
THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN STATES

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Abstract

The recent innovation in mass communication or mass media have various effects on the sustainable economic development of African countries. The digital age as represented by the social media, telecommunications and the internet have made the dream of a global village or a global family realistic. Yet, African quest for economic advancement has been greatly affected in several ways. A business tycoon, for instance, needs the services, better still, the facilities of the social media to compete favourably globally. He or She does not need to travel to foreign countries to import goods, ideas and services. The e-services of the internet, such as e-business, e-banking, e-transact, and others, have provided us options in business transactions in lieu of physical transactions with cash. However, the social media have their weaknesses in various internet criminal activities. This research investigates contributions of some scholars in selected topical issues through the introduction of the concept of social media, social media activities, economic benefits of social media, problems of social media and probable recommendations on ways to uphold the positive economic benefits of social media in African States. This paper therefore x-rays the influence of social

media in facilitating economic development of African states towards globalization while adopting the historical and analytical approaches as its methodology in illuminating the issues.

Keywords: Social Media, The Internet, Economic Development, African States, Internet Crimes, Globalization.

Humanity has gone beyond radio, television, news-paper and magazine communication with the creation of the nouveauté media or digital media popularly known as the social media or the internet. The recent trend in mass communication has changed from analogue to digital signals in order to meet up with globalization. The era of keeping records or documents only in notebooks, files, journals and other literature has metamorphosed into computer based via laptops, cell phones, desktops, pagers and others.

Social media facilities under the ‘e’ services of the internet are intended to make economic activities simple, workable, efficient and effective. For instance, e-mail, e-banking, e-learning, e-teaching, e-sport, e-commerce, e-transact and the likes, are created to boost human relation and free flow of communication.

The internet has to a large extent brought succor to the less privileged through the services of many Non-Government at Organizations (NGOs). It has helped greatly in academic, religious, medical, political, technological, economic and social-cultural activities.

However, the social media have some pitfalls on the economic development of African states. Recently, in most very developed African states, many bookshops no longer attract many customers of literature. Rather, buyers now prefer CDs, DVDs, VCDs, of foreign and home video films. This is because the bible, dictionary, encyclopedia and other literature can be accessed through laptops, cell phones, pagers and blogs with internet facilities. Some major commercial activities have gone e-commerce and e-transact leaving the vast majority of the businessmen that are not ICT-compliant barely making a living with little or no commercial activities at the local level.

Libraries which serve the African society in areas of sourcing vital information and researches have dwindled in services since many users now prefer internet services. Furthermore, interests in letter writing as a means of transmitting messages and information have been taken over by e-mails and short message services (SMS). Consequently, SMS have grossly paralyzed the postal services and negatively

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influenced the manner of articulation, reading and comprehension of most people and especially students in our society.

Meanwhile, cyber crimes are on the increase daily among many young ones across the nations in areas of Advance Fee Fraud (popularly known as 419) especially in Nigeria. Plagiarism in the academic sector, pornography, homosexuality, lesbianism and many other vices now seem to take precedence over economic and academic researches as a result of the use of social media.

Social Media

The encompassing nature of mass media has brought much innovation to human development. Technological advancements in mass communication have transformed the world from global village to global family where every participant interacts like members of the same family circle. (Nworgu, 2011:109)

Through the world wide web (www), there has been constant interconnectivity which allows sharing of information across national boundaries. Internet search engines revolutionized by Google, Webopedia, Yippy, Yahoo, Mahala, Ask, Bing, Dogpile and others, have thrown out so many sites that allow the internet users access to a wide variety of information. (Nworgu, 2010:20)

The social media popularly known as the internet are also described by many scholars as digital or new media. Ramanuyam (2008:iv) believes that:

The elements of the digital media (the new media) enhance ease of creating multimedia, interactivity, automation and the fact that digital is simply made up of bits or electrons, rather than anything physical. Thus, social media is linked to Information Communication Technology (ICT).

The social media have to do with the noun or adjective – “Cyber”. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary:

Cyber is connected with electronic Communication networks, especially the internet, such as cyber-café, cybernetics, cyber space, cyber crime, cyber warfare, cyber terrorism and the like.

The use of internet or social media in sourcing or searching for information is facilitated by the help of computers, pagers, cell phones and others. From computers to cell phones and televisions, technology has found its way into every corner of the world – even crossing the divide between the rich and the poor and has become an integral part of life for many. The pervasiveness of technology is perhaps most apparent in the proliferation of computers and cell phones, many of which are no longer just common computers or phones. Advanced models of these products enable users to access the

internet, send and receive text messages, phone-calls, watch TV, listen to music and news, take photographs and so on.

