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OSUN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

VOLUME 4 NO. 1, JUNE, 2017

LIST OF ARTICLES	PAGE
1. FROM VIOLENCE TO PEACE: THE NATIONAL UNION OF ROAD TRANSPORT WORKERS AND POLITICAL THUGGERY IN IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA, 1999-2015 -Adebiyi, Oluwashina Moruf	1-18
2. TRADITIONAL RULERS, RESURGENT MILITANCY AND INSECURITY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA – Bona Chizea & Osumah Oarhe	19-34
3. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ILORIN, NIGERIA – Fawole, Olufemi Adeniyi	35-44
4. A SURVEY OF MEDICAL ERRORS IN NIGERIA'S HEALTH SECTOR AND PROGRAMME PRIORITIES -Adegboyega Kamorudeen	45-55
5. GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA – Osayi, Francis Osadebamwen & Edebiri Stanley	56-73
6. LEADERSHIP UNDER SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED ECONOMIC CRISIS: THE CASE OF THE CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA UNDER SANUSI LAMIDO SANUSI - Omobowale, Ayokunle Olumuyiwa & Falase, Olugbenga Samuel	74-83
7. RURAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION AS A PANACEA FOR NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT -Raji Abdullateef; Muhammed Abubakar Yunusa; Joseph, .A. Oluyemi	84-91
8. THE IMPACT OF MORAL DECADENCE AMONG THE YOUTH IN NIGERIA – Adekeye, Deborah Sade	92-103
9. OIL PALM PROCESSING AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA – Odia, Lucky Osaretin; Omoyibo, Kingsley Ufuoma & Raph I. Adeghe	104-113

10. SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AND UTILIZATION OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES BY PREGNANT WOMEN IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA- Aliyu, Bello Mohammed 114-130
11. MANAGEMENT AND LEGAL PERSPECTIVES OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG WOMEN ACADEMICS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS – Issa AbdulRaheem, & Nimah, Modupe AbdulRaheem 131-146
12. POLITICAL AND VOTING PARTICIPATIONS OF RURAL DWELLERS IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS BETWEEN 1999 AND 2015 IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA – Adeleke, Gbadebo Fatai 147-158
13. WORKERS' PERCEPTION OF STRIKE ACTIONS IN SOME STATE OWNED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA - Osasere Obasuhon & Dokpesi, Augustine Okhobo 159-171
14. SOCIAL CAPITAL DEFICIT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA - Jack, Jackson T.C.B. 172-185

COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN NIGERIA: SOME MATTERS ARISING

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Abstract

It is difficult today to read a newspaper or watch the news without noticing the changes that continually affect the world. The Middle East, Central America, Southern Africa and many other countries demonstrate social transition and transformation in many dimensions. Information revolution has come to transform the structure of many societies, particularly as they free the human mind, open new vistas in knowledge and allow technologies to increasingly take on human qualities. The impact of the development of the information society on a nation's development and social change is now a question of discussion. It is against this background that this paper examined communication revolution and social change in Nigeria. The paper concluded that new communication technologies as tools for Nigeria's socio-economic transformation have been drawn mainly from the experiences and exploits of western industrialized countries. In spite of the little progress that Nigeria and Africa has made in the age of new communication technology, many people still hold the fear that communication revolution has come with a lot of problems.

Keywords: Change; Communication; Revolution; Technology

Introduction

Social change has become a major issue within emergent societies, particularly Nigeria. The institutions and the entire social structure of the third world are in a state of complete modification and transformation. The whole issue of change is important to all developed or developing societies. It remains a major area of interest to those concerned with the future of developing countries. That is why there is a general consensus among researchers that social change is now regarded as normal feature of every society (Adebisi, 2005).

Fundamentally, there are certain characteristics that are peculiar to social change. First, there is a general belief that rapid change occurs in every society. It therefore means that there is no society which is static. Furthermore, it has been noted that changes are neither temporary nor spatially isolated. It means that change occurs in sequenced chain rather than in temporary crisis. Contemporary social change also has dual basis

because it is everywhere and the consequences can be significant everywhere. Contemporary change that is either planned or issued from the secondary consequences or deliberate innovations is much higher than in former times (Makafan-Aliyu, 2009; Mitchell, 1968).

