

The Imperative for a Separate Social Media Policy

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Social-media is fast permeating media ecology and impacting most aspects of humanity, presenting a social challenge to be examined critically for solutions, based on the peculiarities of individuals and objective reality of assemblages. Considering the different aspects of social media engagement, this study posits government adoption and implementation of distinct social-media policy in Nigeria, guiding the principles of communicativity. This conceptual paper adopts textual and discourse analysis methodology. It contributes to ongoing debate on regulation of social-media user-abuse. This study presents a stakeholder approach to positing a separate social media policy based on objective reality and peculiarity in culture.

Keywords: culture, media policy, media ecology, social-media regulation

INTRODUCTION

In recent times the media have been accepted as part of our existence, it has become ubiquitous, as such, it has integrated into our lives and not only that it has also occupied a very vital in social economic and political lives of individuals. This is made more challenging with the rapid spread of the internet, which has evolved the new media as part of the ecology of human existence. However, for us to understand the impact of the challenges the media has created, especially the new media, which is our main concern here. To proceed with the details of this introductory section. It would be penitent to take a critical look at three central subtopics to be treated here, (1) the media (2) the new media and (3) the social media, to fully comprehend the argument of this paper. There are multitudes of definitions for the media, and most are encapsulated in this definition by Mehraj, Bhat& Mehraj (2014) who indicate that “Media are the vehicles or channels which are used to convey information, entertainment, news, education, or promotional messages are disseminated. Media includes every broadcasting and narrowcasting medium such as television, radio, newspapers, billboards, mails, telephone, fax, internet (the main means of mass communication)” (p.56). The media is an essential component of any society, and it is considered as the element of empowerment and development through the facilitating the exchange of communication, education, and enlightenment of the citizens to be abreast with development indices. Again, it serves as a veritable platform for them to contribute to the government policies and also make use of the media platform to disseminate developmental news items. Conversely, the government also uses the platform to inform the people of the developmental needs they have for them. More

important is its application in promoting integration among people, as it plays a vital role in reassuring cooperation and social cohesion among groups, thereby reducing the emergence of conflict by projecting the principles of understanding and resolving conflicts (Blake, 1998). The relevance of the media cannot be overlooked in this symbiotic development of human improvement. (Suleiman, 2018; Abubaker, 2017). Communication is the basis for human interaction which in turn forms the ‘rationale of informative and sensory discourse.’ (Bryant cited in Blake 1998). After taking a casual look at the relevance of communication and the media, this study then takes a cursory look at various definitions of the media and provides a wholistic conceptualisation of the concept.

However, this study narrows down to social media, which by diffusion of innovation, has evolved tremendously as marketplace and communication hub. Social media is fast permeating media ecology and impacting most aspects of humanity, presenting a social challenge to be examined critically for solutions, based on the peculiarities of individuals and objective reality of assemblages. Considering the different aspects of social media engagement, this study posits government adoption and implementation of distinct social-media policy in Nigeria, guiding the principles of communicativity. This conceptual paper adopts textual and discourse analysis methodology. It contributes to ongoing debate on regulation of social-media user-abuse. This study presents a stakeholder approach to positing a separate social media policy based on objective reality and peculiarity in culture. This discourse is imperative globally and locally, particularly because media are now extensions of some human faculty.

THEORETICAL BASE

Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DOIT) by E.M. Rogers

This theory developed by E.M. Rogers in 1962, postulates that over some time, the innovative product gains popularity and diffuses into society through a particular audience or social system for the people to adopt and adapt that idea for advancement. This situation will necessitate people to do something quite different from the initial culture, that would change their perception about an idea. The central attributes of the theory include innovation of communication channels, time and social system (Asemah et al., 2017). Rogers (1962) DOIT has become handy in predicting how innovative technology has influenced communication studies and made a significant contribution in the field as regards the analysis of higher technology in newsgathering.

The permeation of social media in almost all spheres of life and business makes the theory truly relevant today.

Rogers (1963) categorised the steps of adoption, which is classified according to the motivation of the individuals. These stages include (1) Innovators (2) Early adopters (3) Early Majority (4) Late majority (5) Laggards. Countries could be grouped this way in the acceptance of innovation and changes brought about by social media but not without and its attendant challenges. This has necessitated countries and even continents action towards announcing and implementing stronger media regulations and policies.

