Revolutionizing Teaching and Learning through the Social Media in Nigeria

Amannah, Peace Ireju, Ph.D
Department of Mass Communication
Rivers State University
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt
Rivers State, Nigeria
Email: peaceizidor@yahoo.com
Phone: +2348035441703

Adeyeye, Josephine Osatohanmwem
Department of Mass Communication
Benson Idahosa University, Benin,
Edo State, Nigeria
Email: jenobakhare@biu.edu.ng

Abstract

The pervasive status of the social media has made it a formidable factor in human endeavour. This work sought to exhaustively examine the impact of this biggest platform for communication, with a view to seeing what its usage could portend for the educational system in Nigeria. With the work anchored on the Social Categories and Technological Determinism Theories, it observed that while it is fast becoming an order in much developed world, the trend is yet to be fully embraced in our education system. The paper had concluded that the social media have the capacity to revolutionize teaching and learning given their impact in places that have adopted them. It however recommended that frantic efforts must be made to check against hijacking the social media for cheating, which could spell doom for our education.

Introduction

Virtually everything is in a state of flux. No phenomenon remains in its state form. They over time, undergo certain degree of metamorphosis. While the various stages of change birth new horizons to the phenomena, leaving some original identity others are outrightly supplanted.

Life and human existence has in itself experienced series of evolutions – leaving us at the point we find ourselves. Yet there is no end in sight to this ever evolving world.

Over the decades societies and disciplines have existed on some order; strongly held beliefs, notions, ideas and concepts. These beliefs system are such that are deeply rooted and of course, strong determinants of human relationship and interaction – a deviation from these is not only seen as an aberration but an anomaly. It is this fear of altering the status quo that makes many resign to the realm of spiral of silence. At this stage such society becomes allergic and intolerant to change. But this has a far reaching implication. The implication is to the extent that those who resist change soon find themselves eclipsed.

The change concept implies that the right approaches are applied for any individual, group or organization that would bring about improvement. While all changes do not lead to improvement, all improvement requires change. The ability to develop, test and implement changes is essential for any individual, group or organization that wants to continuously improve.

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement explains that a change concept is a general notion or approach to change that has been found to be useful in developing specific ideas for changes that lead to improvement (see, http://www/hi.org/resources/pages/changes). It is this approach to change that is known as a paradigm shift. There is always a point when some disciplines experience revolutions. At this point, the discipline enters a period of crisis characterized by a "proliferation of compelling articulation, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals (Martins, 2008, p. 40).

In the end, the crisis is resolved by a revolutionary change in world view in which the now-deficient paradigm is replaced by a newer one. This is the paradigm shift of modern parlance and after it has happened, the scientific field returns to normal science based on the new framework. As so it goes on.

Martins, again observed that revolutionary science, often questions the paradigm itself originally, it is believed that a paradigm would make a sudden leap from one to the next, called a shift; the new paradigm could not be built upon the foundations of the old.

It is the possibilities of this paradigm shift in teaching and learning in this era of the social media that forms the fulcrum of this discourse.

Social Media: A Social Reality

It is an incontrovertible fact that the social media are no less a reality. Just like the advent of radio, television and several other inventions, this technology has come with a sweeping impact on virtually all strata of human endeavour. Suffice it to say that its existence, impact, reach and accessibility is gradually reach and accessibility is gradually dwarfing the conventional media of mass communication; like the radio, television, newspaper, magazines etc.

A good starting point in this discourse will be to really examine what social media as a term means: Wikipedia comes handy in this regard. It defines social media as a web and mobile based technology that supports interactive dialogue and introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals. In essence, users generate and share all types of contents within their established networks. A rather technical definition was made by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) cited in Sheedy (2011) saying the social media is "a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and

technological foundations of web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p.60).

Users use mobile and web-based technologies to create interactive platforms where individuals and groups share, co-create and modify user generated content from which they all benefit. They (social media) belong to a new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends and share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the worldwide web (Nwafor, Odoemelam, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo and Nweze, 2013, p. 70).

Similarly, social media include facebook, twitter, blackberry messenger, whatsapp, skpe, 2go, Badro, Linkedln, YouTube, Flickr and Tumbler. Of these, facebook twitter and Youtube are among the most pervasive.

