

# ITC AND MASS COMMUNICATION

## **Globalisation and Information Communication Technologies: Repositioning Nigeria's Image and Reputation Towards Greater Acceptability**

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### **Abstract**

Currently, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have set no limits to which whirlwind messages may flow unhindered universally. This trend has shocked many nations, particularly Nigeria, where the ills of nationhood are no longer hidden, but exposed globally. Nigeria is currently regarded universally as a failed nation. This essay considers and recommends very urgent steps for the effective re-positioning of Nigeria in the world scheme of things for popular and greater universal acceptability. This could be done, using globalisation and Information Communication Technologies to represent Nigeria's international image and reputation from a fresh national orientation and locally fronted perspective.

The essay introduces related problems in questioning; defining or explaining associated concepts used in the study. It touches on the effects of globalisation and Information Communication Technologies on Nigeria now and in the future. It initially visualizes the possibility of repositioning Nigeria's image and reputation internally and then proffers coherent achievable remedies that may perhaps ameliorate the current sordid situation. If implemented faithfully, these solutions may serve to resolve the current negative picture of Nigeria globally.

### **Introduction**

Recently, modern innovation concepts, especially in information dissemination, have redefined the world. These tend to exert compelling

influence on people and nations. The areas of Globalisation, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Development have benefited the most. Although development as a concept, is a pivot on which every socio-political, economic and cultural activities revolve, these concepts appear to belong to an unruly marriage contracted amidst high suspicion. Notably, globalisation and ICTs are foreign, when considered along the belief systems of Third World or developing countries. This is because these concepts have come faster than expected. They are now virtually everywhere. Premium can no longer be laid on privacy as life's essential factor. The speed of information flow tends to have no limited boundaries as information from satellite monitors emit from anywhere, at any time and before one turns around, such information is everywhere. How long for instance, did it take satellite monitors to emit and relay signals on the Asian Tsunami catastrophe of 2005?

When Marshall McLuhan first theorized on the world becoming a "global village" shortly after the end of the cold wars of the East and West blocs, it was not conceived that globalisation would take over the reins as the world's fastest intruder. As globalisation becomes a regular cover, ICTs have nothing to hide in showcasing the speed of information communication through Internet information super-highways.

While the world clamours for giant strides in developmental circles, no standard formulae have been arrived at to which every world nation must conform to, while undertaking developmental initiatives. Moreover, not all nations can hold on to the claims that economic and sustainable resources are equitably distributed.

Therefore, what perhaps may be the developmental formula of a nation may not meet even the minimum criteria of globalisation and ICTs. Under such instances, the rating of developmental levels of one nation falls short of those of other nations. Third World or developing nations are placed far behind under the development parameters of Europe and America. When this happens, information communication through globalisation and ICTs clearly becomes predetermined. The disparities and distortions about Africa, which are often noticed as contents of messages flow, are regularly cases in point.

Nigeria, for example, is not rich enough to afford ICTs to the level of controlling foreign information and communication globally about her domestic operations. Through global media outlets, Nwosu (2001), cites the well-known computer wizard Bill Gates as saying:

...that computers and information technology should not be a priority in the developing countries because these will not put food on the tables of the poor and hungry masses or teeming populations in these countries...

The issue therefore is whether Nigeria is poor or rich, whether it can cope with globalisation or not and whether the scope and volume of necessary ICTs are wide and high. Nigeria is an inexorable victim of the tides and concepts of discussion in developing and Third World contexts. Therefore, Nigeria's image and her ills of nationhood can no longer be hidden locally and abroad. Today, this country's image is that of "...a failed nation". Repositioning Nigeria in terms of reputation is a clear option in the world scheme of things since this would foster greater global acceptability and popularity. Such repositioning should be tailored to suit similar channels encompassing globalisation and ICTs worldwide. An instance is the fresh image orientation domestically fronted by the Federal Government that is currently in operation – the anti-corruption crusade.

### **Definitions and explanation of concepts**

A number of concepts used in this work are explained to ease understanding and direction with regards to their applications. These are discussed below.

#### *Globalisation*

Jatau (2002), argues that globalisation is, "...an inevitable process which has rendered the boundaries of nation states useless through the introduction of the information super-highway". In addition, Giddens (1990:64), defined globalisation as, "The intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.". Also, Sambo (2001), while dealing with reputation management in Nigeria, linked globalisation and defined it as follows:

*... the shrinking of the world electronically and the communalization of interests among nations socio-economically... the removal of hindrances to access to national economies, or in the opening up of access to the international market place of ideas, information, goods etc.*

Globalisation as defined above helped to formulate the focus of this study.

