

# **Media Convergence, Social Media and Societal Transformation**

**Etim Anim, *Ph.D.***

Cross River University of Technology, Calabar

## **Abstract**

This article explores the potentials of social media for influencing societal change in a variety of settings, including politics, health, socialisation and even business. Some of the socio-political upheavals and events that have occurred in parts of the world in the past seven years -- the Iranian post-election uprising of 2009, the Arab Spring, the London riots of 2011, and the monitoring of the 2011 Nigerian General Elections -- were all given some social media dimensions. Because of these wide-ranging potentials of social media, the article also advocates the introduction of social media studies into the communication curriculums of universities in the country. Attention has been drawn to the recommendations of the social media panel during the Second World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC) which took place in Grahamstown, South Africa, in 2010. The point is made that WJEC 2 attracted journalists, journalism and mass communication trainers, administrators and college and university teachers from all continents; their views in such matters count. The article concludes with a suggestion that the ACCE should initiate the process of determining whether this would be a direction to follow in the Nigerian university system. Alternatively, individual universities could restructure their curriculums to take in the study of

social media.

**Keywords:** Media convergence, social media, societal transformation, social change, communication for development, communication curriculums, ACCE

### **Introduction**

The aim of this paper was, originally, to provide a backdrop for the discussions that took place during the 2012 Annual Conference of the Nigerian Chapter of the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE). It has, however, been expanded to explore the potentials of social media for influencing societal change in a variety of settings. These settings cover politics, health, socialising and even business. Because of these wide-ranging potentials of social media, this article is also advocating the introduction of the study of social media into the communication curriculums of universities in the country.

In considering the topic, “Media Convergence, Social Media and Societal Transformation,” definitional issues immediately come to the fore. Then an effort will be made to establish a relationship among the three elements of the topic. The first natural question would be: What is convergence?

### **Convergence**

A search through the communication literature shows that *media convergence* is a concept that blossomed in late 1990s, although the term convergence goes back to the synergy strategies of the 1980s when business acquisition and merges were propelled by the desire of one company to deliver a variety of services. However, at this point in the development of communications media, the concept of media convergence has come of age. Thus, it will be helpful to put a historical perspective on the emergence of the convergence phenomenon. This is because the overarching

theme of the 2012 (ACCE) Conference was tied closely to the phenomenon.

Baran (2009) defines convergence as the erosion of the distinctions among media. He reviews examples of convergence to include movies, music, video games, books and television shows that are made available simultaneously on multiple media platforms. The sheer complexity of the convergence phenomenon is almost dizzying. As Baran describes it:

You can read the New York Times or Time magazine and hundreds of newspapers and magazines on your computer screen. Cellular phone maker Life's Good sells a mobile phone that not only allows users to talk to other people but – because it includes a digital camcorder, zoom and rotating lenses, and a digital still camera, complete with flash – allows those same users to “broadcast” their “television programmes” and photos...This erosion of distinction among media is called *convergence*... (Baran, 2009, p. 52).

Many authorities (de Beer, 2009; Straubhaar and LaRose, 2000; Baran, 2009) attribute the rapid pace of convergence to concentration in the communications/media business. Baran, for example, argues that a company that owns multiple media businesses “has a strong incentive to get the greatest use from its (company's) contents, whether news, education, or entertainment, by using as many channels of delivery as possible” (2009, p. 52).

Indeed, Dominick (2011) disaggregates convergence into three levels: corporate convergence, operational convergence, and device convergence which he describes as, perhaps, the most important type of convergence. Dominick's approach is, all the same, consistent with assertions by other experts that convergence

is driven by business concentration.

Deuze (2009) conceives of convergence as “the complex interaction and integration between work, life, and play, all of which get expressed in, and are facilitated by, the rapid development of new information and communication technologies” (p. 133).

Convergence has also been described as the process of the development of media and communication through several overlapping eras – in which newer forms of technology disrupted and modified older forms (Campbell, Martin and Fabos, 2012). Written communication disrupted and modified the oral tradition; the invention of printing modified and enhanced written communication; the electronic era disrupted and modified print; the digital era practically destabilised media and communication. It is important to note the point about “overlapping eras”: to differing degrees, these eras still operate; they overlap and complement each other. In other words, they converged.