More importantly, the ideal social change relates to some kinds of social, structural and institutional transformations that may occur in society after sometime. Such transformations may occur as a result of certain forces that are generated from within or without, new communication technologies inclusive. Such forces or processes may bring about fundamental changes in the social structure of the society concerned. For example, colonialism brought about fundamental socio-structural change to the societies of the third world, such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Egypt and so forth (Adebisi, 2005).

Broad social trends for example, shifts in population, communication technologies, urbanization, industrialization and bureaucratization can lead to significant social change. Emphasis on new technologies as the basic tool for Africa's socio-economic transformation has been drawn essentially from the social change experiences of Western industrialized countries. For example, during the industrial revolution, many Western countries experienced the constructive force of science and technology and found them to be the vital tools of development. Based on that historical experience, there are now wide spread perceptions that new technologies constitute the engines that propel the socio-economic growth and development of many countries. Against this background, there is a growing pressure on Africa to invest in new technologies, particularly information technologies (Obijiofor, 2008).

However, in spite of Nigeria's socio-economic development in the age of new technologies and the overwhelming optimism associated with new communication technologies, many people still hold the fear that what worked for the West may not necessarily work for Nigeria. Never the less, greater evidence seems to suggest that there is nexus between new communication technologies and social change in many industrialized countries, but in Africa there are many challenges (Kwansah-Aidoo and Obijiofor, 2006).

Nigeria as a country is drawing a lot of inspiration from the experience of new communication technology from the developed countries. The country has come to realize the importance of effective communication for rapid socio-economic development and has put in place measures aimed at harnessing and maximizing their perceived benefits (Obijiofor, 2006). The introduction of the global system for mobile communication (GSM) in Nigeria and the explosion of the digital and online services such as the MP3 players, iPod, Celle phones have really change the social space of Nigeria with many of the benefits not yet tapped (Longe, 2008). It is against this background that this paper sets out to examine the nexus between communication technology and social change in Nigeria with special emphasis on the concomitant benefits derivable from such synergy.

Conceptual Issues

Social change is the alteration in patterns of culture, social structure and social behaviour overtime. No society can successfully prevent change, not even those that try

to do so, although some societies are more resistant to change than others. But the rate, nature and direction of change differ greatly from one society to another (Ian, 1981; Makafan-Aliyu, 2009).

Social change often generates controversy and has various consequences. Preston (2000) posits that social change yields both good and bad consequences. Politically speaking, every social transformation wins support from some people and provokes opposition from others. Some social changes have some passing significance, whereas other transformations have far reaching ramifications. The world can scarcely imagine how the computer-based information revolution will have both positive and negative impacts, opening of new kinds of jobs while compromising personal privacy. Many factors underlie social change. Some changes emerge within a particular society. But in a world lined by sophisticated communication and transportation technology, change in one place often prompts change elsewhere. This therefore account for while social change is a universal phenomenon.

Macionis (1993) submits that social change is sometimes intentional but often unplanned. Industrial societies actively encourage many kinds of change. For instance, scientists seek more efficient forms of energy, advertisers try to convince consumers that a new gadget is a necessity and government officials seek ways to increase equality of opportunity among various categories of people. Nevertheless, the experts rarely envision all the consequences of the changes they propose. Early automobile manufacturers understood that cars would allow people to travel in single day distance(s) that had required weeks or months a century before. However, no one foresaw how profoundly the mobility provided by automobiles would affect families and reshape cities and suburbs, not to mention that resulting in some accidents each year. Social change processes according to Abhuere (2000) have undergone fundamental changes in developing societies. These have been a cause of serious concern; very important are the implications of these changes on the lives of each individual, groups and the entire society. This is to say that the introduction of modern technology into the Africa societies has caused a lot of sweeping changes on a larger segment of the people. Whether or not these changes will bring prosperity remains another issue of debate

