

## **NEW MEDIA, CAPACITY-BUILDING IN AFRICA AND CHALLENGES: AN ANALYSIS IN DEPENDENCY**

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### **Abstract**

*The New Media has become increasingly relevant in this age of globalization. This is because there is very little we can do without recourse to Digital Network. In Africa, a lot has been said and done to underline the critical role of New Media in sustainable development and good governance. This paper explores the key challenges of New Media in relation to Capability-Building in Sub-Saharan Africa. The central thesis of the paper is that a lot of obstacles still stand in the way of Capacity-Building in the continent and that the New Media has not been properly and effectively deployed as a veritable platform for sustainable development. The paper concludes by pointing out realistic steps that needs to be taken to address these challenges in the short and long run.*

**Key words:** Capacity-Building, Digitalization, Empowerment, New Media

### **Introduction**

Those old enough would remember the days of correspondence courses, where textbooks and other materials were couriered to students who studied in the evenings and worked during the day. Advances in technologies soon led to distance learning via radio and tv; and now we have National Open Universities that uses a mix of channels to deliver education including internet, web, satellite tv, instructor-led, and classroom-based learning.

In more developed economies, new media is now a veritable channel of instructional delivery. For example, Khan academy is a non-profit educational organization created in 2006 by educator Salman Khan to provide “a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere”. Khan academy produces micro lectures for over 15 courses and practice exercises in the form of YouTube videos now translated into 65 languages. Coursera is a for-profit educational technology company that offers massive open online courses (MOOCs). Established in 2012, and now with less than 200 employees, Coursera works with universities to make some of their courses available online, and currently offers over 12 courses in 12 languages and to over 12,000,000 users. This education for example, shows how the new media can transform the way we live, work and interact. In 2012, a global survey of 2,000 C-Suite business and IT executives across several countries and industries

to capture insights into the adoption of emerging technologies indicate an emergence of digital ecosystems that are re-shaping markets and creating the “We Economy”, Nwoye and Okafor (2014).

### **The New Media and Capacity-Building: A Conceptual and Empirical Overview**

New media as a whole has remained and continues to remain a fascinating subject especially in relation to its social, economic, political and cultural impact in developing countries. This is interesting in the sense that it opens up a lot of scholarly interest regarding the way and manner new technological innovation shape and direct consumer behaviour in these countries.

The concept of new media represents one of the most important forms of communication infrastructure that digital technological innovation brought about in an ever increasingly globalized world. It is no longer in dispute that globalization has had overwhelming transformation in virtually all areas of human endeavour especially in the area of information technology and regional economic integration. The implication is that the new media is not insulated from the rest of the world and in fact appears inextricably interwoven in the dynamics of these phenomenal changes. Underpinning these changes has not only been tighter integration of Media sector, but fundamentally the convergence of entertainment, social networking and digital interconnectivity. This process of digitalization has transformed traditional and contemporary forms of communication in very complex ways (Nwoye and Okafor, 2014).

New media generally refers to on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, and creative participation (Bentley, 2015). Another aspect of new media is the real-time generation of new unregulated content. New media deals with the issue of things being new, many argue that new media technology such as mobile phone is actually just a regeneration of old Media and so not really new (Shapiro, 1999).

Most technologies described as “New Media” are digital in nature, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive (Bentley, 2015). Some examples may be the internet which combines internet accessibility with digital text, images and video with web-links, creative participation of contributors, interactive feedback of users and formation of a participant community of editors and donors for the benefit of non-community readers. Facebook is a typical example of the social media model, in which most users are also participants.

Until the 1980s, Mass Media relied primarily on print and analogue broadcast models, such as those of television and radio. The last twenty-five years have seen the rapid transformation of New Media Technologies largely predicated upon the use of sophisticated digital network such as the internet, Robotics using artificial intelligence (AI) as well as video games. However, these examples are only a small representation of New Media. The use of digital computers has also transformed the remaining Old Media, as exemplified by the advent of digital television and online publications. Even traditional media forms such as the printing press have been transformed through the application of

new technologies such as image manipulation soft wares like Adobe Photoshop and desktop publishing tools.