As Campbell *et al* (2012) have argued, every era brought profound change to the human community; the first two phases parallel tribal and feudal communities and agricultural economies, while the last three feature the development of mass communication. Indeed, the march of civilization has been synonymous with the changes wrought by each stage in the convergence process. Straubhaar and LaRose (2000) present a kaleidoscopic concept of the process: Pre-agricultural societies depended on the spoken word...to transmit their traditions from one generation to the next. Agricultural economies, being more complex and more settled, paid a great deal of attention to communication and brought written languages into being. Industrial societies depended on mass production as exemplified by the publication of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455.

They argued further that the Industrial Revolution, which

extended Gutenberg's mass production methods, was the harbinger of industrial production. Then, industrial production -- based in the large cities -- triggered mass migration from country to city and from agricultural jobs to manufacturing. "Urbanization, literacy and the need to advertise manufactured goods on a large scale gave rise to the first truly mass medium: the urban newspaper" (Straubhaar and LaRose, 2000, p. 14). As industrialisation expanded, newer types of amusements for the urban masses -- including film, radio and television -- was a logical consequence.

The complexity of the communication needs of the industrial society led to the emergence of an information society, where information work dominated the work force because information became the dominant commodity --- "a society wherein the creation and exchange of information is the dominant social and economic activity" (Baran, 2004, p. 48). The logic of this progression is that the media -- information carrying artefacts -- reflect the developmental status of societies that spawn them. Within that context, the capacity of the computer to create, store and process information has made it (the computer) the dominant medium of the digital age.

Straubhaar and LaRose concluded that "the conversion of all media to computer readable forms is what drives the convergence of the mass media" (2000, p. 15). The multimedia capability of the computer also fostered interactivity, thus making it possible to customize the converged media to highly refined audience segments or even to individual tastes. So now, we are able to access TV shows, movies, music, games, newspapers, magazines, books on our computer screens. The flourishing of the Internet, one of the most astounding inventions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has forged the ultimate in the concept of media convergence. Aided by digital technology, all media have now converged on the Internet, causing even more profound disruption of *status quo* patterns in the communication of mass information.

The nature of each platform of convergence has dictated the nature of its use by the consumer. The desktop computer is stationary; the laptop, which integrated the basic detachable parts of the desktop computer into one device, provided primary mobility; tablets combined the features of the laptop and miniatures, thus greatly improving device mobility; smart phones led to what Helles (2013) has described as extreme mobility. With extreme mobility has come extreme convergence. Thus, between the advent of laptops and smart phones, the explosion of mobile technology has now shifted the converged media into hand-held devices. These technological shifting sands have created an even greater impact on 21<sup>st</sup> century society, namely, social networking. As Campbell has argued, this is so because mobile communication technology supports “mediated social connectivity while the user is in physical motion” (2013, p. 9). Thus, at this point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mobile technology appears to the zone of ultimate convergence: it has the capacity to incorporate the computer, the Internet, voice, text, pictures, and video, and it may “support other forms of media consumption, information, and even tracing the movement of objects that are in motion” (Campbell, 2013, p. 9).

This point is emphasised by Helles (2013) in arguing that, “The user (of the mobile phone) becomes a mobile terminus for mediated communicative interaction across the various contexts of daily life” (Helles, 2013, p. 14). Jensen (2013) adds that mobile media have made physical space more accessible and manageable for diverse political, economic, and cultural purposes.

### **Social Media**

The term social networking originally involved communication via networking sites that were devoted to socialising. It distinguished these sites from networks that were used for business purposes. Contemporarily, the term includes interactive websites with message boards, chat rooms or the ability to leave

comments and have a discussion with other people. Social networking has plugged into the capabilities of computer-based interactive and socialising platforms to create a new concept of media resources known as social media. Among the more familiar social media are *Facebook, MySpace, Orkut, Friendster, Twitter, YouTube, Gowalla* and sites where information is loosely shared, such as *Delicious.com, Flickr.com* and *LinkedIn*.