Communication

Frank (1999) defined communication as a cyclical process through which a message is received by a sender, encodes and relayed through a particular route or channel to a receiver who then interprets it and finally confirms it through feed back. In essence, communication is a dynamic, continuous and ever changing source to the receiver. Chappel (2000) views communication as a learned skill. To him, most people are born with the physical ability to talk, but they learn to speak well and communicate effectively. The author posits that speaking, listening and ability to understand verbal and non-verbal meanings are skills, people develop in various ways. Communication skills are also learnt through observing other people and modeling behaviour based on what is seen. He concluded that the act of communication is the first of all interaction process. This is also true for the media of communication such as radio, computer, television and newspaper etc. For this form of communication to be effective, there must be some form of interaction between communication and its anonymous or absent audience. Therefore,

the successes of communication media are measured by the feedback from the audience through such action as subscription or purchase of advertised product. These responses, affect future communication. This means that feedback is very important for effective communication. It is feedback that ensures that the sender's message has been received correctly, understood, interpreted and acted upon.

Communication Revolution

Communication revolution is often relatively regarded as rapid transformation that produces change in the structure of information media and technology by changing the traditional societies into industrial societies. It is noted that rapid communication technological development are thoroughly changing the way we seek things, gather information and the level of information flow in the society (Kuechler, 1994).

The contemporary societies have often referred communication revolution to as information age or information society. These terms are important in this era considering the massive explosion of information which has been facilitated by the communication revolution such as telecommunication networks. The increasing development of communication technologies has revolutionalized various socio-political and economic sectors, such as manufacturing, science and technology, school and homes. Communication revolution is the springboard for the massive production of information which is increasing monumentally today (Robertson, 1995).

Communication revolution has changed the world profoundly, irreversibly and problematically at a pace never seen before. It has provided a wealth of extremely powerful tools and methodologies, created entirely new realities and made possible unprecedented phenomena and experiences. It has caused wide range of unique problems and conceptual issues and opened up endless possibilities hitherto not available. Communication revolution has also made possible for fresh approaches and objectivity; it has made it possible for the world to identify new crucial questions and meanings attached to classical problems.

Blondhein (2002) states that people are living in an information age which is specifically characterized by data in the sense that massive amount of data on all aspects of modern life are available and accessible through the advent of communication revolution. One of the major changes as a result of this is the rapid transformation of the contemporary communication environment. The environment is creating considerable interest in the processes and patterns of technological change in the context of socio-economic, scientific and cultural development.

Factors of Social Change

Many scholars have tried for many centuries to develop a single form theory that explains the nature of social change. But no single theory has a chance of explaining the diversity of human social development from hunting and gathering, pastoral to traditional civilizations and finally to the highly complex social system of contemporary time (Giddens and Duneier, 2000). Physical environment, political influences and cultural factors will be the focus of our discussion in this section of the paper.

Physical environment has greatly impacted on industrial capitalism. Capitalism has equally affected production system worldwide and leads to constant expansion of

production for the ever increasing accumulation of wealth. In the traditional systems, levels of production were fairly static as they were geared to habitual and customary needs. Capitalism has brought a lot of innovation into the production world via-technology with the increasing amount of science being drawn into it. The rate of technological innovation in the modern industry is tremendous and impactful. For example, the impact of current communication revolution on industrial production is unprecedented. Over the past years, the power of computers has increased by a factor of ten thousand. A large computer in the past was constructed using thousands of handmade connectors; but today such a device has been integrated into a circuit.

The emergence of science and technology especially communication revolution has been driven by economic factors. This is because science and technology are equally influenced by political and other cultural factors. With social change, scientific and technological developments have helped to create modern forms of communication, such as radio and television. These types of communication devices have produced changes in politics, economic and cultural spheres. The communication exploit in radio, television and other electronic media has also shaped the way people think all over the world.

The emergence of the modern state is one of the factors that have speed up social change. This has greatly enhanced the mechanism of government. Government has greatly played greater role in the lives of people in the contemporary world than it was in the traditional societies.