While social media has enriched media and communication, the challenges it portends to humanity must be checked and controlled within country and socio-cultural contexts. As the world journeys on and social media advancement continues, and so does its attendant ethical challenges, which can no longer be ignored. Hence the increasing number of studies on its demystification, data mining and regulations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

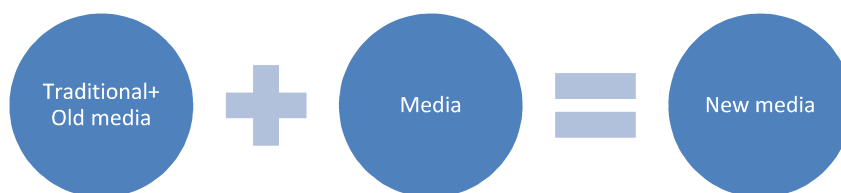
The Traditional and Old Media

It would be noteworthy to discuss the traditional media, which is at variance with the new media in this case. The traditional media emerges from customs and tradition and the practices of particular people that are steeped in their social system. Consequently, the old media derive from the communication through the application of verbal, gesticulatory, visual and signals handed down by society for generations and have served that particular society for ages. Some of these old means of communication still exist today in the forms of masquerades, songs and puppetry.

Each aspect of events communicates to the next line of action in their local cosmology, like the time for planting, harvesting, resting, danger and other types of reaction signalled to that community. Recently traditional media has been considered to be communication that is not connected with the internet. It is a closed system of one track communication that involves a sender and the receiver in a conversation. The traditional media do not include new media and old media.

The old media include the old electronic forms that are still used today as the radio, TV, telegraphs, telephones, prints, billboards, advertisement; all these are pre-made and programmed. The most important thing here is to notice the dichotomy between the old and the traditional media as it would aid the understanding of this topic, as they are the prelude to the new media which will be the centre of our next discussion. A combination of the traditional, old and the media make up the new media as represented graphically in *Fig. 1*; the progression to the new media.

**FIGURE 1
RELATIONSHIP AND EVOLUTION OF THE NEW MEDIA**

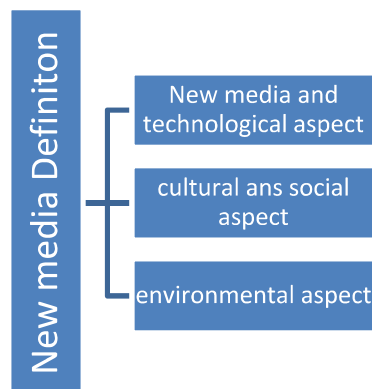


The New Media

The new media is too broad to be compartmentalised in a narrow definition, but an attempt shall be made to agglomerate the explanation by diverse authors and then narrow it down to a particular meaning. According to various writers, the new media is a combined term which includes diverse technologies like blogs, podcast, emails, mobile devices, websites and the virtual devices that are used to communicate with people real-time (Nicoleta,2008). This agrees with the definition by Mitra, (2011). Though it was approached from three perspectives, the rallying point is that it is used for simultaneous communication.

Thus the writer defines it as the consolidation of all types of media into one form and conception for instantaneous communication. It is based on three aspects: the new media and the technological aspect which aids development in technology, the cultural aspect which is referred to the inducement to socio-cultural change in society and the environmental aspect which deals with ecological, environmental development. Thus the writer holistically defines the new media as nascent technological improvement not only in the areas of social or cultural improvement but also in sustainable environmental development. This can also be represented graphically, Fig 2.

**FIGURE 2
THE ASPECTS OF THE NEW MEDIA**



Hence this approach at defining the new media indicates that it covers almost all aspects of our existence; see **Fig 2**. While for Lev, (n.d), “the new media embrace all Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, computer games’ D-ROMs and DVD, virtual reality, and computer-generated effects all fall under new media”(p.). More so, according to Omoye, (2014), The new media are novel communication technologies that conglomerate the computers and telecommunication equipment and are used as networks for the spreading of information to a varied audience irrespective of time, space and outreach.

