous with innovation and technological innovation viewed, by some, as a self-perpetuating mechanism capable of transforming social systems by permanently and positively altering values and patterns of beliefs. This implies that the use of technology in developing economies like Nigeria could transform its social, economic and even political structures.

This is because new technology requires new skills so that, inherently, learning becomes a part of technology. Learning could result in morphogenic change, whereby the changes automatically cause more changes, which can eventually transform the entire social systems.

The major objectives of this study include tracing the development of the new media from inception to the present day, with a view to examine the positive and negative impact of the new media on the economic and political lives of African countries, using Nigeria as a case in point. It will also make recommendations as to how the new media can be used as a tool for socio-political and economic development of African nations.

This study adopts the qualitative research method where data shall be generated from books and journals as well as from online sources.

The New Media: A Brief History

Several scholars have slightly varying views about the origin of the internet and its evolution from inception to the present day. In all the submissions however, everyone seems to agree to the fact that the new media is largely driven by the internet. According to Barry. M. Leiner et-al (2007, p.48),

The Internet is at once a world-wide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location. The Internet represents one of the most successful examples of the benefits of sustained investment and commitment to research and development of information infrastructure. The Internet has revolutionized the computer and communications world like nothing before. The invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and computer set the stage for this unprecedented integration of capabilities.

The Internet today is a widespread information technology. Its history is complex and involves many aspects - technological, organizational, and community. And its influence reaches not only to the technical fields of computer communications but throughout society as we move toward increasing use of online tools to accomplish electronic commerce, information acquisition, and community operations.

Human interactions with one another across long distances have been a great concern to humanity for centuries. As social animals, people have always relied on communication to strengthen their relationships. When face-to-face discussions are impossible or inconvenient, humans have dreamed up plenty of creative solutions. One of these solutions was the invention of the internet; the information dissemination technology that drives the rest of what has now come to be known as the new media, including all the social networking media platforms. In the words of Drew Hendricks (2013), the earliest methods of communicating across great distances used written correspondence delivered by hand from one person to another; in other words, letters. The earliest form of postal service dates back to 550 B.C., and this primitive delivery system would become more widespread and streamlined in future centuries. The telegraph was invented in 1792. This allowed messages to be delivered over a long

distance far faster than a horse and rider could carry them. And although telegraph messages were short, they were a revolutionary way to convey news and information.

Furthering the development of information and communication technology, two important discoveries happened in the last decade of the 1800s: The telephone in 1890 and the radio in 1891. Both technologies are still in use today, although the modern versions are much more sophisticated than their predecessors. Telephone lines and radio signals enabled people to communicate across great distances instantaneously, something that mankind had never experienced before.

Technology began to change very rapidly in the 20th Century. And as Drew puts it, after the first super computers were created in the 1940s, scientists and engineers began to develop ways to create networks between those computers, and this would later lead to the birth of the Internet.

The earliest forms of the Internet, such as CompuServe, were developed in the 1960s. Primitive forms of email were also developed during this time. By the 70s, networking technology had improved, and 1979's UseNet allowed users to communicate through a virtual newsletter.

By the 1980s, home computers were becoming more common and social media was becoming more sophisticated. Internet relay chats, or IRCs, were first used in 1988 and continued to be popular well into the 1990's. The first recognizable social media site, Six Degrees, was created in 1997. It enabled users to upload a profile and make friends with other users. In 1999, the first blogging sites became popular, creating a social media sensation that's still popular today.

After the invention of the internet, the new media began to explode in popularity, offering internet users various platforms to get their information across to their target audience in their hundreds of millions and in real times. Sites like MySpace and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s, and sites like Photobucket and Flickr facilitated online photo sharing. YouTube came into the picture in 2005, creating an entirely new way for people to communicate and share with each other across great distances. And by 2006, Facebook and Twitter both became available to users throughout the world. These sites remain some of the most popular social networks on the Internet. Other sites like Tumblr, Spotify, Foursquare and Pinterest began popping up to fill specific social networking niches.

Today, there is a tremendous variety of social networking sites, and many of them can be linked to allow cross-posting. This creates an environment where users can reach the maximum number of people without sacrificing the intimacy of person-to-person communication.

The new media has taken communication and information dissemination further and farther from the conventional radio and perhaps television. The new media offers faster platforms which are much more durable, portable and convenient for the users.