Many changes in the world particularly in the political sphere have been motivated by economic transformation. For instance; the internet provides consumers with a valuable tool for information, and at the same time empowering them with knowledge, while access to online market increases competition and variety of choices. The communication technology through the internets speeds up the globalization process by reducing physical barriers. Many businesses are able to reduce travel cost and associated expenses as online communication has improved. The effects of the economic downturn the world experienced in 2008/2009 was mitigated by the availability of the online business that is booming all over the world today.

Cultural factors affecting processes of social change in modern times have been the development of science and the secularization of thought and ideas. These patterns of life have contributed to the critical and innovative character of the modern world. It is no longer assumed that customs or habits are acceptable just because they have the authority of the age long tradition but only if they are relevant. Therefore, the new ways of life require rational basis.

Furthermore, the world thinking ability has changed; the content of ideas has also changed. Self-betterment, freedom, equality and democratic participation are largely creations of the contemporary world. Such ideals have served to mobilize processes of social and political change, including revolutions both in thought and practice. These ideas cannot be field to tradition, but rather suggest the constant revision of ways of life in the pursuit of human betterment. These ideals although initially were developed in the western world, today such ideals are becoming genuinely universal in their application, there by promoting tremendous change in most regions of the world including Africa and Nigeria (Giddens and Duneier, 2002; Boston Consulting Group, 2010).

Theoretical Anchorage

The central concern of structural-functionalism is a continuation of the Durkheimian task of explaining the stability and internal cohesion of societies that are necessary to ensure their continued existence over time. Structural functionalism asserts that the society is made up of parts and these parts contribute positively or functionally to the operation and functioning of the system as a whole. Functionalism attempts to explain the relationship of different parts of the system to each other, and to the whole. Many scholars in this school of thought argue that social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system, and that a change in one institution will engineer a change in other institutions (see Parsons, 1951; Turner, 1991). For instance, changes in communication network have radically impacted on the social system of other institutions. The internet in Nigeria and elsewhere for example motivated new forms of social interaction, activities, and events, through its basic features such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Yahoo messenger etc.

One of the brickbats leveled against structural-functionalism is that it sees change as orderly and evolutionary, rather than revolutionary or with dramatic structural breaks. Another shortcoming of structural functionalism is that it fails to account for the sources of social change (see Cole, 1966). Despite these criticisms, the theory is still useful for explaining the nexus between communication revolution and social change in Nigeria. This is because communication revolution has altered greatly our economic, political, social and cultural institutions.

Communication Revolution and Social Change in Nigeria: An Overview

Before we examine the nexus between communication revolution and social change in Nigeria, it is apposite to account for the Nigeria's experience of the communication revolution. The Nigeria's communication experience can be traced to the introduction of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) into the country in 2001. Prior to the introduction of GSM in Nigeria, the teledensity (fixed and mobile lines) in Nigeria was 1 line to 440 persons in 1985 and 1 line for every 263 persons in 1997. With the introduction of GSM, the teledensity jumped to 1 to 18 in 2004 (Akwani, 2005).

According to Open Net Initiative (n.d.) the country has experienced one of the most dramatic increases in cell phone ownership than any country in the world, jumping from 13,000 subscribers in 1995 to over 9 million in 2004. In the same period the number of internet users grew from under 10,000 to 1.7 million. Strong growth has continued, the number of internet users in Nigeria in December 2006 and January 2007 were 32,322,202 and 33,603,761 respectively. The January, 2015 monthly subscriber data by the Nigerian Communication Commission reveal that the total active lines (mobile GSM, mobile CDMA, fixed wireless) is 140,822,483 with 100.59 teledensity (NCC, 2015). Thus, we can deduce that virtually all Nigerians have an active phone lines. The influx of GSM into the country according to the scholar have increased the activities and promoted competition in the industry, resulting in exponential growth in the number of telephone lines. Longe (2008) also asserts that it changed the social space of Nigeria and strongly connecting Nigeria with the global village.