Nevertheless, Jensen argues, and aptly too, that media do not in themselves create social relations. “New technologies, institutions, and discourse of communication constitute resources which, over time, may reconfigure social relations in fundamental ways” (2013, p. 26). As proponents of the *Technology Affordances Paradigm* have posited, technology is only as important as the uses to which human users convert it. For example, Lucas Graves' ***Technology Affordances model is built on the culture and technological effects theory*** (Carey, 1992; Geertz, 1973). According to Graves, his conceptual framework is a modification of the **culture and technological effects theory to explain the social and cultural contexts of technology adoption**. Essentially, then, Graves argues that technology in itself does not bring about change, in contrast with the main thrust of the technological determinism theory, originally associated with McLuhan. Humans and their socio-cultural environments and necessities drive any new technology to accomplish things for a society. Graves defines *affordances* “as the features of a technology that make a certain action possible; they are properties of the world defined with respect to people's interaction with it” (Graves, 2007, p. 332) and asserts that technology merely sparks, unleashes, or even creates (the) new habits...” (p. 335).

Helles (2013) agrees with Graves that the affordances paradigm provides a middle point between technological determinism and social constructivism with regard to the relationship between technologies and human action. Technology is therefore, more appropriately a child of opportunity; a particular

technological knowledge does not simply bring about change. It is adopted when the circumstances are ripe and it becomes recognised as being central to the functioning of the society (Anim, Akpan, Okon, Sunday & Eyo, 2011).

Thus, the technological capabilities of 21<sup>st</sup> century society are limited only by the imagination of their users. Social media are a product of this adoption of available technology by societies in different eras to meet their specific needs. In this case, adoption was fired by the desire of people to share experiences without borders. The experiences range from work to academics and more. Campbell *et al* (2012) assert that social media are the vehicles for re-inventing our oral culture. But the exponential expansion of social networking has, in turn, enlarged the importance and variety of social media and highlighted their critical implications in the global village: the irrelevance of long distance, the immediacy of communication, the abundance of communication platforms, the erosion of boundaries, and the ease with which relationships can be built even with people that one may never meet.

### **Societal Transformation**

The third element of this topic is societal transformation. The association of societal transformation with social media, once again, brings up the never-ending global debate about the centrality of communication to development. Social media as vehicles that facilitate a certain kind of communication – social communication – are now evidently part of the debate which goes back to the 1950s and the 60s. That was when the concept of mass communication and the development of nations emerging from colonialism became the passion of the United Nations and its agencies, aid-granting countries and agencies, the governments of the emerging nations, and communication experts in academia.

Then, it was postulated that communication through the mass media was capable of introducing not only news and information, but also a whole new way of thinking about the world.

This developed into the much discussed modernization paradigm spearheaded by scholars like Wilbur Schramm and Daniel Lerner. In sum, “Lerner's thesis was that the process of modernisation was thrusting traditional peoples into the modern world of the West through the mass media – and that this was not only inevitable but also a good thing” (McAnany, 2012, p. 2).

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed relentless criticism and critiques of the modernisation paradigm, especially among Third World scholars and theorists of the critical school, leading to its being recanted by the major proponents. The shift away from this paradigm was landmarked by Everett Rogers's *The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm* and the emergence of new thinking about communication and change. It is thus to be noted that the rejection of the modernisation paradigm was not a rejection of the role of communication in the development process.

The new approach to communication for development (often referred to as C4D) has since been entrenched in global development strategies as well as in the academia. Various interpretations and definitions of C4D abound. Servaes (2004) characterises the concept as the sharing of knowledge aimed at reaching a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned. It is thus a social process. In this social process, the media are important tools; but interpersonal communication, too, must play a fundamental role.

Servaes & Malikhao (2004) assert that this process “favours a multiplicity of approaches based on the context and the basic, felt needs, and the empowerment of the most oppressed sectors of various societies at divergent levels.” An Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) observed that communication for development “is about dialogue, participation and the sharing of knowledge and information. It takes into account the needs and capacities of all concerned” (Monyo, 2005). Waisbord (2008) has argued that it was the long-running critique of Rogers's diffusion theory and modernization

that led to a questioning of “the purpose of the entire 'development' enterprise” (p. 206).

This was accompanied by calls to drop the notion of 'development' in favour of “social change” and “social justice.” In the context of the modernisation paradigm, “development” was seen in terms of economic growth whose indicators were Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita or income per capita. It ignored the individual members of communities; in other words, even when GDP per capita or income per capita increased annually, it often exacerbated the disparity between the rich and the poor -- the condition of the poor, the minority, the vulnerable -- remained the same or got even worse. The introduction of the Human Development Index (HDI) by the United Nations was, partly, a response to this new approach to “development” or social change.