According to Shapiro (1999), the emergence of new digital technologies signals a potentially radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and resources. Neuman (2012) suggests that whilst the new media have technical capabilities to pull in one direction, economic and social forces also pull back in the opposite direction. To Cardoso (2017), we are witnessing the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication. In addition, Carlyle (2018) observed that new media will also alter the meaning of geographic distance that will allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication; Provide massive opportunities for interactive communication and allow complex forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect.

Consequently, it has been the contention of scholars such as Kellner and Bohman (2013), Drew (2017), Drexel (2018), Ernst (2018) that new media, particularly the internet, provides the potential for a democratic postmodern public sphere, in which citizens can participate in well informed, non-hierarchical debate pertaining to their social activities. Contradicting these positive appraisals of the potential social impact of the new media are scholars such as Herman and McChesney (2013) who suggest that the transition to new media has seen a handful of powerful transnational telecommunications corporations who have achieved a level of global influence which was hitherto unimaginable. Scholars, such as Lister et al (2013); Friedman, (2015), Ericson (2015), Fritz (2016), Galley (2017) highlight in different both the positive and negative potentials and actual implications of new media technologies, suggesting that some of the earlier works on new media studies were clearly inadequate to serve as a basis for assessing contemporary media systems.

### **The Problem of Capacity Building in Africa**

Scholars generally agree that Africa's persistent underdevelopment and chronic poverty cannot be addressed without concerted effort at capacity building. This is undoubtedly true simply because very little effort has been done by African governments to create the basis for sustainable capacity especially in very poor countries within the Sub-Saharan region. For example, Empirical studies by Haran and Ojeik (2016) in Kenya, Hambutu and Malaka (2017) in Zambia and Ijewere and Aminu (2018) all suggest that there are fundamental challenges that stand in the way of building human capacity in Sub-Saharan Region.

By capacity-building we are referring to the systematic and sustainable effort in straightening citizen's potentials to effectively determine their life choices; to organize themselves to act in a manner that sustainably empowers them. Indeed, effective sustainable development is inconceivable without capacity-building and empowerment, Nwoye and Odoh, (2015). In this context, capacity-building goes hand in hand with empowerment in the sense that they reinforce and complement each other. Thus, capacity-building is about men and women becoming empowered to bring about positive changes in their lives; about personal growth together with positive action. On the whole, it is about

the process and the outcome of challenging endemic poverty, oppression and marginalization. In short, capacity-building in the long run pursues the realization of human potential through social and economic empowerment and opportunities. Viewed this way, it involves the process of transforming lives and in turn transforming societies Cohen, (2016).

### **New Media and Capacity-Building in Africa**

The use of new media system as a basis for capacity building in Africa is at a very low level simply because we are just beginning to embrace the globalization of digital communication. As a result, citizen's participation in the decisions and processes affecting their lives remains weak. In theory, capacity-building and empowerment should be different sides of the same coin. In practice, much of what passes for capacity-building in Africa is not in any way empowering to the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups in society (Greder and Tillman, 2015).

For capacity-building and empowerment to be effective in Africa, a lot has to change. In fact, recent studies done by donor agencies such as Oxfam, Department of International Development (DFID) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) all suggests that capacity-building has really not been very effective and sustainable due to rampant corruption and inconsistent implementation. These agencies also point to the low level of digital broad band use in rural Africa, warning that a large percentage of Africa are being left behind. For example, a recent study done by Kirongo and Muwanda (2018), in Kenya and Tanzania for Oxfam reveals that there is near absence of policy guide line regarding capacity-building and empowerment in these countries and that internet penetration remains low in rural areas. The study blamed poor policy framework, endemic corruption, weak institutions and intense bureaucratization as key obstacles. In another detailed cross-country study done by Hamid and Sajah (2016), it was shown that not much has been done to use the New Media as a tool for capacity-building in Arabophone Africa countries of Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria. In fact, they insisted that the New Media has had its greatest impact in the area of democratic radicalization of social and terrorist movements and in social media networking among youths Hamid and Sajah (2016:14-15). To them, nothing much has happened in terms of policy initiatives by North African Leaders to build a strong and consistent digital infrastructure that would enhance Capacity-Building in the long run.