Effect of the New Media: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

The invention of ICT and the new media no doubt came with a mixture of influences which has changed the dynamics of everyday existence. It is therefore safe to suggest that the new media has had effects ranging from good through the bad to the ugly across all fields of human endeavors.

According to Imtiaz Alli (2015, p. 1)

Social networks, (which are a consequence of the new media) help businesses in a variety of ways. Traditional marketing mediums such as the radio, TV commercials and print ads are completely obsolete now and demand for thousands of dollars. And, with new media, businesses can now connect with their targeted customers almost for free; the only cost being those of energy and time. Through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or any other social site for instance, businesses can lower their marketing cost to a significant level.

Again, the increasing popularity of social sites like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, social networks has gained attention as the most viable communication choice for the bloggers, article writers and content creators. These social networking sites have opened the opportunity for all the writers and bloggers to connect with their tech savvy clients to share their expertise and articles. The audience will further share such articles, blog or expertise in their various social circle which further enhance the networks of the followers.

The new media has removed all the communication and interaction barriers, and now one can communicate his/her perception and thoughts over a variety of topics. Students and experts are able to share and communicate with like-minded people and can ask for the input and opinion on a particular topic. Another positive impact of social networking sites is to unite people on a huge platform for the achievement of some

specific objective. This is very important to bring the positive change in society.

Still writing on the positive impact of the new media on the society, Dave Parrack (2017) posits that “social networking isn’t for everyone, however, it is now such a massive part of all our lives; whether we embrace or reject the notion. It can no longer be ignored”. And while comparing the pros and cons of the new media, Parrack thinks it’s only fair to find the balance. According to him, what some people would conceive as negative impact can also be positives for others. And because there are no hard and fast rules to the effect of the new media, the positives could be said to counterbalance the negatives. In his own argument for the new media, Marion Doss, (2016, p. 15) is of the opinion that:

It has never been easier to make friends than it is right now and that is mainly thanks to the new media and social networking sites. The rise of mobile phones helped change the narratives in this instance by connecting people in new ways, but the social networks sprang up and the whole idea of friendship changes again. And there’s no going back

It is now entirely possible to have hundreds of friends on facebook. They may not be friends you know personally, or can spend time with in real world on regular basis; in fact, one may never get to meet these virtual friends. But nonetheless, they are still friends. The new media makes communication faster. Through the use of the various social media platforms, people can reach out to other across distances with their information and in real time. This is why Robert Bejil (2017, p.53) states that

Our time is being stretched thinner and thinner by work and family commitments. But the social networking sites offer a chance to communicate in a speedy and efficient manner. Writing and update for twitter takes all of 20 second and with cross-posting to other social networks switched on, the same update reaches everyone you want it to reach (and probably more) in an instance.

Apart from communicating easily with close friends and family, the new media through social networking has also made it possible to open up the world, making it a smaller place. Friends and acquaintances on the social networks need not bother about where each person lives or who they are, this is because with the new media, everyone is equal regardless of location. The new media offers a great platform for building new relationships. Even though social networks can sometimes also lead to

relationship breakdown, still, people are moving onto other, perhaps better relationships on the social media. The social media connect people back in touch who have lots in common. And this common ground is often the beginning of some long lasting relationships. On the flipside however, it's not all rosy with the new media as it also has its downside. According to Imtiaz Alli (p. 55)

One of the negative effect of the new media or social network is it leads to addiction. Spending countless hours on the social sites can divert the focus and attention from a particular task. It lowers the motivational level of the people, especially of the teenagers and students. They mainly rely on technology and the internet instead of learning the practical knowledge and expertise of the everyday life.

Kids can be greatly affected by these social networking sites if they are allowed to use them. The reason is that sometimes people share photos on social media that contains violence and sex, which can damage the behavior of kids and teenagers. It put the negative impact on overall society as these kids and teenagers involve themselves in crime related activities.

Another downside of the social media is that the user shares too much information which may pose threats to them and which more often than not, are not even verifiable.

Impact of the New Media on African Politics

The new media have been used to trigger and initiate changes in the governments and societies. In fact, the new media can make a difference in the national politics of a state. However, according to Narnia Bohler-Muller and Charl van der Merwe (2011, p. 15),

It is important also to consider this side of the debate about the potential of social media to influence or bring about socio-political change on the African continent. The first is the fact that the tools themselves are actually ineffective, and second, that these tools can produce as much harm to any process of democratization as they can produce good.