The hallmark of this new thinking is its people-oriented character. The intent of communication in the drive for social change is the participation of the people or the participatory communication model. “Communication for development became understood as a two-way process, in which communities could participate as key agents in setting normative development goals and standards” (Jayaweera, 2007). Therefore, a recurring element in contemporary concepts of C4D is community participation and interpersonal communication alongside mass media communication. People involved in the development process are encouraged to accept whatever development intervention is concerned as their own project.

The concept of societal transformation is thus in accord with the desire to shift emphasis in development from statistics to the individual. This implies that critical in the development mix is the quality of life and individual well-being. Social mobilisation is an integral part of people participation in the development process. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defined social mobilisation as a process of coalition building and action by which

social actors come together to raise awareness about specific issues, raise demand, support service delivery, and strengthen local participation (Waisbord and Obregon, 2010). This involves the ability of communities to identify problems, “make decisions about priority goals and actions, mobilize resources, develop and implement strategies, provide health services, and inform and educate about health issues” (Obregon and Waisbord, 2010, p. 27).

Social mobilization is thus loosely used to refer to tasks or decisions that multiple actors -- community members, beneficiaries, local organizations, policymakers, and government officials -- perform in support of development programmes. This range of activities fits clearly into the strategies of different types of activists and advocates who rely on the media to create awareness and mobilise for action. However, McQuail is concerned about “the open-ended, non-purposive uses that are typical of new technology” and the “loss of direction and control over content by the sender” in relation to social change (2010, p. 142). This concern can be easily resolved by the purpose of the communication and the overall strategy of any such initiative; it depends on what the users want to do and how they want to do it. Indeed, as McQuail himself has argued, “it may be that more participatory media are equally or better suited to producing change because they are more involving as well as more flexible and richer in information” (p. 142).

### **Convergence, Social Media and Social Change**

The potentials of social media as agents of social mobilisation in the quest for social change have been well demonstrated in the past five to ten years. There are some basic characteristics of social media that enable them to be adapted for more than the sharing of social courtesies among friends. Some social and political upheavals that the world has witnessed in the last few years saw the oppressed and the vulnerable calling the social media into their

struggle to improve the human condition. Social media allow people to:

- Create a profile or identity through which one can show others who one is.
- Create lists and links to things one supports and likes.
- Easily share information with and among groups.
- Pass comments and messages from one person that others can read.
- Pass comments and messages to an individual from people in that person's social networks or (in some cases) even from people unknown to the person.
- Establish connections to other people.

In other words, social media communication has the capacity of being one-to-one, one-to-many, immediate and interactive, public and interactive on a global scale, two-directional in flow and easy to rapidly aggregate and link from a lot of people in different locations. In addition to these and their extreme mobility created by convergence and miniaturisation, the social media have the advantage of being beyond the control of individual state actors like presidents, governors, politicians and bureaucrats. McQuail provides an alternative taxonomy for these characteristics, namely: interactivity, social presence, media richness, autonomy, playfulness, privacy, and personalisation (2010, p. 144).

A study of *Facebook*, for example, would show that people are speaking the way they feel; some of the posts on *Facebook* are polite, others restrained, but some are definitely driven by anger and frustration. For instance, it would be unimaginable in Nigeria to say anything uncomplimentary about the President, a governor or a chieftain of the ruling People's Democratic Party on the Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) network. Most newspapers would, for ethical reasons, spike many of the comments on *Facebook* that

have been sampled in the course of writing this paper. The average copy editor would take out some of the more uncivil expressions that the people post directly to political leaders. The president of the Nigerian Senate, David Mark, was once quoted as saying that there should be a check on social media in the country because “people now use these media to demean their leaders.” It is not difficult to imagine what the Senate president would have done if the “offending” media were government-controlled or were owned by one of the senator's friends or political associates.