#### *Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)*

ICTs are available data storage, retrieval and transmission devices or know-how's, for conveying information and signals in their meaningful or usable states and relaying them to those who use these for policy action and decision-making. Scholars argue that ICTs involve transmission devices for the reception of knowledge and intelligence. Information on its own, notifies, stimulates, surprises and reduces uncertainties. Information creates

energy within the recipients, modifies or changes behaviours and attitudes among audiences greatly. When communication technologies transmit information, more often, an amalgam of data, images, texts, documents, voice and several other values are integrated in the ICTs' hard or soft ware systems. According to Sambo (2001), these systems are scientific and capable of obtaining, packaging and relaying signals that are ridden with feedback mechanisms. They are thus referred to as information communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs may perhaps embody the following vocabulary in focus:

a) OAS (Office Automation System):

This information communication technological device supports coordination and the communication activities of data workers who primarily use, manipulate or disseminate information. Associated technological accessories of the system can deal with documents through word processing, desktop publishing, electronic mail communication, digital filling, voice mailing and video conferencing.

b) MIS (Management Information Systems):

These are reports - oriented and may have on - line access to an organization's current performance and historical data.

c) DSS (Decision Support Systems):

These have been designed to aid or enhance management decisions, especially when the decisions are unique, rapidly changing and not specified easily in advance.

d) ESS (Executive Support Systems):

Information from diverse internal and external sources is pooled and presented in an easy-to-use graphic order.

e) The Internet

The Internet is perhaps most popular in air and space service. Here, there exist services including e-mail, Usenet newspapers, telnet, chatting, gophers, Archie, WAIS, FTP and the World Wide Web (www).

f) Intranets:

Intranets are noted networks that based on the World Wide Web technology. These are privately used.

g). Extranets:

Extranets abound, but are organization - oriented and directed.

#### h) Electronic-Commerce:

We further have the enterprise networking that enhances Electronic commerce (e-commerce) transactions. Here, organizations can build a business model through which they are linked directly to their desired publics and to other parts of their organizations using WANs, VANs and the Internet. Electronic commerce is the process of doing business electronically. It involves the automation of diverse business-to-business transactions.

#### *Development*

This concept is universal in orientation. Its meanings are multi-faceted and diverse. The yardstick or measuring rod for determining its status varies according to different individual judgements, organizations' qualifications, quantifications and the level of nationhood by modern countries. This study's theme hinges on national development. Therefore the concept of development will assume an explanation more integrally from the basis of "national development," with defined territories from grassroots to national parlances.

According to Beltran (1974:11 - 27),

National development is a directed and widely participatory process of deep and accelerated socio-political change geared towards producing substantial changes in the economy, the technology, the ecology and the overall culture of a country, so that the moral and material advancement of the majority of its population can be obtained within conditions of generalized equality, dignity, justice and liberty

Furthermore, additional approaches aimed at quantifying meanings for "national development" exist. Simon (1996) dwelt on "economic approach" in analysing "national development". He opined that the economic approach is predicted on using the Gross National Product (GNP) as the development index of any nation or region. According to him, in promoting economic development, "... *everything else will somehow follow or less spontaneously*"

The assumption of GNP is on national performance. It holds that if the index improves, every individual and even region has developed or found improvement in all spheres of their lives.

National development can be seen from the perspective of the modernization approach. This approach sees development as a process whereby things that are less modern, must be replaced with new statuses that are modern and current. For example, boreholes are replacing rural water sources from the stream; modern housing schemes are replacing

defunct Urban County Council stuff of the colonial era; pit toilets of the early 60's and 70's are giving way to modern flush toilet systems; simple literacy is disappearing, for computer literacy to take over. According to Hilling (1996):

Of more importance to us is also the fact that standards of developed countries are used to determine what is modern. Developing countries through this approach are perpetually subjected to colonialism, dependency and capitalism.

According to deliberation by the foregoing schools of thoughts, these define national development.

### *Nigeria's Image and Reputation*

The issue about Nigeria as a nation and her image and reputation both domestically and overseas cannot be overemphasized. The country is a problem even to her citizens when judging it from the position of nationhood. Mogu (2004) and Sambo (2001), agree with a single definition as regards Nigeria and her image or reputation. They state as follows, "...the reputation or image of a nation or country is the impression or opinion held by other nations, organizations, people or persons about that nation or country."

Currently, the image of Nigeria and Nigerians is far from good both locally and internationally. This is amplified from her national position as listless and with bad human rights records – particularly the lack of respect for individuals rights to life, the failed general elections of 2003, the illicit trade deals in oil bunkering, the advanced fee fraud or 419 syndrome, among others. The image of the nation is blemished and the expected sound reputation is not there.