The central point in all the definitions is that the new media deals with the interactive process of the internet systems through user engagement with the media text from different locations and time in multiple communication modes. The internet has made everyone for multitasking as different personalities on different jobs and different times with the aid of an unprecedented amount of information. Consequently, the gatekeeping and agenda-setting function of the media has been abrogated by the independence of the search engines to have access to blogs, international newspapers and the individual now decided what to read or listen without any hindrance.

It has also provided ample opportunity to understand complicated issues and see distant places unhindered by geographical challenges. The negative aspect is that it permits users to use the technology to violate privacy. However, they opened a new vista for some users to contribute to humanity by contributing positively.

The New Social Media

With the advent of the internet, the world shrank to what was termed global village where almost human contact was contracted into a small contraption on the palm which used to contact anybody in the world. This situation has further transformed the entire world into a global hamlet with the introduction of the social media which has connected the world into a nervous system of global communication thereby conquering the challenges of time and space constraints in communication. The term social media, as applied here, means the term used to refer to the nascent generation of data, digital computerised information, and communication technologies. This also includes the internet forums, podcasts, music forums, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube as a means of interaction and sharing of ideas between people in virtual communities and networks (Dugan, 2013).

This is supported by Manning (2014), who added that Social media is the term often used to refer to new forms of media that involve interactive participation... With the rise of digital and mobile technologies, interaction on a large scale became easier for individuals than ever before; and as such, a new media age was born where interactivity was placed at the centre of new media functions. One individual could now speak to many, and instant feedback was a possibility. Where citizens and consumers used to have limited and somewhat muted voices, now they could share their opinions with many.

According to Manning, the social media is ubiquitous and could be applied to many activities by an individual from a single location. It has collapsed communication and brought people closer than the era of the new media because of the development of multiple application that has opened choices for the people at a little cost and convenience. While for Daniel & Fuchs (2008) point out that, all computing structures, and therefore all web systems, and also all arrangements of media can be regarded as social because they stockpile and convey personal data that initiates social dealings in society. They are the objectification of humanity and human social associations. McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase (2017) also define it as web-based facilities that permit persons, groups, and organisations to work in partnership, and build community by allowing them to construct, co-create, modifies, share, and involve with user-generated content that is merely accessible on the internet. It has permeated our lives that individuals now see social media as part of their existence. As a result, it has been used for positive and negative reasons.

When individuals see themselves in the media, they will see themselves in a new light and then become more open in thought, actions and expression for good and for worse because the medium could also be used to do something untoward like the use of unregulated language. The cases of bullying and even media trolls are rampant. Again, people are known to have committed crimes and suicide because of new media influence. The politicians have used it to rally supporters, and in some extreme cases, it has

caused a mass revolution as in the Arab Spring of 2011 and the resistance to totalitarianism in Sudan in 2019, the social media, especially twitter were praised as the principal mechanism to enable the organisation of social movements by serving as a stitching mechanism (Hemsley, Jacobson, Gruzdz& Mai,2018). All these remarkable human actions were caused by social media, and this at times necessitates the government to shut it down to maintain internal security.

Popular social media sites like Twitter and Facebook have often been demonised as narcissistic and superficial, though people still insist that they met good friends on the sites. So, it is not just the negatives; some people live in the social media in the sense that they perform the work function and the new media in just like their office, especially for bloggers, to the extent that they even attract sponsorship and advertisement from companies. The next and the most challenging is the democratic nature of the new media, which seems not to have restrictions for any action, though some governments and individuals are becoming worried because of the abuse that has come from that. It is also a place a person can conduct business from any part of the world. People can also find entertainment by streaming videos and movies online and real-time. The social media is beyond communication, but also for cognition, cooperation and entertainment which refer to varied sociality.

DISCUSSIONS

The Imperative for a Separate Social Media Policy in Nigeria

With the preceding, it seems clear that social media have formed a significant part of our existence and initially people had hope that the social media as an aspect of life would improve the human condition, however in the event of the recent complaints and outcry about the negative aspect of the social media privacy intrusion, fake news, pornography, trolls, bullying, the hope on the social media has declined in favour of doubts, scepticism and outrage and there seems to be massive clangour for a kind of regulations, especially in the global who consume the social media traffic from the global North. Many have called on the state to use its power to control the new media because of these challenges through a media policy that should draw from the peculiarities of the people. This idea is to prevent cultural domination and hegemony from the West and for the preservation of the local culture from the intrusiveness of the global systems. In Nigeria, this seems to be paramount because there seems to be no clear-cut media policy, as contained in one federal document, regional or corporate document from which the social media document could be grafted.