True to the global character of the digital age, the social media phenomenon has no boundaries. As in Australia so it is in Egypt, or Nigeria, or Poland or the United States. The scope and spread in each territorial space might differ but the phenomenon and its effects are universal. Nigeria has an impressive infrastructure to participate in the burgeoning phenomenon. Access to the Internet is on the rise. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) data show that as at April 2013, 48,366,179 Nigerians had access to the Internet ([www.internewworldstats.com](http://www.internewworldstats.com)), which represents 28.9% of users in Africa. France had 52 million users (10.1% of European total). That put Nigeria at the top in Africa, and next to France (11<sup>th</sup>) in world rating. In addition, current mobile phone technology enables even the cheapest telephone to access the Internet; with 120 million mobile phone subscribers in Nigeria (NCC, 2012), Internet penetration of the population – certainly among the urbanized population and the young – is higher than formal access figures portray. Also, according to December 2012 statistics, there were more than 6,630,200 *Facebook* users in Nigeria. That outstrips the daily circulation of all newspapers in the country -- which is well under 300,000 -- in staggering fashion.

Nigeria's literacy rate is well above 60 per cent (60.8% - UNESCO; 61.2% - CIA - *The World Factbook*). Male adult literacy rate is well above 70% (71.96% - UNESCO; 72.1% - CIA - *The World Factbook*). Youth male literacy rate is 78.15%

(UNESCO); while youth female rate is 65.33% (UNESCO). That puts youth total literacy rate at 68.99% (UNESCO). Therefore, between the adult literacy rate and that of the youths, there is a high percentage of Nigerians literate enough to access and use Internet platforms and, in particular, the social media. UNESCO defines literacy rate as “the percentage of people from age 15 and above who can, with understanding, read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life” (2011). Those who tweet, post on *Facebook*, chat and comment on the social networking platforms meet this definition. The “text language” they use suffices for the expression of their views, intent and frustrations; sophisticated language is not a condition for participation. These Nigerians know what they want from the economic, social and political system; they have a voice and, more than any of the traditional media, social media have given them the platforms to join the national conversation. This voice is going to be increasingly heard in the years ahead.

In the manner of capitalist or free-market environments, giants were bound to emerge among the social media; *Facebook* did. It might be said indeed that it is becoming impossible to imagine a world without *Facebook*. Everybody is “on *Facebook*.” Presidents, prime ministers and heads of government, media conglomerates, business conglomerates, SMEs, politicians, scammers and crackpots, high school children, university students, housewives, house helps, princes and paupers are all on *Facebook*. During the 2011 General Elections, the presidential contestants of all the major political parties were on *Facebook*, pitching their ambitions in a variety of ways.

Today, more than one billion subscribers are on *Facebook*.

The consequences of all this for society is already evident. Add the other social networking sites, and it is moot to argue that social media have influenced society everywhere in very profound ways. McQuail makes a compelling argument

about this new dispensation:

The new electronic media have been widely hailed as a potential way of escape from the oppressive 'top down' politics of mass democracies in which tightly organised political parties make policy unilaterally and mobilise support behind them with minimal negotiation and grassroots input. They provide the means for highly differentiated provision of political information and ideas, almost unlimited access in theory for all voices, and much feedback and development of interest groups between leaders and followers...They allow dialogue between politicians and active citizens, without the inevitable intervention of a party machine (2010, p. 151).

As de Beer (2009, p. 133) points out, the convergence phenomenon “signals the emergence of a global convergence culture, based on an increasingly participatory and interactive engagement ... between people and their media.” Not surprisingly, events that occur in one part of the global village profoundly influence peoples in other parts. For example, between 2008 and 2012, political and social upheavals in different parts of the world have manifested the increasing power of the social media. Specifically, the post-election uprising in Iran in 2009, the London riots of 2011, the uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria (collectively known as the Arab Spring), and the Occupy Movement (as in Occupy Wall Street) have all been given a social media dimension.

After the 2009 presidential elections in Iran, Iranians took to the streets to protest the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. According to the *Washington Post Online* (2009, June 17), “Because the Iranian government had barred journalists from 'unauthorized' demonstrations, people communications networks became the only means of getting information on the unfolding drama out of Iran to Iranians living abroad and the rest of the world audience.” The *Post Online* commented further that,

“The move illustrates the growing influence of online social-networking services as communications media” (<http://www.washingtonpostonline>).