There is a general believe that there is a positive relationship between communication revolution and socio-economic development of many industrialized countries (Obijiofor, 2008). Many African governments, Nigeria inclusive have come to realize the importance of effective communication for rapid socio-economic development and are proceeding to put in place measures aimed at harnessing and maximizing their perceived benefits (Kwansah-Aidoo and Obijiofor, 2006). For instance, Uganda's National information and Communication Technology Policy Framework recognizes that ICTs have a big role to play in powering national development (Mwesige, 2004). In a similar manner, Ghana announced in the Mid-1990s a policy to abolish tariffs imposed on imported computers, Ghana's ICT Policy was to facilitate development through ICT.

The measures by Nigeria have made communication to successfully aid the following sectors of the Nigerian economy: the Industrial/Manufacturing, Education, Transportation, Tourism, Health, Banking, Commerce, Agriculture, Government Services, Defence, Sports, and Rural Development (Posu, 2006). The communication revolution is well embraced by all the institutions and every nook and cranny of the country. It has altered the belief system, the culture, economic institution, the political institution, the health, social and virtually all institutions and structures of the country. It has led to the establishment of new institutions and modifications of the previous institutions. It has changed the way we greet, eat, dance, sing, dress, do business, interact with people, think etc. Hence, there is no gainsaying that the communication revolution has changed the country's *modus operandi*.

It is imperative to note that the communication revolution is like a coin with two sides. It also has its own side effects. Hence, we examined the shortcomings of communication revolution in the below section.

Problems of Communication Revolution and Social Change

Many studies carried out on the effects of communication revolution on social change identified behavioural and institutional modifications as most pressing of the effects. The conundrum of communication revolution can be explained within the context of "technophobes" which sees ICT inimical to development. ICTs may destroy more jobs than they create; the gap between the rich and the poor may widen (Van Dijk, 1999). Shields (1996) states that the communication revolution has opened the doors of the world to anti-social behaviour, in ways that would never have previously been imagine. Computer system, Internet and television system offer some new and highly sophisticated opportunity for law-breaking. In view of the growing dependence of social and economic activities on communication system in the world at large, damage arising from communication technology such as high-tech crime can easily spread to all parts of the world. This menace is a serious problem in Nigeria today. The Nigerian government has however been concerned about this problem. The borderless nature of communication media such as internet, mobile phone and television system has caused law enforcement agents to focus more on this problem and how it can be resolved. Thus, communication revolution has led to the establishment of new institutions and policies in Nigeria such as Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), the mobile phone registration exercise and issuances of licenses to private media organizations are efforts to stem the proliferation of the problems emanating from the communication revolution.

Communication Revolution and Social Change in Nigeria: Some Matters Arising

Furthermore, communication revolution has helped in the promotion of militancy, especially with the emergence of the phenomenon different religious sects. These different religious sects have adopted various communication technologies to spread their violent ideology. The manner and approach these sects have adopted in their pursuit of their ideology depicts a lot about the social change which the country is experiencing.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed some important issues about communication revolution and social change in Nigeria. Social change has been identified as a vital engine in the Nigerian society, as is an essential factor for the transformation in the social system. The impact of social change is evident in the society. From the production and manufacturing sector, energy and power generation to communication and information technology, the impact of social change is clearly demonstrated. Social change with communication revolution has helped to reduce poverty, risks associated with travelling, rural-urban migration, boost food production, enhance international competitiveness and build social capability. On the other hand, social change has led to loss of some jobs and complicates behavioural problems in the society (Makanfan-Aliyu, 2009).

All section of the society particularly, the parents, communication management experts, government and non-governmental organizations can use the media and other communication technologies to enhance genuine social change through the "inculcation" of good ideas, values and norms of the society into the general citizenry.

Finally, it is clear that there is a positive relationship between communication revolution and socio-economic development in the western industrialized societies. But in Nigeria, there are still obstacles hindering the uptake of new communication technologies. For Nigeria to adequately maximize the advantages of new communication technologies for socio-economic development, government must move fast to address the myriads of institutional social, economic and political barriers impeding access to and diffusion of the new technologies.

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