Imperatively, the social media leverages on reach, frequency usability and immediacy, offering more opportunities than the conventional media. The case of the unequalled reach (coverage or breadth of circulation) of the social media, which obviously stands as one of its sterling selling points, need not be over emphasized. As the day goes by internet users spend more time with social media sites than any other types of site, thereby making it increasingly pervasive. To this end, social media seem to have irreversible growth both in terms of the number of their members (users) and of their effects or society. Social media have become the highest nativity on the internet (Shea, 2010, cited in Acholonu, 2013, p. 134). Moreso, the rapid growth of social media activities that has been observed in the last three years is indicative of its entry into main stream culture and its integration into daily lives of many, Acholonu, added.

Consequently, Cooper (2013) would lend his voice to this pervasive status of the social media when he averred that "… the social media has become the biggest platform for communication throughout the world" (p. 1).

Nigeria, like most of the world, is not left out in this social media frenzy. In fact with some 124 million active simcards in Nigeria and a sizeable community of online users, the social media have exploded in Nigeria with an increasing focus on political matters (Adeagbo, 2013, July 23).

Access to the social media has continued to increase with more persons having access to GSM in Nigeria. In a report on www.gsmweb.cz, which was published in the Punch of 8th April 2014, Nigerians on the internet (and mainly the social media sites) have hit a record number of 63 million. Accordingly, access to the internet through the Global Systems for Mobile Communications networks has risen by 96.3 percent in the last one year in Nigeria. The latest data provided by the Nigerian communication Commission showed a current figure of 63.47 million recorded for February 2014. This according to the report is against the 32.34 million recorded for same period in 2013.

Continuing the report observed that, statistics released by market research and statistics specialists, digitXplus, the digital unit of Media Reach OMD Nigeria, showed that the country recorded a 200 percent growth on internet users between 2009 and 2013. The report also indicated that Nigeria, which tied at 55 million internet users with the United Kingdom in 2012, took 14 percent leap garnering about 62.4 million internet users above the UK with a paltry increase of just two million (57 million) users in 2013.

All these are not to get us excited, but strong signs that the time is rife to embrace the internet, nay, social media thereby making the most of it –especially in our educational sector. If the

world has gone virtual, as there is virtually no activity you think of that does not have its presence in the internet, then it is time we looked at this direction. With the world swallowing up this new means of communication, and with the social media usage progressively continuing to skyrocket, this new form of technology opens up a new channel of tightly woven interconnectivity and interactivity with individuals for the first time, forever changing the way the world population interacts, communicates, spreads its messages and ultimately forms relationships (Copper, 2013, p.2).

Theoretical Framework

The theories selected for this work are the Social Categories and Technological Determinism (Theories).

Social Categories Theory

The theory argues that individuals within broad subgroups (such as age classes, sex, social or educational class) react similarly to the mass media (Kent, 2007, p.46). Accordingly media messages are received and interpreted selectively. Selectivity is influenced by the location of the individual in the differentiated social structure. The social structure is composed of numerous categories of people, defined by such picture as sex, age, income, education and occupation (Pitts, 2010). Moreso, patterns of media attention and response are shaped by the pictures that define these categories, making response to mass communication somewhat similar in each. We can therefore deduce that communication is most likely to be effective among people of same group, than non-group members.

Technological Determinism Theory

This theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. The focal point of the theory is to buttress the impact of technological advancements on societies. McLuhan (1962, p. 13) cited in Baran and Davies, (2002) maintained communication that "changes in technology inevitably produce profound changes in both culture and social order" (p. 273). This statement is profound; especially when we consider the plethora of impact technological advancements has had on our everyday lives. Similar Obayi (2013) would corroborate this, when he averred that "invention of new technology can alter the way society responds to events or what they use to do in an old way" (p. 102).

The choice of these theories is apt to the extent that there tend to be some psychological inter-play between teachers and students who use the social media. By using the social media, the theory argues that they are technologically on the same page. And so, this makes for easy and effective communication as it were. Of course social media users have means of communicating through the social media platforms like Facebook, twitter, BBM Whatsapp among others.

Moreso, the world is fast embracing the various opportunities availed them by rapid technological advancements. To this end, if technology has been proven to save man hour, breach the impediments of space and of course led to significant improvement in virtually all parts of human endeavour, then embracing it fully in the educational sector can only be the most appropriate thing to do. This will drastically revolutionize teaching and learning.