On August 4, 2011, the shooting of a Mark Duggan by the London police in Tottenham triggered riots in various London suburbs, and outside London in Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester. *The Guardian* of London quoted the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, as saying: “Everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organised via social media” (2011, August 11 <[www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)>). On the positive side, it was also claimed that volunteers mobilised to help clean up the worst hit areas through *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

The Arab Spring had its genesis in Tunisia where, in January 2010, the people finally decided to react to high unemployment, poor living conditions, illegal elections and human rights abuse. The trigger was the death of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street vendor who set himself ablaze on December 17, 2010, to protest the confiscation of his wares and the humiliation inflicted on him by a government official. An intensive campaign of civil resistance followed Bouazizi's death on January 4, 2011, spread all over Tunisia, and ultimately lead to the deposition of President after 23 years in power. A participant in the street revolution explained that:

The revolution unfolded in three basic phases. First, protests broke out in the interior of the country after a young man burned himself alive to protest his treatment at the hands of the authorities. A brutal police crackdown resulted, providing activists with shocking imagery to spread online and generate unrest. Second, as protests spread to the more affluent parts of the country, people poured into the streets of cities like Sfax and Tunis and began to organize themselves with cell phones and *Facebook*. Finally, as President Ben Ali fled

and the country risked disorder and random violence, people across the country used social media to dispel misinformation and organize themselves to counter security forces, regime-supporters and looters alike (Rim Nour, 2011).

The street protests that toppled President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt from power after 30-odd years, the successful revolt in Libya and Yemen, and the thwarted uprising in Bahrain were also attributed, in part, to mobilisation via social media. Petit (2012) postulated that: “Social media proliferated compelling images and stories that resonated with all classes of citizens worldwide, inspiring a mix of activism and outrage that ignited revolutionary sentiment.”

The civil war in Syria took its cue from the successful uprising in Egypt and is kept alive in the world's public mind by images that are sent round the globe through *YouTube*. A Wikipedia article on that conflict **noted that**, “International media have relied heavily on footage shot by civilians, who would often upload the files on the Internet” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian\\_Civil\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Civil_War)).

The government is reported to have “disabled mobile phones, landlines, electricity, and the Internet in several places. Authorities are also said to have extracted passwords of social media sites from journalists through beatings and torture, which they use to hack into social media sites to post “pro-regime propaganda.” Thus, beyond the ground war, there is another front being waged in the social media.

On a more positive note, the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria were monitored via social media by some interest groups concerned about the fairness of the elections. For example, an organization called the Social Media Tracking Centre deployed a structure to track the use of social media in the elections. In a post-election report the Centre reported as follows:

Volunteers ... embedded within INEC established a

social media structure to allow for open interaction with election stakeholders, including setting up *Facebook*, *twitter* and *YouTube* platforms. This was done within five days, significantly strengthening the organization's capacity throughout the election period. Several civil society organizations established reporting platforms via SMS, *twitter*, websites, blogs, and phone lines... Although the estimated 70,000 voters who contributed reports and comments may seem small out of a registered 73 million voters, this is the first Nigerian election in which social media played a role and appears to be the beginning of a new trend. It is fair to say that Nigeria may have begun its own 2011 Spring with a heightened level of awareness and participation by citizens in their governance process (The Social Media Tracking Centre, 2012).

Some people have argued that it is still too early to assume that the social media have adequately provided platforms where the government interacts with the citizens. Such views underrate the speed with which social media have spread across the world and the viability of even small beginnings as demonstrated by the Arab Spring. The status quo has certainly been disrupted and things will never be the same again.

### **Social Media, ACCE and JMC Curriculums**

In the face of the increasing impact of social media in the media ecosystem, should not social media become part of JMC curriculums in Nigerian universities? The Nigerian Chapter of the African Council Communication Education (ACCE) is or should be the most authoritative forum to discuss issues related to the communication curriculums of universities. The case for including the social media in JMC curriculums was made eloquently during the World Journalism Education Congress of 2010 (WJEC 2) that took place in Grahamstown, South Africa. The syndicate panel on “Social Media, Citizen Journalism and Media Curators”<sup>1</sup> argued:

Social media sites, including interactive blogs, are now essential items in journalists' kitbags. They are tools for newsgathering and dissemination; for investigation and even crowd-sourced fact checking. Perhaps most importantly, though, they are platforms for engagement with Rosen's "the people formerly known as the audience" – each one of whom is a potential source .... The concept of an interactive, audience-engaged and activated real-time web platform for journalism is here to stay. And that means social media theory and practice must be embedded in journalism teaching.