This critique that social media can as well be ineffective has been mostly used by Malcolm Gladwell in *The New Yorker* and stems from the fact that casual participants to activities and actions such as large-scale social protests seek social change through low-cost activities such as joining a particular Facebook group like the "Save Darfur" group, which was

created on Facebook. Gladwell is of the opinion that such actions cannot bring about any useful political action.

Shirky however says that even though this critique is correct, it is not central to the question of the power of social media in the sense that the fact that actors who are barely committed and who just joins Facebook groups and makes comments online does not mean that actors who are very committed cannot use social media affectively to influence socio-political change.

The second critique that social media tools can be used to influence or bring about socio-political change and political improvement has to do with the fact that the state is gaining increasingly sophisticated and more technologically advanced means of monitoring and interdicting social media tools. Authoritarian states are increasingly shutting down communications networks and grids in their countries to deny dissidents the opportunity and resources to coordinate and broadcast documentation of any event in real time. The recent incidence in South-West (English-speaking) Cameroon is a glaring case in point.

In Nigeria for instance, the Bring Back Our Girls campaign has also largely been a social media campaign which has drawn attention from all over the globe. Again, politicians and political office seekers in Nigeria have also come to realize the power of the new media in executing their political campaigns as against using just the radio and (or) the Television. Apart from attracting a huge cost, those regular media (radio and TV) have their own peculiar limitations unlike the new media.

It is thus necessary to point out that social media tools can and will be used as tools of state oppression. However, the success of social networking in providing momentum and support to the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt cannot be denied. In this context, Africa as a continent is experiencing a period of enormous change, and there is no doubt that social media will play a role in ensuring active continental political participation

ICT, the New Media and Economic Development in Nigeria

Economic development generally refers to the sustained, concerted actions of policymakers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area. Such actions can involve multiple areas including development of human capital, critical infrastructure, regional competitiveness, environmental sustainability,

social inclusion, health, safety, literacy, and other initiatives. And Slovan Michelle (2013, p. 37) explains the intertwined nature of the internet and economic development better when he posits that:

The day the World Wide Web goes down is the day we will truly appreciate the worth and usefulness of the internet as a tool not just for economic development but for our existence. The day that happens is the day some call DOOM DAY or Armageddon in a more religious language. The engine of globalization is the internet. The earth rotates on its axis but that rotation is being powered by the internet.

Young people are not just 70 % of the Nigerian population, they also now have the tools and the means to effect changes from their population strength. This tool is the new media made possible by the invention of the internet. No longer do Nigerians need to pay an upwards of N250, 000 to place job vacancies in a Newspaper to advertize their enterprises, now people can simply tweet it and get real live responses from target audiences and this has enormous economic implications.

Ours is an empowered generation. We never had a voice but the dynamics have radically changed. We now have the loudest voice. Since the pre-colonial and colonial era, African countries have desired to achieve progress in their economic development as observed in the developed countries. However, up until now, the African countries have continued to depend on the industrialized nations for guidance, largely due to the slow pace of technological development in Africa.

In Nigeria for instance, the economic dependence level led to the recommendations of policies encapsulated as Austerity Measures and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) by the IMF and World Bank in 1983 through 1992. On the political level, Nigeria and the rest of the African countries were also subjected to the United Nations' resolutions on democracy, constitutionalism, human rights and the rule of law. (Echesi, 2014, p. 12)

Over the years, Nigeria and indeed many other countries of the third world have enjoyed enormous economic benefits from the rest of the world as a result of the introduction of the ICT. For instance, emerging businesses in Africa can now freely draw from the experiences of their counterparts in the developed world. Global business partnership is fast developing. This is why Nigeria can now not only boast of her own indigenous

communication company in Globacom (GLO) but has also gone into mega partnership deals with other giant brands around the world.

The ICT has simplified the process of foreign interventions in Africa and the rest of the third world. The presence of the USAID, UK DFID, UNDP, UNICEF and many others are readily evident around the world and their activities and progress are made visible with the help of the internet and new media. Project reports and numerous education materials from these global interventionist organizations are now readily available in the cyberspaces and are also accessible to everyone who has internet access. This way, the new media is helping to better the lives of people.