Social media remain the key factor in global interaction among people from all walks of life. They have revolutionalized the ways we seek and receive information, messages and transact businesses over the years. Digital tools magnify the ability that is unique in the world- the ability to think, to articulate our thoughts, the ability to work together and act on those thoughts. (Gates, 2000:45).

Palmer and Perkin (2007) agreed that:

The 20th century breakthrough in communication ranks with great forces which have shaped mankind's progress through history. Modern communication technology (social media) have changed the way of life not only of the developed worlds but also of developing societies.

The concept of globalization has been made more manifest through the internet. The way social media bring communication closer to our societies can be authoritatively concluded that we are in a “global family” where those with similar information needs, ideas, services and tastes become members of both the nuclear and extended families of information givers, takers and users. This has been made possible through the latest internet facilities such as the world wide web (www), face book, you-tube, blogs, twitter, google, and e-services such as e-mail, e-commerce, e-transact, e-learning, e-banking, e-business and others.

Each of these allows people to interact more closely than before and share intimate information like people do in a family circle, thereby bridging the communication gap which has become the main thrust of the new media as represented by the internet. (Nworgu, 2010).

Economic Benefits of Social Media

The products of digital technology via social media should be described as a blessing to humanity. For instance, computers spare mankind tedious tasks, enable us to buy and bank conveniently online and help us keep in touch with others by e-mail, voice-mail or video-link. Indeed, the fastest global diffusion of any technology in human history (Awake, 2009:3-4).

The concept of collective consumption of mass communication products is gradually changing from social media outfits/packages to an individualized user needs approach, where the media content tends to satisfy each media user by presenting programmes that appeal to such individuals. For instance, in a particular month, it is

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noted that about 20 million people visit you-tube to watch videos posted by other people. That is a bigger audience than what most hit prime time TV shows attract. (Dominick, 2002:78). When businesses use computer and tele-communications media, they expect increased profits. Social media can assist businesses to grow. For instance, film studios can get the edge on competition by using electronic editing to get blockbuster films. Newspaper outfits can create innovative products such as the electronic versions of the newspaper on the web. (Albarran, 2002).

In the print media industry, newspapers and magazines are now charging lower prices for online versions of their products, thereby allowing electronic commerce to make an in- road into the core mass media industry. What has added to electronic commerce greatly is the shift of long distance phone calls away from telephone networks to internet. (Biagi, 2003).

Moreso, new media (Digital media) have increased productivity, hence in most cases, the rate of output is virtually relative to inputs of workers. Machinery and other resources have expanded to create products. For example, computer assisted design and computer assisted manufacturing (CAD/CAM) system have helped designers visualize new products inside the computer and also work stations such as animated movies which are now possible and are designed, directed and produced with the aid of CAD/CAM. (Traudt, 2005).

Therefore, there are now more customized mass media products everywhere. These include: customized publishing of books, specialized magazine and newspaper editions, cable/satellite television pay per-view movies and programmes. (Nworgu, 2011).

In radio stations, automated CD Systems or Satellite delivered network programmes are supplanting announcers and disk jockeys (DJs). Again, common work place is being replaced with telecommuting in which employees' home offices are linked to the work place. (Dominick, 2002). The idea is to help the worker balance home demand and work schedule.

The impact of e-commerce on business activities selling through websites is the fastest growing method of trading world wide. It allows for complete purchases and financial transactions over the computer networks through the internet. There are two main forms of e-commerce vis-Business to Business (B2B) trading where companies trade and exchange information using the world wide web (www) and Business to Consumer (B2C) trading where companies deal directly with customers through web pages, and ordering is carried out online. There are also many different types of products and services that are traded online. These include: books, cars, CDs,

insurance, wears, information on medical specialist services, technology transfer and others.

In response to e-trading, most business outfits now set up their own websites. (Abbey, 1984) All these are made available through the social media. Non Governmental Organizations have attracted funds and attention from international donors, philanthropists and humanitarian agencies in assisting indigent youths, physically challenged children and youth and the like in the African States through adequate use of social media.

Problems of Social Media

Computer crime also known as the following: e-crime, hitech crime or electronic crime generally refers to criminal activities where a computer or network is the source, tool, target or place of crime. Types of computer crimes include: cyber crime, malware and malicious code, denial of service attack, computing virus, cyber terrorism, information warfare (propaganda), cyber stalking, fraud and identity theft, phishing, virtual crime, hacking, hardware theft, drug trafficking, sexual harassment and so on.