Nevertheless, there are rules of engagement for journalists operating in these spaces; rules that require more than mere technical knowledge of how to tweet or post a *Facebook* status update. They also demand reflective practice and critical thinking in reference to ethics and professionalism. So, while individual journalists are now expected to swim with the social media tide, rather than resist it, it's incumbent upon industry trainers and J-Schools to provide the training necessary to equip the practitioners (WJEC, 2010).

The point of interest here is that professional journalists, journalism/mass communication teachers and administrators from every continent who met at Rhodes University for WJEC 2 agreed that it would be an important step in the development of journalism and mass communication education to plug social media studies into JMC curriculums. Since that 2010 Conference, a number of universities worldwide have taken that route. That should be food for thought for the ACCE.

Two approaches to the issue of introducing social media into the classroom are suggested here. First, the example of what the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) did in the United States, can be borrowed and applied in Nigeria. In 1999, the AEJMC set up a series of high profile committees to examine and make recommendations on JMC education as the new millennium

approached. The second volume of the report from these committees was issued as *Journalism and Mass Communication Education: 2001 and Beyond*. The introduction to the report noted:

The AEJMC is well positioned as it enters “2001 and beyond” to meet the challenges of both a new century and a new millennium and to serve its membership and the journalism and communication academic community as they evaluate new tools, new media, new markets and new opportunities (Pavlik, Morgan & Henderson, 2000).

In the same vein, the ACCE may set up a committee or committees to examine the possible options and make recommendations. Whatever viewpoints, concerns, doubts and, indeed, the holistic issue of studies in new media that may be broiling in the minds of stakeholders would be presented, discussed and resolved at the committee level. The ACCE would then make recommendations for implementation to individual universities.

The second approach is for individual universities -- with different visions and missions – to restructure their communication curriculums to reflect the new trend. In the second option, two thrusts are possible: To introduce specific courses with new course codes and detailed course descriptions; the second thrust is to adopt the advice that the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission, Professor Julius Okojie, once offered following an inquiry by this author, that is, to expand the purview of existing courses to take in the new areas.

Overall, the first approach is preferable because (i) any emergent recommendations will lead to universal adoption by the country's university system, and (ii) there will be a standard curriculum (which may then be tweaked by individual institutions to reflect local emphases). The model curriculum for journalism

training issued by UNESCO some years ago was in this mould.

## **Conclusion**

Historically, technology adoption has always been slow in developing nations, partly because of the various factors that mediate in such an adoption process. For example, as Orr (2003) pointed out, “For most members of a social system, the innovation-decision depends heavily on the innovation-decisions of the other members of the system.” There are various levels of innovation decision making, including governments, administrators, the bureaucracy, and technocrats, each capable of being a cog in the wheel. In the matter of adopting new university programmes, a key constraint is the absence of a clear-cut policy by the National Universities Commission, Nigeria's higher education regulator.

Another constraint is the new media competency of JMC educators themselves. This results in lethargy towards change because, as Pavlik et al. (2000) pointed out, “To best serve efforts to teach technologically literate students...JMC education also must make a commitment to support on-going technology training for current educators and educators of the future” (p.8). *A similar point was stressed at WJEC 2*: “Journalism educators and trainers need to be at the knowledge cusp of radically changing journalism training... Journalism educators should facilitate open discussions about the ways in which journalism is changing.”

A start must be made to reflect the technological changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the country's university curriculums. Some universities, especially the second- and third-generation federal universities, are still using curriculums drawn up in the 1980s. The ACCE should demonstrate the will to deal with the realities of the contemporary communication culture by setting up exploratory committees to examine the possibilities/potentials and implications of integrating the social media into JMC curriculums. It is unnecessary to argue that formal study will equip

students -- the young people who use social media the most -- with the knowledge, critical thinking ability, and competency skills required to meet the personal, professional, and civic challenges of social media use in the years ahead.

