

**NEW MEDIA: CONNECTING OR ALIENATING THE  
NIGERIAN YOUTHS?**

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## INTRODUCTION

A sort of virus seems to have taken over the system of the world, though in a different but attractive robe. Everybody catches the bug so fast with high level of addiction and pride.

This development spreads fast into the fabrics of our existence to the extent that more pro-viruses (such as social network system, web browsing, chat/instant messenger, file transfer protocol, etc) are designed every other day to lure more faithfuls to the phenomenon.

Today, new media and their usages have reached an explosive growth across the globe with Nigeria having her share in the “holocaust”.

Some of the beauties of these new technologies which have endeared the youths especially are; the interactivity, the ability to combine voice, video and data and mobility.

Today, researchers have proved that the youths are at the forefront of technology revolution which in fact remains the major driving force behind the global emergence and evolution of the information and Knowledge-based society.

The increasingly widespread use of information and communication technology (ICT) must be viewed within the context of a much broader trend affecting the lives of young people today.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that through modern day media, ICT and global interconnectedness have combined very powerfully to influence the lives of young people, creating what is referred to as global media driven youth culture. – World Youth Report (2005).

Youth in this context may be defined as people that are young in age and at heart because the cyber- participation has reduced almost all the web browsers to the same level.

Terminologies like “*Tweenagers*”, “*Middle Youths*”, “*Kidults*”, “*Adultescents*”, “*Generation-X*”, “*Generation @*”, “*Net-Kids*”, etc intentionally blur the differences between children youth and adults, (Ulrich and Harris, 2003).

More so, the global media-driven culture as propelled by new media pushed information beyond national borders amongst the youth, and also encourages the two-directional interplay between local and global influences as reflected in the concept of “Glocalization” (Robertson, 1994).

The so called global media-driven youth culture differs across the globe. Unlike the developed countries and other African nations, Nigerian youths have carved their culture out of the decadence of the system and political landscape of the states.

The question remains: are Nigerians youths connected or alienated by the new media?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

New media can be described as the third generation communication vehicles that encompass all technologies which enable the handling of information and facilitate different forms of communication. The new media consists of; internets, mobile phones, cable/satellite TV, etc. This study will focus on the internet because it provides all the facilities that any new medium could offer. Also it is most widely sought after amongst Nigerian youths.

There are a number of misconceptions surrounding young people’s use of the internet. Several theories suggest that children of the information age are micro-monsters and web- sharks whose cognitive process as hand-eye coordination and functional observation speed are such that their levels of ability and skill far surpass those of their parents and teachers, (Tapscott, 1997).

Talking about connectedness, the youths require a specific level of socialization to enable him or her relate effectively within the cyber- culture with his or her peers.

According to the world youth report (2005), socialization generally represents a process in which a younger member of a society or community adopts the values, norms and moral order of his or

her group. In general terms, culture may be classified into **post-figurative**, **co-figurative** and **pre-figurative** (Mead, 1970).

Post-figurative culture socialization involves the transfer of basic values from the older to the younger generation

Co-figurative culture involves both children and adult in the learning process from their peers, although the direction of socialization is still from the older to the younger generation.

The Pre-figurative culture framework allows for a two-dimensional process of socialization that normally occurs when societies are experiencing rapid change, and intergenerational roles and relationships are not clearly stated

The situation comes into being when young people gather new sets of idea and education that give them edge over their elders and obsolete ideas.

This type of culture nevertheless, is synonymous with the youth and the new media, internet in particular. It is just a reflection of Yoruba adage (Western Nigeria) that says, the contemporary dogs are employed to hunt the contemporary rabbit.

Also, young people are believed to be vast in using and contributing to the content of the internet, hence determining their socialization system.

Therefore, if connectivity is primarily hinged on cyber-culture, cyber-socialization and language, it simply means the youth cyber-culture is tilted towards altering the authority structures and conditions of socialization in our society, hence social disconnection and alienation come in.

The world youth report succinctly asked:

*Identifying an aspect of the global media culture such as internet use as part of a pre-figurative, two-directional socialization process raises a series of questions:  
Into what are children and young people being socialized?  
What are the values, norms and moral structures of the global media culture into which they are being initiated?*

*How does the socialization takes place under conditions of rapid social change?  
The media culture context also raises an important question with regards to the direction and agents of socialization:  
If the global youth media culture is best defined as Pre-figurative (two-directional), what does this mean for tradition?*

Douglas Kellner, tends to hold a different belief ,

*“... before we can talk intelligently about the emergent Technologies and their impact on human and social life, we need to reject right from the beginning the two dominants ways of talking about contemporary technologies and need to develop a critical theory of technology to adequately address the issue of technology and alienation”.*

Kellner further identified the two dominant factors as **Technophobia** and **Technophilia**. He bemused the idea of Technophilia which presents new technologies as our messiah, the salvation that will solve our problems, liberate work force, educate and reduce our work loads.