In sub Saharan, Mashaba and Tambo (2017) have also shown the structural and political challenges that undermine digital application in developing countries. Using the Malawian and Zambian experiences, they observed that there is very little on ground to suggest that African leaders are serious in terms of digital transformation and Innovation. Outside annual budgetary announcements and campaign promises, there is the consistent lack of political will and commitment to put the new media at the centre of governance and capacity building.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work hinges on the theoretical conception that developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America depends essentially on the economic, scientific and technological

innovations of the west which has largely influenced their postcolonial development. Put differently, Africa as a peripheral continent relies largely on Western sources of technology and knowledge as a basis for transforming their society. In recent years, this chronic dependency is gradually shifting towards Asian economies of China and India. Historically, the dependency perspective became increasingly popular as a result of Paul Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth* in 1957. The central argument by Baran (1957) was that the industrialized societies of the West were hindering the economic development of the weak economies of Latin America, Africa and Asia by making it difficult for them to pursue self-sustaining development strategies; by so doing, the problem of underdevelopment and backwardness becomes more acute and difficult to redress. Baran, clearly blamed the post-colonial nationalist leaders of Third World countries for colluding and collaborating with Western countries to exploit and impoverish their people in a manner that continues to perpetuate dependency.

Therefore, dependency theory is essentially a set of theories which argue that the failure of Third World countries to achieve adequate and sustainable levels of development largely stems from their chronic dependence on the advanced Western economy Gordon (2009). In other words, dependency theory developed in opposition to the optimistic claims of "modernization theory" which saw the less developed countries as being able to catch up with the West. They stressed that western leaders have an interest in maintaining their dominant position in relation to the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) since they have the financial and technical wherewithal to do so. There are many different accounts of the relationship between the advanced and less developed states within the broad framework of dependency theory, ranging from the stagnancy and "surplus drain" theory of Andre Gunder Frank (which posited that the Third World would be unable to achieve significant levels of industrialization), to the more cautious pessimism of those who envisaged a measure of growth based on "associated dependent" relations with the West Frank (1969), Taylor, (2015) Lee (2016).

The Major contribution to dependency theory was undoubtedly that of Frank, a German economist of development who devised and popularized the phrase "the development of underdevelopment" describing, what he saw as the deformed and dependent economies of the peripheral states – in this terminology the "satellite" of the more advanced "metropolis". In *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin American* (1969), he argued that the Third World was doomed to stagnation and underdevelopment because the surplus it produced was appropriated by metropolitan capitalist countries, through various illicit means. This argument has been taken further by Zentes (2015) and Xavier (2014) when they argued that dependent relationship is undergoing gramatic transformation as a result of globalization and digitalization. Nwoye (2017) went further to argue that the pattern of dependency has become so complex and interwoven to the point where we can talk of complex inter-dependency relationship. This is because the structure and dynamics of dependency relationship is moving towards the East currently but the rest still calls the shots.

Just like modernization theory, dependency theory is a model of economic and social development; but the key difference is that dependency theory explains global inequality

in terms of the historical exploitation of poor countries by the rich and powerful ones. Dependency rejects also the basic assumptions of modernization theory that the unit of analysis in studying underdevelopment is the National economy. They insist that the internal cultural and institutional features of Africa, indeed the Third World, are in themselves not the basic variables accounting for the relative backwardness of the continent but primarily their incorporation into the global capitalist system as dependent peripheral states. Dependency theorists do not deny the fact that internal or domestic structures are important intervening factors. Nonetheless, dependency theory remains flawed by an overemphasis on economic factors and in some versions, a Neo Marxist logic based on the idea of a “surplus drain” (extraction and appropriation of profits) from the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) to the rich and powerful nations.