Global statistics show that Africa is the fastest growing market for mobile phones and Nigeria has the fastest mobile phone growth rate in the continent, with about 120 million subscribers. Mobile social media will become increasingly important for addressing the country's peculiar problems. Campbell (2013) has argued that these media and the services associated with them are more affordable than other wireless and fixed media and provide opportunities for connectivity in developing societies that were previously beyond their reach: "New forms of basic connectivity... have a number of profound consequences for the developing world, including changes in health care, democratic process, small business enterprise, and domestic relations" (2013, p. 12). The study of social media will be important for Nigeria in several ways.

## **References**

- Anim, E., Akpan, I., Okon, G., Sunday, O. & Eyo, T. (2011). ICTs and Higher Education in Nigeria: A Study of Four Universities. *CRUTECH Journal of Science, Engineering & Technology [JOSET]*, 1 (1), 74–82.
- Baran, S. (2009). *Introduction to mass communication: Media literacy and culture* (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Company.
- Campbell, R., Martin, C., & Fabos, B. (2012). *Media & culture: An introduction to mass communication*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Campbell, S. (2013). Mobile media and communication: A new field, or just a new journal? *Mobile Media and Communication*, 1, 8–13.
- Deuze, M. (2009). Global journalism education. In Arnold S. de

- Beer (Ed.), *Global journalism: Topical issues and media systems* (pp. 131 – 142). Boston: Pearson.
- De Beer, A. (Ed.). (2009). *Global journalism: Topical issues and media systems* (5<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston: Pearson.
- Graves, L. (2007). The affordances of blogging: A case study in culture and technological effects. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 31(4), 331- 346.
- Helles, R. (2013). Mobile media and intermediality. *Mobile Media and Communication*, 1, 14-19.
- International Telecommunications Union (2012). *The world in 2011: Facts and figures*. Geneva: ITU.
- InternetWorldStats (2012). Internet usage statistics for Africa. Retrieved on October 10, 2012, from [www.Internetworldstats.com](http://www.Internetworldstats.com)
- Jayaweera, W. (2007). Towards a common UN system approach: Harnessing Communication to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Retrieved on February 10, 2013 from <http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-html>.
- Jensen, K. (2013). What's mobile in mobile communication? *Mobile Media and Communication*, 1, 26–31.
- McAnany, E. (2012). *Saving the world: A brief history of communication for development and social change*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass communication theory* (5th ed.). London: SAGE.
- Monyo, J. (2005). *Communication for Development*. Rome: FAO.
- Nigerian Communication Commission (2012). *Subscriber Data: August 2012*. Retrieved on September 18, 2012 from <http://www.ncc.gov.ng>
- Obregon, R. and Waisbord, S. (2010). The complexity of social mobilization in health communication: Top-down and bottom-up experiences in polio eradication. *Journal of*

- Health Communication*, 15, 25-47.
- Orr, G. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations* by Everett Rogers (1995): A Review. Retrieved April 12, 2011 from <http://www.stanford.edu/class/symsys205/Diffusion%20.htm>
- Pavlik, John, Morgan, Harry & Henderson, Bruce (2001). Information technology: Implications for the future of journalism and mass communication education. In AEJMC, *Journalism and mass communication: 2001 and beyond*. Retrieved on November 6, 2006 from <http://www.aejmc.org/pubs>.
- Rim Nour (2011). How Social Media Accelerated Tunisia's Revolution: An Inside View. The BLOG. Retrieved on March 3, 2013 from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/colin-delany/how-social-media-accelera\\_b\\_821497.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/colin-delany/how-social-media-accelera_b_821497.html)
- Servaes, J. (ed.) (2002). *Approaches to development communication*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Servaes, J. & Malikhao, P (2004). Communication and Sustainable Development: UN Background Paper. Rome: FOA.
- Straubhaar, J., and LaRose, R. (2000). *Media now: communications media in the information age* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson.
- The Social Media Tracking Center (2012). The Social Media Tracking Centre and the 2011 Nigerian Elections. Abuja: Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation.
- Waisbord, S. (2008). The institutional challenges of participatory communication in international aid *Social Identities*, 14, (4), 505 - 522
- World Bank* (2011). *Nigeria - Literacy rate, adult total*. Retrieved October 2012 from <http://data.world.org/data-catalog>
- World Journalism education Congress (2010). Social Media, Citizen Journalism and Media Curators. The recommendations of a syndicate panel during WJEC 2 in Grahamstown, South Africa.