These categories are not exclusive and many activities can be characterized as falling in one or more categories. Additionally, the terms computer crime and cyber-crime are more properly restricted to describing criminal activities in which the computer or network is a necessary part of the crime. These terms are sometimes used to include traditional crimes such as fraud, theft, blackmail, forgery, pornography, embezzlement, and others, in which computers or networks are used to facilitate the illicit activity. (Olofin, 2011:45-54).

Modern Technology can be seen also as a curse on mankind. Excessive or improper use of digital technology may be harmful to the users both mentally and physically. Addiction, distraction, interruptions are perhaps the most recognized problems associated with popular communications and media technology such as cell phones, computers and televisions. A simple phone call or text message can prove to be very costly, fatal or expensive. In regard to cell phones, an investigation into 2008 train wreck that cost over 25 lives in California, USA revealed that the engineer had sent a text message seconds before the crash. He never even applied the brakes. (Awake, November 2009).

Other dangers are more immediate. In 2000, for instance, a study commissioned by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicated that 85% (percent) of business respondents which included companies of all sizes and orientations said that they had been victimized by one computer-related crime or the

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other in the previous year. These crimes ranged from problems of epidemic proportions, such as virus infection to less prevalent ones but there were some serious problems such as website defacement, denial of service attacks, financial fraud, sabotage and network break-ins. (Olofin, 2011).

Furthermore, social media have become avenues for get-rich-quick syndrome very common with our youth who are predominant agents of Advance Fee Fraud (419) which has given Nigeria in particular and other African States in general, bad image within the international community. The social media via the internet are responsible for the practice of plagiarism in our tertiary institutions which has influenced the education system in Nigeria negatively. The computer has also assisted the increase of high level of piracy in our society thereby killing the economic proceeds from our entertainment industries in Nigeria and other African States as a whole.

Moreover, the issue of rampant baby factories especially all over Nigeria has received boost through the social media. Patronizers of both legal and illegal adoption of babies now use face book pages to see or view the kind of babies they would like or want to buy. There is now a source of communication link between the buyers and sellers of babies. (BBC World News Report 7am, August 11, 2013).

Social Media promote pornography, lesbianism, homo-sexualism, bisexualism, incest, human trafficking, face book prostitution, forced child marriage, shady business deals, and their likes. Some drug traffickers especially, “the middlemen”, arrange transactions sometimes, at internet cafés, fast food joints, supermarkets, hotels, and so on. Before, traditional drug recipes were carefully kept secret, but with the internet information they are now made available to anyone with computer access. Internet hoodlums, gangsters or fraudsters lure their victims, most times, into uncertainties through the social media. People receive paid tickets and visas to foreign countries only to see themselves as victims of sexual harassments, modern slavery, ritual purposes, laboratory guinea pigs for experiments, forced donors for kidney transplant, liver transplant, lungs transplant, etc.

Conclusion

Certainly, from the above in depth review of the global benefits of social media in all facets of our economy, as well as their negative impacts on the society at large, it is therefore advised that the government and all who operate the social media for diverse useful purposes should uphold their beneficial aspects for the economic emancipation of our African States. It is also advised that all hands must be on deck to fight the anti-social, anti-economic activities of the ignoble users of social media.

Therefore, censorship agencies should regulate the operations of these social media outfits. Those agencies must be strictly encouraged and sustained by the government, regulatory agencies and members of the society at large.

Recommendations

The researchers of this paper therefore advise that the Government of African Countries should make computers – laptops, desktops etc. and mobile phones very affordable for their citizens to own. They should also work assiduously to make subscription very cheap and people are advised to develop interest to learn how to operate computers and websites.

The governments at all levels and corporate bodies in our societies are urged as part of their community development projects, to provide internet facilities and computers to all offices, sections, departments, ministries, parastatals and institutions. They are also advised to sponsor ICT trainings for our youths towards self-actualization and entrepreneurial skills.

There is need for social media users not to allow the internet become a liability to them. This is because improper or negative use of the social media can be harmful mentally, economically and physically because it destroys one's life.

Our government agencies are urged to monitor and control some websites that are obnoxious to their citizens. Face book pages and others that encourage criminal activities and immoralities should be blocked from public usage. The governments of African states are advised to encourage the public to engage in social media activities by making computer courses an integral part of the curricula from our primary schools to the tertiary institutions and by providing the equipment to enhance our education system.

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