Despite its noticeable drawbacks, the dependency field has proved extremely popular and useful as a strong analytic paradigm to dissect and explore the international and local dynamics that perpetuate dependent relations in poor countries. For one thing, it has helped us in identifying the structural continuity of African dependency as well as the factors that shape and deepen it. Secondly, it has also proved very invaluable in exposing the internal class dynamics that helps to sustain dependency relationship. For example, what is the point of blaming Western leaders and transnational corporations (TNCs) when African leaders continue to clamour for foreign direct investment (FDI). Put differently, what is the sense behind African leader’s endless trips across Europe and America in a fruitless attempt to attract foreign investment when they have consistently failed to capitalize on the abundant human and material resources at their disposal. It should be emphasized that all Africa needs is right at home

### **New Media and Capacity-Building in Africa: Overview of Challenges and Prospects**

Using the dependency theory in this discourse helps us to put into critical perspective the crisis and contradictions that frame a post-colonial continent. It also provides a critical platform from which we begin to appreciate why and how things are going wrong all across the region. Despite all the noise about the prospects of economic growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the stark reality is that the continent as a whole is in a far worse and vulnerable position than it was three decades ago. This dismal picture is reflected in decaying infrastructure, perennial conflicts, endemic poverty and abject failure of visionary leadership across the continent Nwoye (2018). Take the case of the recent Ebola health crisis which badly exposed, in a disturbing way, the shambolic state of health infrastructure across the continent. Even when dealing with primary health issues such as malaria control and immunization, we turn to World Health Organization (WHO) and other donor agencies to provide us with very basic necessities such as mosquito nets and vaccines. So, where is the independence when African economies are clearly mortgaged by the IMF-World Bank and perpetually in debt bondage, relying on donor-hand-outs or asking for debt forgiveness?

Against this grim background, there are noticeable challenges that currently undermine New Media as a platform for capacity-building in Africa. These challenges stem from the continent’s political, social and economic conditions that are largely

inclement and historically rooted in dependency relations with the West and most recently East Asia, notably China and India. According to Kirongo and Muwanda (2018), two areas appear to have benefitted the most from tremendous growth of New Media technologies in Africa namely, social and political media. Therefore, much of the excitement and fascination around social and political media stems from the success of social movements in the overthrow of dictatorial regimes in North Africa as well as in protest movements across West Africa notably in Burkina-Faso, Gambia, Togo, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Indeed, there is a growing tendency to fetishize the relationship between social and political media and the likelihood of grassroots citizen engagement and participation. While this is possible, it has not really led to effective capacity-building and empowerment in real terms. In a study done by Adebayo and Fatayi (2015), in the South East and South West for Department for International Development, an agency of the United Kingdom (DFID), they discovered that issues of capacity-building were among the least concern to new media users. The primary concern and interest remains social and political interaction. Why is this so? The answer is simply because new media is largely driven by popular culture and fuelled by a consumerist mind set. Secondly, internet use in Africa has been largely a fad rather than a solid basis for social and economic empowerment. This is because African governments have not elevated it as a critical tool for social and economic transformation.

In line with the foregoing, we isolate five key interrelated factors that have continued to undermine the tremendous opportunities offered by the new media to leverage on capacity-building by users. The first challenge has to do with the inability of African governments to capitalize on the tremendous benefits offered by the New Media as a tool for manpower planning and human resources development. While touting the internet as the magic wand for myriad of development problems, there is little effort on ground to suggest that they are really serious. Besides, very few governments see the need to draw attention to issues of capacity-building by encouraging regular interactive programmes via the new media.

As if that is not bad enough, there is very little investment in digital infrastructure to support ICT usage and penetration in most African countries. Take Nigeria for example, energy supply remains highly unreliable and generally frustrates every effort towards effective long term digitalization. The Nigeria Broad Band Plan (2013-2018) formulated by the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) observed recently that less than 10 percent of households and individual users in un-served areas have internet access and that less than 50 percent of households and individual users in un-served areas have broadband access NCC (2018).