As a result of this vacuum and the subsequent eminence of the social media on all aspects of our life, it has become necessary to fashion out a clear cut social media policy that would regulate the activities of people on the social because of the reasons explained initially. At this point, it would be pertinent to have a look at what media policy is generally before diverting to the particular concern of this write-up, the social media policy. Media policy is a complex affair because it has to draw inspiration from the past, the contemporary and the future concerns connected with the performance of the media. Countries and policymakers are now facing the challenges related to the application and abuse of the internet and social media in particular(McQuial,2010) It has to deal with large scale policy issues by several actors and forces related to the social, political and economic dimensions, though people think that policies are largely technologically driven(Staniolos,2016). So, a media policy is made taking into consideration diverse context which would produce a different outcome because of the peculiarity of the setting and situations to be considered.

Therefore, media policy can be defined as the rules and regulation guiding the interactions in the media as postulated by the government, individual or a body corporate. The definition of social media policy could be grafted from the understanding of media policy to mean the principles and guidelines that apply to activities on social media. Nigeria is a country with over two hundred million inhabitants and with a growing population of 3%(voanews.com,2019) is assumed to be one of the most populous in the world. The internet usage is one of the fastest in Africa with an estimated 92.3 million users which is expected to grow to 187.8 million in 2023 at the penetration rate of41.7% of the population 2018, is set to attain 84.5% in 2023(Statista.com,2019).Based on this development it is necessary to have regulations to

social media usage in the country to tap into the potential for economic and social development, instead of leaving it as unregulated as it seems now, which has already initiated challenges to the users.

Communication has been etched into the social fabric of the Nigerian society and the government has made several uncoordinated attempts to regulate the usage and application of the media through various legal instrument administered by different bodies. The social background of society goes a long way to determine the type of policy and regulations to be applied in this situation. In an assumed democratic society like Nigeria, the media are regulated through enabling laws by the state, unlike where the laws are stiffer as the government in question determines all about the media with stiff regulations that will impinge on individual liberty on the social media. Depending on the type of challenges faced by the country the social media regulations may be determined and controlled by the political, economic and social reality, according to regional situation and demands (Abubakar, Gugbawu and Lawan,2017). A clear understanding of a problem would enable planners to have an adequate solution to the challenges that would guide policy formation and implementation of a policy. The regulators need to understand the meaning function and dysfunction of social media to act on regulations.

Due to its complex nature, it has become almost fully understand the phenomenon called social media. However, no matter this complex nature, there should be enabling regulations associated with user engagement as new challenge resurrect new policies and a continuous review of the documents which would help to address the new challenges(Caristi,2011).In Nigeria some of these problems include fake news, false identity, fraud, pornography bullying and all sorts of social malaise, that should be checked through a broad policy that would cover all aspects of the social spectrum through policy formation. Due to the peculiar nature of Nigeria, the dynamism of society and the media ecosystem there should be regulations that should be targeted at different sectors of society but mare particularly on the family, corporate institutions the church, educational institutions and other areas that have a direct impact on the lives of the citizens to respond to any new challenges that may be brought in by the new media technologies and environment.

These changes may be because of a particular technology, or an individual or company might decide to do something in a particular way that would suite them in the application of the media. Consequently, this would a kind of confusion that may require the application of a universal policy that deals with social media. The presupposition here is that due to the inchoate nature of the communication policy in Nigeria, it would be tidier to have a separate social media policy that would serve as a universal guide to all practitioners in the country from where they would, in turn, draw inspiration to develop their document for a particular usage as it would agree with their special needs.Alternatively, the policy could also be generated from the regions indicating what they want according to their categorical imperative and this will then have coalesced at the national level with a strict recognition of what the contributor asked for. In this wider approach, all shades of opinion and peculiarities s would have been taken care of. This makes it fewer challenges because all cultural, corporate and individual contributions would have been captured especially in a pluralistic society like Nigeria. The method of approaching the matter from the top by the Nigerian government and the incorporation of the social media policy into the media policy look unwholesome. So, the social media policy document should be produced separately because of the peculiar nature of the subject, the rapid development of the internet and the growth in the population of the users, coupled with involvedness of the social media.