According to Lee-Roy Chetty (2013, p. 2), technological innovation and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) “represent a way for developing nations to foster economic development, improve levels of education and training, as well as address gender issues within society”.

Entrepreneurship is crucial for economic development around the world. In countries such as Nigeria, Egypt and Indonesia, micro-entrepreneurs generate 38% of the gross domestic product. (Lee, p. 8). Analysis from the World Bank in 2011 indicates that small businesses create a disproportionate share of new jobs. They generate new ideas, new business models, and new ways of selling goods and services.

In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, approximately poor state of roads the near-no-access to electricity, means that people would have very limited access to their target markets. The combination of poor infrastructure and poverty makes it difficult for entrepreneurs to access financial resources and information. The availability of the internet and consequently, the new media has however made it possible for people to access the desired financial information for their small businesses at a much reduced cost.

A basic form of technology such as a simple mobile phone can assist people to communicate with one another, access market information, sell products across geographic areas, reach new consumers, enter mobile payment systems, reduce fraud and crime, and empower women and the disadvantaged. Also, small holder farmers can access valuable information about the latest farming techniques via their mobile devices.

According to a survey undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2014, it was found that 55% of women around the world earned additional income due to owning a mobile phone, and 41% increased their income and professional opportunities. Mobile payment

systems represent a way to reduce the cost of financial transactions and thereby help entrepreneurs. If people can transfer funds quickly and efficiently, it becomes easier for small and medium-sized businesses to sell their products. This improves the efficiency of the marketplace and removes barriers to business growth. And as Lee-Roy (p.13) puts it, “mobile technology offers extensive help on various forms of social and economic development because wireless communications broaden access to information, improve capital access, overcome geographic limitations, and expand market access”.

Internet and Social Media as Tools of Socio-Political Development of Nigeria

The internet and social media have advanced social development by helping to curb the challenges of corruption, terrorism, security, public education and the likes. More critically, social media is helping to bridge the divide amongst Nigeria’s millennial generation. Young Nigerians are talking. The government is beginning to listen too; or at least get a feeling of the political temperature in the country without necessarily going into a National Conference. The man from Owerri does not necessarily need to go to Adamawa or Ibadan to make friends with people from those parts of the country.

While Nigerians at home might not have appreciated the paradigm shift brought about by the invention of the internet. As a result of the January 2012 fuel subsidy removal protests, other sub-Saharan Africans saw that as a pointer to the way forward. The internet served well in mobilizing the Nigerian masses for that protest. And as Farid (2015 p.19) did say:

It took just the click of the computer button to get the message of the protest on the facebook pages, twitter handles and blogs to tell every Nigerian with access to the internet that the #OccupyNigeria #Abuja protests would be at Ascon filling station or that Fuel Subsidy was not the issue but corruption, mismanagement, cronyism and all the known and unknown vices of those in power. It was about the way Nigerians defined the issues and set the government on the defensive path. The government had to be sent scampering for ad-hoc solutions. (p. 22)

There is a shift in Nigeria’s politics that is being run and defined by the internet and social media. The internet and social media affects politics and brings about institutional changes and set the nation on the path of trying to do the right thing.

Democracy is about the people. The internet and social media today offer Nigerians the unique opportunity of expressing themselves freely without the censorship suffered by conventional media houses. It allows everyone to debate freely on the socio-political and economic dynamics of the country. This helps to promote and improve our democracy and sets about the process of Good Governance. The internet and social media have become the crucial bridge through which the governed and the government reach out to one another.

The New Media and Global Politics

The past decade has so far seen many important elections on the African continent. With powerhouses like Nigeria and South Africa holding national and local elections respectively, an independence referendum in South Sudan, plus a presidential election in the fast growing Uganda. All of these elections provide windows into the development of democracy and freedom on the continent.

2011 was also the start of a new decade on the African continent, one that follows significant economic development fueled by the high prices of natural resources. While the continent has widely consolidated economic reform in the first decade of the 21st century, democratic reform still lags in comparison.

Crisis in Zimbabwe, DR Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, among others highlight the ongoing struggles that the continent faces in terms of democratic consolidation.

During this past decade also, another increase was under way: mobile penetration. The substantial growth of mobile technology has alerted development agencies and organizations to the empowerment that mobile devices bring to people of developing and emerging countries. The field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been merged with these developmental bodies into a field of ICT for Development (ICT4D). This emerging field has captured the interests of a range of specialties, from government bureaucrats, to information system companies, to multinationals, and to health organizations.