Use of Social Media in Education: A Vista of Opportunities

It is not in doubt that the impact of the internet has continued to be palpable. Interestingly, this has created a cyberspace, where virtual interaction and acquiring of knowledge have

become possible from the comfort of the house; people can talk to and interact with the world. We can send e-mail, chat, share fun and bad moments through photos we can download music and movies, educational material, research documents, and learn online among others.

The internet, nay, social media with its associates and rivals offer to the explorer a new future. Interestingly, I do not need to travel thousands of miles to the Cambridge University in the United Kingdom to access research material. The internet has made this possible. Cyberspace for the student researcher is simply entered and left for purposes of gathering or exchanging data with scholars and student colleagues in distant parts within seconds. Again students of media communication, concerned as they are, for most of their work with developments and issues that are recent and increasingly global in significance, can use the internet via social media to retrieve latest and relevant information .With the social media feedback becomes possible, and enrichment through interactivity becomes a likely bonus (Nsereka, 2013,p.14).

The social media platforms have advanced the course of educational interaction. With the facebook, twitter 2go, BBM YouTube, Linkedln, Badoo, Instagram etc students and lecturers now have the opportunity to engage in rational discourse. It has made it possible for users to persuade, sensitize, lecture, teach, hold conferences with, counsel and entertain our myriads of cyber members, acquaintances and friends (Nsereka, 2013, p.15).

Suffice it to say that the internet and social media has made education free. And in this era, there are a number of educational materials available on YouTube. In April 2006, for instance, UC Berkeley, announced its plan to complete academic courses on Apple's iTunes U, beginning what is now one of the biggest collections of recorded classroom lectures in the world. A year after the school launched UC Berkeley on YouTube. According to Benjamin Hubbard the Manager of webcast at UC Berkeley, the school has had well over 120 million downloads since first sharing videos online, which they began doing in 2001. This testimonial goes a long way in stressing the growing accessibility of educational materials through the social media.

More schools are increasing embracing this new frontier in education. The *Insider* (2011, p.14) reported that both Yale and Stanford have followed suit, and even Harvard has jumped on board. For instance, the reports that open Yale, features free and open access to a selection of introductory courses taught by distinguished teachers and scholars. Outside of the U.S, some of the most selective universities in India have created a vast body of online content in order to reach more of the country's exploding student populations. It reports that at Stanford, you can freely "attend" the Stanford Mini Med school featured 3 years long series of courses by more than thirty distinguished faculty scientists and physicians. This is very possible and trendy-one wonders how many Nigerian universities that have embraced e-learning. Quite a few we must admit.

Conversely, Sahakov (2013, p.8) observed that the use of technology in education is a somewhat problematic premise because it has generated a heated debate on whether it helps or hinders learning. "While we will analyze that when we get to the challenges, it is imperative to further stress that the integration of technology in schools has changed today's education and also the way teachers and students use their classrooms.

Let us understand further that a couple of years back teachers used chalk boards, (even in our universities they still do), then progressed to white boards and now smart boards. Smart boards are advanced boards which allow teachers teach and share information with students in a multiplicity of ways. While it is seemingly alien to use on a regular basic, audio-visual capabilities from PowerPoint presentation and other animation software to present

information in an interactive manner as it is done in developed countries, the social media platforms provide those of us in developing countries the opportunities to achieve considerable results in teaching and learning. How? Lecturers and students can use the social media platforms to discuss educational issues. In fact, lecturers can begin to discuss students' materials with them on facebook chat, 2go BBM, Skype, YouTube etc.

Similarly, Priego (2011,p.9) in his article "How Twitter will revolutionize academic research and teaching" observed that granted that social media is becoming increasingly important in teaching and research work, tutors must remember, it is a conversation not a lecture. So by this, we understand that lecturers and students can begin to create chat forums to discuss issues of academic importance. Unfortunately this trend has not been fully embraced by most academics. Priego, noted that "academic marvel (or react with rejection) at the rapid changes in the production and dissemination of scholarly work and interaction between and those "outside" academic institutions". Thousand of scholars and higher education institutions are participating in social media (such as twitter, facebook, 2go, BBM etc.) as an important aspect of their research and teaching work. However, there is still considerable resistance to embracing social media tools for educational purpose.