He also disagreed with the school of thought that believes Technophobia. Technophobia sees new technologies as our damnation, demonising and the harbinger of problems that characterize the present age.

Kellner submitted, against one-sided Technophilic or Technophobic approaches, he advocated a critical theory of technology intended to sort positive and negative features, the upside and downside, the benefits and the losses in the development and trajectory of the new media as well as contradictions and ambiguities.

He said, it is necessary to counter promises of technological utopia that computers will solve current problems, produce jobs for everyone, generate a wealth of information, entertainment, and education, connect everyone and overcome boundaries of gender, race and class. But a critical

theory also needs to counter technological dystopia and claims that computers are fundamentally vehicles of alienation or more tools of capital, the state and domination.

In another development, a research team at Carnegie Mellon University, led by Robert Kraut came up with findings which posited that internet users tend to report greater levels of depression and feelings of loneliness.

Kraut further stated that two intervening variable may be responsible for the outcome of the research, i.e. activity displacement effect and displacement of social ties. The researchers also claimed that some of their data actually showed that those who used the internet for social purposes were more likely to suffer the negative social effects than those who used the internet for less social purposes.

I personally think it is pertinent at this level to critically explore alienation and its effects. Defining Alienation may be a bit cumbersome ,because the word means so many things to different disciplines and people. For the purpose of this study, social alienation will be sought as it relates to the work of study. Social alienation is the set of behaviour designed to estrange the relationship between society and a person or a group of persons.

Social Alienation could further be explained as the social disconnection from the environment which could be immediate household or community at large.

Alienation results when a person cannot feel any rewarding satisfaction from his or her social involvements. It can produce Isolation. Alienation means everything is bland, everything is regulated, and everything is regimented.

Melvin Seeman of the University of California identified five alternative meanings of alienation, i.e. powerlessness, meaningless, isolation, normlessness and self-estrangement.

Social alienation involves a persistent perception of being isolated or removed from others.

Marrying new media and alienation, this simply equates technology with dehumanization and isolation from other people, the environment and the “real world”, posing the user of new media as lost in cyberspace. Similarly, critiques have emerged from the philosophical community, including Albert Borgman’s across the Postmodern Divide (1994) which claims that information and communication technology are taking us into the sphere of hyper-reality, a term he borrowed from Baudrillard, and that we are losing touch with our bodies, with nature, with other people and focal things and practices – an argument developed in popular form by Mark Slouka (1995).

## **IS NIGERIA ON THE SUPER HIGHWAY?**

It is pertinent to look at where Nigeria stands in relation to information and communication technology (ICT), the problem, prospects and way forward. In the process of determining the youths’ cyber-culture, a nation has a role to play.

Like other nations, Nigeria had in March 2001, ratified a national policy for information technology. The policy acknowledge that Information Technology (IT) is the bedrock for national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment and challenges us to devise bold and courageous initiatives to address a host of vital socio-economic issues such as reliable infrastructures, skilled human resources, open governance and other essential issues of capacity building (Ganiyu, 2009).

The policy appreciates the fact that for Nigeria to compete favourably in the emerging information age, she needs a highly efficient Information and Communication Technology system with a vibrant IT policy.

According to Ganiyu (2009), the followings are some objectives of the policy:

- Ensuring that IT resources are readily available to promote efficient national development
- Improving accessibility to public administration for all citizens
- To create IT awareness and ensure universal access in order to promote IT diffusion in all sectors of national life
- To empower children, women and the disabled by providing special programmes for the acquisitions of IT schemes.

Out of these objectives, Nigeria cannot be said to have achieved forty percent. Many of the factors militating against the implementation of these objectives include:

- a. Poor power supply
- b. Regulations/control of contents and practitioners
- c. High poverty level
- d. High illiteracy level
- e. Cybercrime/Hacking
- f. Inconsistent political landscape
- g. Inadequate broadband among other things.



## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Marshall McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory posited that "societies have always been shaped more by nature of the media with which people communicate than by the content of the communication".

In summary, McLuhan was of the opinion that "the medium is the message". This statement could be used as a peg for the reason why most youth surf the net or join the social networks.

Many young people do not really have a clear cut objective of visiting the internet, but because he or she believes a friend is hooked on the internet, it becomes a misnomer for him or her not to be online.

In the same development, Joshua Meyrowitz in his book, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour*, corroborated McLuhan's submission by saying "... the theory suggest that a broad, seemingly chaotic spectrum of social change may be, in part, an orderly and comprehensible adjustment in behaviour patterns to match the new social situations created by electronic media" (p.9).

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the impacts of the connectedness that the newer media promote?
2. Do the youths have stronger social ties to their peers because they are in virtual contact for so much more of the time?
3. Does Internet use cause social isolation, depression and loneliness among the youths?