In terms of democracy, ICT plays a significant role in the future of Africa's evolution. Explaining this in more details, Bailard (2009, p. 9) submits that:

Because the term ICT is so broad, any device, whether it be a radio, television, mobile phone, or iPad can be classified in the ICT arena.

Traditional ICT technologies, such as radio and the television have played substantial roles in elections and democracy since their invention for obvious reasons: the ability to communicate messages to the masses. However, both of these technologies have used one-way conduits to broadcast messages. Even telephone campaigns have been a one sided affair in developed democracies, with campaign aids calling or texting to inform potential voters the pros of their candidate and the cons of the opposing candidate. These traditional modes of communication are well established in western countries, and have been employed by democracies and autocracies to meet their objectives.

However, in the developing world, the infrastructure to conduct communication through these traditional modes of fixed line telephony, over the air television, and radio was first constructed by the western countries seeking to impose colonial or imperial control over these regions. Thus, these networks were generally only established in urban areas where the concentration of people was the greatest and the need to control the masses was the highest.

While radio became the medium of choice because of cost and scalability, these developing countries reminded significantly behind the rest of the world in communications technology. This state remained for much of the second half of the 20th century.

With the advent of mobile technology this paradigm of communication has changed. Now citizens are more connected to each other, to the events in their country, and thus closer to the government. However, this proximity means little if communication remains a one-way avenue. Thus, the creation of social media, which creates a forum for two-way communication, is the real paradigm shift as it allows citizens and government to communicate back and forth. This has many consequences for democracy.

Social media, in terms of democracy, is increasing used to mobilize citizens, hold government officials accountable, and to document abuses and fraud. These modes of usage take on added significance when viewed from the interconnectivity of the world through the World Wide Web. The Internet allows this national communication to be viewed by the rest of the world, as well as allow for the engagement between stakeholders inside and outside of the country. The message that social media users intentionally or inadvertently spread now has an audience as wide as 2

billion. Social media also allows for the bypassing of traditional media groups that often have corporate or ideological bias that shapes their reporting. The democratic values of social media mean that anyone from around the world can engage with an event happening anywhere in the world regardless of their government's view of the event and provided the proper access exists.

Mobilization has always been a key part of political movements. Spreading the message of your group to as many people as possible has always been seen as one of the greatest challenges because of the lack of interconnectivity. Whether that was due to geographic distance, the socio-economic gap, or the digital divide, influencing those people who are not part of the movement is necessary to meet political and democratic objectives.

Before now, election fraud and abuses previously worked fairly straightforwardly in rural parts of Africa. With no international monitors being able to traverse to each district in the countryside, national and local elections were often accompanied by significant fraud and abuse because of the anonymity culprits could be assured would cover their tracks. With no evidence of ballot stuffing, voter violence, or other tricks of the ruling party's cronies, there was very little that could be done from domestic and international viewpoints. Hearsay and conjecture are unlikely to ever bring down a government, or bring about international sanctions. However, documented human rights abuses and confirmed electoral discrepancies certainly can bring about international attention and this is what the New Media has been able to do in recent times. Now, with a broadband mobile connection and a camera phone, election monitoring quickly becomes a task everyone can take part in.

All of these methods used to mobilize, hold politicians accountable, and report election conditions are quickly adopting social media as a medium to conduct business. Each usage requires access to ICT technology. Twitter, Facebook, and custom crowd sourcing apps require a broadband internet infrastructure in order to transmit photos and video, plus provide access to the websites of social media tools.

The other side of the New Media: Terrorism and Security Issues

Much as the ICT and the invention of the social media have made great contribution to the overall socio-political and economic dynamics of the world, it has not been all rosy with the innovation.

In a study by Gabriel Weimann from the University of Haifa, Weimann (2012) found that nearly 90% of organized terrorism on the internet takes place via social media. According to Weimann, “terror groups use social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and internet forums to spread their messages, recruit members and gather intelligence”.