The third major challenge has to do with the low inclusion of women and youths as critical partners in pushing the frontiers of digital innovation and creativity so as to enhance Capacity-Building in Africa. Despite the creation of ministries of women and youth development in most countries, there is very little effort to main stream women and other disadvantaged groups into embracing the New Media especially in the rural areas where the need is very acute. A recent survey done by Kalloba and Smith (2016) in East

Africa notably: Tanzania, Malawi and Uganda, showed that broadband inter-connectivity remains low in rural areas and that there are only few community-based internet cafes that are fully functional and up to date in these countries. The same can be said of Nigeria especially in the North East: where Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen, and farmers in North Central Nigeria are in conflict. Political and communal conflicts had remains a major problem in building-capacity in the continent. This is because it often results in mass displacement of rural population, denying them of their economic livelihood.

There are also the debilitating bureaucratic and regulatory bottlenecks that makes doing business in Africa extremely difficult. Most African countries have failed to carefully identify emerging new media trends in a hyper-connected world where organizations and governance interact with each other digitally across the globe. As every day pursuits are becoming increasingly digital, bureaucracy is becoming obsolete in view of array of digital options that reach deep into every aspect of human lives.

Finally, there is the problem of endemic corruption and wanton mismanagement which has been the bane of successive governments across the continent. Virtually all key institutions and donor agencies have repeatedly emphasized the adverse consequences of corruption on governance and human development. For instance, the World Bank (2015,2016) has consistently called on African countries to place more emphasis on human capital development and in the fight against corruption as a basis for sustainable development and poverty reduction. The same perspective is shared by Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. The foundation has continued to frown at the high level of infant and maternal mortality as well as lack of economic opportunities for women and young people due to rampant corruption and misgovernance.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, all these challenges in the continent clearly mask a culture of dependency where the State is dysfunctional and the rule of law rarely prevails; it also underlines the dependent character of the economy. As a matter of fact, this dependency has different dimensions. There is the socio-cultural and economic dimension of dependence borne out of colonial legacy and the apparent 'superiority' of Western imported values and techniques. This socio-cultural dependency is diffused through the education and new media technologies. It is also reflected in political and social institutions as well as in the dominant paradigms on development.

Taking account of the challenges raised so far, what are the likely prospects of new media as a tool for capacity-building and empowerment? The answer lies with the way and manner African leaders decides to position themselves now and in the near future in addressing these challenges. There is no debating the incredible opportunities and potentials currently available on the new media. However, the fact of the matter remains that African countries, as currently constituted and governed, appear seriously weak and confused to take full advantage of the global digital transformation, especially when it comes to human resources development and utilization.

Considering the huge percentage of Africans still resident in rural areas of the continent and largely poor and ignorant, massive adult-literacy education programme is



one sure first step of raising these disadvantaged groups to come to terms with the idea of new media opportunities. This point is critical in the sense that basic education is the key that unlocks all other economic opportunities. Without huge investment in quality education, nothing else can begin in the continent. Regrettably, the record of budgetary investment in basic education remains discouraging. According to a recent UNESCO annual global survey (2014), Africa as a whole and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular spends the least on education and research at all levels, when compared with their Asian and Latin American counterparts.

In addition, at the heart of the continent's development must lay the ultimate and overriding goals of human-centred development that ensures the overall well-being of Africans through sustained and qualitative improvement in their living standards. For capacity building to work, full and effective participation of the citizens in charting their development needs and processes and contributing in their realization is absolutely necessary. There is also the urgent need to improve access to digital network in Africa especially among women. The current digital divide is clearly unsustainable. To bridge this yawning gap, women and other disadvantaged groups must be given digital access particularly in rural areas through building community-based new media facilities across the nook and crannies of the continent.

To conclude, the primary principle that will ultimately guide any serious capacity-building problem in Africa should be that the citizens have to be the agent, the means and the end of digital innovation and development. For Africans to be effective partners in a world of digital transformation, long term capacity-building anchored on digital self-reliance is the ultimate solution to mitigating the chronic dependence on the West as well as in redressing chronic poverty and under development. Finally, unprecedented population growth rate with its huge and increasing unemployment rate has major implications for capacity-building. To mitigate the high level of unemployment in Africa, there is need for massive investment in digital broad-band and internet penetration in rural areas.

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