Mobile phones and tablets enable the user in producing content, and to disseminate it online. The microblogging platform of twitter is purposefully designed to exchange information and to facilitate reciprocal communication (Priego, 2011, p.10). With the social media, documents can be produced (a thesis, an article, a book) and then sent to someone else to review it, edit it, publish it, distribute it.

Empirically, a number of academics are gradually embracing this trend in Nigeria. Recently the *Guardian Newspaper* of Sunday 9 February 2014 had an interview with Dr. Ifeoma Theresa Amobi, a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Nigeria. She had advocated that social media be integrated into the journalism courses and academics. Her argument is that since majority of Nigerian students are found on social media, it is important to prepare them for as a fast-changing industry, by using the social media as a pedagogical tool. The challenge for the Nigerian scholars is the extent to which they are relevant in the face of a rapidly changing technological environment.

Today's generation of students, often referred to as "digital natives" or "millennial" are very much at home with social media. Students could be animated at the sight of their lecturers using the same media platform with them.

Dr. Amobi maintained a word press blog where she posts course outlines. This blog is linked to all other social media platforms including facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Trumblr and YouTube, such that any message published on it is automatically posted to the others. Expectedly students offering her courses are expected to download the relevant course outlines through any of the social media platforms at the beginning of the semester. They are also expected to access their assignments through the same platforms, Dr. Amobi noted.

Continuing, Dr. Amobi explained that, to explore social media and journalism all students are assigned to groups to cover various major campus- wide events, using a collection of mobile apps, SmartPhones, ipads or digital cameras. The original photos are uploaded to Google's Picasa, audio interviews, uploaded from the field using Audioboo, and 20 "tweets" posted to the class blog during four hours of any line event. Videos are uploaded to the class YouTube account. One cannot agree any lees that this is the practical expression of this work.

Social Media and Education: Challenges for Nigeria

Although we have mentioned in passing a few challenges militating against the use of the social media in education. It is necessary that we further identity some other challenges to this technology. Sahakov (2013, p.8) discussed some of the challenges of using the social media in our education system. They are:

Distractions: The positive effects of technology such as communication, entertainment and ability to make life more manageable can turn out to be a hindrance to learning in the classroom. Various kinds of entertainment from mobile devices such as playing games, texting, and surfing the net distract students in the classroom. But then, how many students will be gratified, using their phones mainly for academic purposes?

Plagiarism/Cheating: With the social media, students can now make good grades effortlessly as they can now easily search for solutions for any kind of problems they come across in various search engines. For instance, students in an examination can forward questions via chatting to someone else and the possible answers could be provided. Again, the enormous materials available on net have made it easy for students to plagiarize. The implication of this is far reaching in the educational circle.

Lecturer – Students' perceived reluctance to use social media: It is not in doubt that the rate of usage of the social media among lecturers and students for academic purpose in Nigeria is low. Suffice it to say that the trend is rather novel and acceptance level is still at its ebb. In some cases lecturers could see it as a waste of quality time chatting with students (even on academic issues) when they have other pressing demands.

Impostors/fraud: There is also the fear of impostors and fraudulent persons hacking into the accounts of social media users thereby posting obscene and incriminating materials. There have been several cases where individuals are impersonated by someone else with the core aim of defrauding unsuspecting persons. Since face-to-face conversation is impeded, some lecturers or students might be reluctant to divulge sensitive information. (I have made some emphasis in this citation.)

Conclusion

It is an incontrovertible fact that the social media has the capacity to revolutionize teaching and learning in Nigeria. However, it remains worrisome, the fact that this very important medium of communication has not been adequately harnessed for the development of our educational system.

Moreso, the use of the social media is a trend that is fast sweeping the entire world educational space, with many schools adopting it. Frantic efforts must be made to adopt it in Nigeria to be able to keep pace with the times.

Recommendations

1. While we advocate the use of the social media in education, efforts must be made to ensure that it is not hijacked as a tool for cheating.

2. The use of social media for teaching and learning should be included in our educational curriculum. This will provide students and lecturers the opportunity to understand its usefulness in developing our education system.

3. Provision should be made for "virtual classes" to enable students properly appreciate and access the internet.

4. More schools should develop on-line courses for persons who cannot afford formal education. This they could do by downloading relevant materials and making them accessible to the public. It could serve as one of their corporate social responsibilities.

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