Terrorist groups take to social media because social media tools are cheap and accessible, facilitate quick, broad dissemination of messages, and allow for unfettered communication with an audience without the filter or "selectivity" of mainstream news outlets. Also, social media platforms allow terror groups to engage with their networks. Whereas previously terror groups would release messages via intermediaries, social media platforms allow terror groups to release messages directly to their intended audience and converse with their audience in real time:

The activities of the ISIS in the Middle East and the Boko Haram Group in Nigeria are presently starring us in the face as the cyber spaces are constantly bombarded with the gory images and videos of their clandestine activities. And according to an online source www.bbcworld.co.uk/terrorwatch, “the Taliban has been active on Twitter since May 2011, and has more than 7,000 followers. Tweeting under the handle @alemarahweb, the Taliban tweets frequently, on some days nearly hourly. Also, In December 2011, it was discovered that the Somalia-based terror cell Al-Shabab was using a Twitter account under the name @HSMPress. The account has amassed tens of thousands of followers and tweets frequently” Alex Lavery (2013).

While speaking to the media recently on the trend of terrorism in Nigeria, the president of the Nigerian Senate, Yakubu Dogara acknowledges that “the new media has made recruitment a lot easier for the various terrorist organizations; not only in Nigeria, but across the globe.

An interesting twist to it all however, is that fact that the government and her security agencies seem to be in a tug with the terrorist groups for attention in the New Media. On the one hand, the government and its allies would do just about anything to enforce a media blackout on the activities of terrorist groups, while on the other hand, the terrorists would do same to secure as much media attention as they can. The New Media therefore appear caught between the cross-fire.

Conclusion/Summary

Historically, revolutionary movements began with people gathering together in the marketplace or town hall to discuss their common grievances. Social media at the moment partly play the role of this public space, facilitating social interaction, information sharing, and fast and easy communication. There have been spaces such as these in almost every society throughout history with the atmosphere at the market being politically effective, as in eighteenth century Paris.

The invention of the ICT and the subsequent introduction of the Social Networks have given the world more than the bargain. The trend in the New Media has no doubt gone beyond mere connectivity and universal socialization. It has also proved to have a lot of social, economic, political and even religious implications

The world has been made smaller and life itself made a lot easier with this invention called the internet. A lot of businesses have recorded massive growth while a lot more ideas have been translated into tangible businesses with so many prospects; all thanks to the Information and Communications Technology

People now make contacts across the length and breadth of the world in real time. Bridges have been built and distances made virtual by technology. World leaders and governments share ideas and trends in governance, borrowing inspirations and exchanging knowledge with one another. Overall, the world has recorded tremendous improvements in all aspects of life as a result of the invention of the ICT and the New Media.

On the flip side however, ICT and the New Media have also advanced the threat to global peace. The rate of spread of cyber crime has become overwhelming; just as the internet seem to have become another terrible weapon freely in the hands of terrorists around the world. Access to the internet has no limits from all parts of the world and there is little or no control over what people do with the invention. This is why people are at freewill to put ICT and the New Media to either a good use or a wrong one.

In the face of the ever-present controversy about the freedom of the Press in Nigeria and in most of the other African countries, online and mobile communications have proved to be readily available for anyone to express himself. Social media activists, bloggers, tweeters and speak-to-tweeters keep the world updated even if the television cameras have been switched

off. Through the use of internet technology, organizations such as ANONYMOUS will continue to protect the freedom of those who speak out against oppression and corruption in the polity.

Governments must engage their people on issues of good governance and democracy, or other African leaders may face the same fate as their compatriots in North Africa. The tide of popular expression is rising and resonating across the continent

Recommendations

In essence, with the presence of the ICT, the internet and the social media, it will be far more difficult, if not impossible, for governments to commit atrocities that remain hidden and silent.

I therefore wish to the following recommendations

1. African governments should reconcile their laws and policies with this broader democratic contribution provided by the users of social media-based tools. In a sense this can be understood as a form of 'direct' democracy where many voices can and want to be heard.
2. Mechanisms should thus be put into place which would assist governments in monitoring and evaluating political, social and economic developments and trends that would then enable them to respond to their people in a more productive and positive manner.
3. As opposed to viewing the advent of the ICT as a threat to their political monopoly, governments in Africa should learn to from their America and European counterparts among others, to embrace ICT and explore its use to improve the lives of their citizens. Embracing ICT does not just improve the quality of life of a people, but also keeps them up-to-date with the trends around the world.
4. Governments should realize that the new media have come to stay. As such, they should start to maximize the opportunities provided by ICT and the new media to improve governance.
5. The positive impact of the new media and their negative impacts are like two sides of the same coin, as such people should be careful the way they use the internet and the new media

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