REASONS AND FORM OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

There are many reasons why the formation and implementation of a social media policy should be carried out in Nigeria. This may be situated in the ideological or political considerations. The first reason is that it can be incorporated into a wider communication document as we have in some countries like South Africa and Jamaica, some that it becomes part of their existence. However, it is possible for these countries because they already have a full-fledge media policy with the social media policy as an appendage. It can also be more convenient for the document to be on it's for a country like Nigeria who does not have a full document to use the opportunity to create a full document for convenience instead of

making it an attachment to another document considering the spate of development in that sector. This is because some sectors in Nigeria, especially the corporate sector and some multinationals have developed an independent company social media policy that is removed from all the sectors of the scattered documents that Nigeria refers to as media policy documents. This universal social media policy would be an umbrella for any other policy in the country and the document would be a reference point for any other issue related to the matter.

The aim of this document should be to direct people irrespective of their position and situation in the country because it represents the nuances and peculiarities of the various concerns of the country. Therefore it is reasonable to propose for a legal document concerned with this matter that will handle most concerns in the country concerned with the social, political, religious, economic, family and cultural issues that would guide the engagement in the social media is required because of the influence of the internet and because the social media is diverse and it spans into not just exchanging information but is also connected with issues like copyright violations as members share things like music, movies and books. Caristi, 20011 argues that it provides the condition for copyright violations because of the way people share all manner of the content without permission.

Consequently, the policy is needed because the way people share the materials without authorisation should be regulated and some of the messages could be against the national interest of the nation and used for deceptive reasons. Also, it can be formed based on business reasons because some companies want to regulate how the employees communicate information that would impact on the reputation of its operations and of making a profit and to regulate how the media consumes the man-hours in the office. To guard against this, according to (Thompson and Bluvshstein,2008, cited in Cilliers 2013), Most companies have developed workplace guidelines to address personnel use of the media and their potential mismanagement of the system.

This should also be implemented at the national level to guide against misuse. The need for formal social rules that are documented that would protect the interest and the rights of the citizens should be developed urgently, championed by the government, corporate institutions and individuals. Other countries are making concerted efforts to have a social media policy that would agree with their demands. For example, forty-nine states in the United State have signed an agreement media conglomerates like Facebook and Myspace to regulate social media use according to their social and cultural demands (Caristi,2010), the European Union has an agreement with some of the media giants on the deployment of content as regards age, content, abuse and other formal agreement on the use of the social media.

For that reason, it has become necessary to formulate a social media policy that would be applied to all aspects of social existence in Nigeria, in the family, in the corporate world, the one connected with the individual and the one connected with the government. The government should draw from these areas to formulate a separate social media policy that would share the common interest of the people and protect their interest before it becomes too late. This could be done by getting all the concerned interest in the public and the private sectors like community leaders, scholars, media experts, traditional rulers, public policy experts. The issues to talk about must be related to needs of the Nigerian people as regards the use of the social media that is connected with moral concerns that should be above selfish private interests, By extension, the social media policy should concern itself with the issues that would unite the country notwithstanding of cultural, linguistic, religious and personal idiosyncrasies, it should look at issues that would impact on the country based on the peculiar culture and the moral values of the community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper looked at the necessity for the formation of a separate social media policy in Nigeria and concluded that it is long overdue to counter the emerging issues in the country especially now that the social media has become part of our social system and it is threatening to level culture according to the dictates of the western hegemony, its development would help to preserve our values and protect Nigerian culture from being eroded.

What has been done so far is not all-encompassing because it is Western oriented in the sense that there was no wide consultation with the spectrum of the Nigerian culture. This monotony has not improved the situation in the sense that policymakers and users are still fixated on the old document that captured the media in broad terms without paying attention to peculiarities of the dynamic social media. Again, it would help corporate bodies and individuals to draw inspiration to form their modalities on social media engagements.

Therefore, the stand of this paper is that the future agenda of government and media researcher should be to develop a social media policymakers document that is detached from the general media policy document that would be supported and guided by the enabling laws of the nation as the social media grows exponentially.

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