## **METHODOLOGY**

Survey research design was used in this study. The study covered 1000 respondents from the five schools (faculty) of Lagos State Polytechnic. Close-ended questionnaire was the research instrument used.

## **POPULATION**

The population was supposed to be the totality of the Nigerian youths. However, the complexity of collection and administering the data would make this not feasible. To achieve scientific and reliable results, Systematic Sampling with a random start was employed. Therefore, the students in these five schools (faculty) of the Polytechnic were used as sample size.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The results show that 73% of the respondents go on-line for on-line dating, instant chats with friends and making new relationships via the social networks. This finding indicates that the new media (in this case, the internet) have strong connecting impact on the Nigerian youths, this connectedness is however strongly indicative of what these youths expect from the media, which include making friends, dating and a whole lot of other social networking. This suggests that the new media are having great impact on the social life on most Nigerian youths, whether this impact transforms into knowledge –driven economy for the Nation ,will be another interesting focus for further research. The important conclusion of this study is that the respondents seem to have stronger ties to their online friends and peers, and that this is probably so because of the level of flexibility and freedom afforded the respondents in their selection of cyber-friends, for instance,

there is no room for physical examination and embarrassing feelings of being inadequate to befriend anybody.

Findings also show that, 62 per cent of the respondents go on-line to submit assignments and research for academic materials. This particular finding is a possible indication that the environment, which include both the physical and social environment can also influence how the youths make use of the new media, the assumption here is that the high percentage of academic use of the internet by the respondents is as a result of the fact that, the research was conducted on students within a school environment. Conducting the same study on youths within a different environment might bring an entirely different result(s) on what the youths use the internet for, and the result might be strongly related to their particular circumstances.

Another findings show that the ladies surf the internet more than the guys with 53% to 42% in favour of the ladies. About 18 per cent involve in pornography. This research findings show that a substantive number, if not so large number of the respondents engage in pornography, however, what the study is not able to determine is what attract this category of respondents to pornography. Is it the fact that such is available on the net, or there are other factors attracting them to look for such “gratification” on line?

However, about 78% of the respondents agreed that the guys engage more in cyber crime compared to ladies.

While 42% percent of the respondents access the internet via their mobile phones, 51% access the net through the public cafes, and 7% have personal laptops with either LASPOTECH hotspot Wifi or dial-up internet facilities. It is worthy of note to know that, 86% of the respondents that browse with their phones , do that to the disadvantage of the Providers.

Sixty eight per cent of the respondents cannot do without going online each day, others cut across two days, three days or once in a week. This particular finding is of great interest, since a larger percentage of the respondents access the net through public cafes, it can be said that the issue of internet having isolating effect on the Nigerian youths might still be a probability for later time, as most time these youths still meet at cafes and most might even have the opportunity to discuss some of their new friends, and other cyber-activities with their colleagues and friends at the public cafes. However, the access to such personal technology like the laptop and dial- up internet facilities might bring about 'escapism' which may lead to social isolation as a result of constant use.

It was also gathered that 81% of the total respondents agreed that they are more connected to friends on-line than those they see face-to-face. This result may not be disconnected from the fact that, the platform allows for fantasies, secrecy, deceits, lies, etc.

While they were asked if they are happy going on-line than doing other things, 84% of the respondents agreed that the internet is fun. This simply indicates that, if Nigerian youths are given access to free computers and internet facilities, they may spend more time on the superhighway.

Overwhelmingly, 100% of the respondents are on facebook. While 20% do not know what *twitter* is about, 76% have at least two usernames. Given the fact that facebook is a social networking site, it can be concluded that the Nigerian youths' awareness of the potential of the internet for social purposes is on the high side despite their low level access to internet technologies.

About 63% listen to on-line music, 21% use internet call facilities such as skype, 23% learn new slangs or languages, while 42% learn fashion.

## CONCLUSION

Broadly speaking, Nigerian youths will do more to maximize the opportunities that the new media have to offer, because at present the youths are more distracted by the less important usages of the new media. Hence, the youths will need an aggressive re-orientation as to positive use of the new media.

Also, parents will need to do more in the areas of censoring what their children or wards are exposed to. As the technologies change, parents would have to swim along in order to have input in the contents of the new media, that culture and tradition may live forever.

Private sector also has a role to play if it must achieve the full potentials of economic liberalisation and privatisation that new media technologies have to offer. The youths' market is no doubt a massive and robust market, therefore an investment in the directions of the new media technologies would not only hit hard on their bottom-line, but also ensure an enviable brand positioning.

On the part of the government, mass literacy should be encouraged and sustained. New media technologies should not be seen as luxury but major factors in the development of a nation and its people especially in the area of corporate governance. Subsequently, necessary infrastructures and enabling policies should be put in place and maintained at the three tiers of government, viz; Federal, State and Local.

As we speak, Nigerian youths can neither be said to be alienated nor connected, but they are surely distracted.

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