The Independent Newspaper of Sunday, May 29, 2005 carried a story about the United States security report branding "Nigeria as a failed nation". The matter did not end there, but also drew public attention to predicted consequences that the country might grapple with. This was within the foreign circles. Domestically, even with the new debt relief formula put forward by the G8 on behalf of the Paris club, the economy is still recording a very slow pace of visible development. The nation's currency is still in the mud and has been there for a very long time without being appreciated in political circles, the controversial National Delegates Conference has flopped without seeing the required light of day. Corruption is changing in semblance or only being camouflaged, but not depreciating. Yet, the information filters of ICTs and globalisation are not relenting in their signals relay on the emerging ills of nationhood in Nigeria.

## **Effects of globalisation and ICTs on Nigeria now and in future**

It is appropriate to recall the gathering of world leaders and delegates – among them, Nigerians (about 65,000 human beings) in Johannesburg, South Africa between August and September 2002. This event was the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* and the theme was: “a sustainable future for all world member nations”. Now, if one may ask, what are the indices or indicators of sustainable development? It is the desire of this work to put aside all issues on available resources control, external borrowing, and gross national production or ratings of gross domestic production. Foreign debt relief, rescheduling or cancellation will not essentially facilitate sustainable development. There has to be nurtured among Nigerians far and wide, a national patriotic ethos or consciousnesses. The root cause of all our ills is national indiscipline, entrenched in the mentality of the affluent aristocratic class comprising the ruling junta of our perplexing democracy and the business class with their multinational accomplices. This boils down to the average person on the street who is daily searching for bread and water. Everyone’s psyche in Nigeria should be overhauled in order for a new and better Nigeria to emerge. Globalisation has narrowed the world to a mere unit or microcosm of analysis. It does not take long for the world to know what a particular nation is doing and possibly recommend sanctions against it. With ICTS – by air, land and sea, no one has a place to hide.

Why would Nigeria, faced with the controls and pressures of globalisation and ICTs, tarry for so long at the precipice of disaster with the watchful eyes of the world and still seek to hide in that thin and flawed cover to advocate a sustainable livelihood for all? The American security report mentioned advocates secession as a possible outcome of the failure of the Delegated National Conference and this could be a fuelling factor for Nigeria’s doom. The Youths’ restiveness, particularly among the oil rich Niger-Delta Region, is a pointer to an uncertain future. Will it be reasonable to say that those involved in the struggle are now gainfully employed? Apart from the youths’ restiveness, is the resource control in Nigeria similar to what obtains in Oklahoma, USA where the state allows only a fraction of its oil wealth to the American Central Government? Will the Niger-Delta people relent in their fight for their sustaining resource? National unemployment in Nigeria begins with university graduates. Is this not an aberration? The answers to these questions lie with a sincere reorientation of our consciousness and honest implementation of programmes at all levels of governance in Nigeria.

Globalisation and ICTs will not welcome these ineptitudes as indices for positive development during information communication. Globalisation and ICTs are more or less permanent phenomena in today’s world. Their

roles are developing progressively based on related 'help' from the developed world, no matter which nation has such information. Nigeria will not be free from the associated web-net of the ICTs coverage. ICTs will not for instance, fail to report through the watchful eyes of the United Nations (UN), the current decadent state of Nigeria's university education, the general falling standards of education in the lower cadres of the same society and the effect of enormous brain-drain afflicting Nigeria. When ICTs do this reportage, the impact is negative on Nigeria's domestic issues and inimical to the country's image and reputation. Currently, plans are rife to conduct a new census for Nigeria. Based on the experiences of the past head - counts, this could again be for record purposes and not as a guiding index for national development. Population figures are indices for proper planning and national development. In Nigeria, population figures are more or less political figures and these are fraudulently applied. From independence till date, not one development plan had succeeded as planned.

Changes are always reflecting dislocations or modifications or rolling plans. Planning for primary education in Nigeria, for instance, under the Third National Development Plan could not work in spite of the huge budgetary allocations involving the years under the rolling plan. Today, Nigeria's budget regime still remains in the doldrums. The Education Ministry must struggle for its share of the national budget at the National Assembly. Painfully, but of great interest, the first ministry to be publicly charged with corruption and pruned of its key officials, including the honourable minister, is that of the education. The curse is national indiscipline. ICTs are doing their jobs and the globe is pressing hard on Nigeria and in the process, faulting her image and reputation. The CNN and BBC media are at the forefront of this.

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its periodic reports about Nigeria has not failed to provide details about infant mortality. According to it, one, out of every ten children in Nigeria, will not survive malaria, polio or other killer diseases. Rural poverty is very alarming and the scourge of AIDS in the country now exceeds five million Nigerians. Yet, poor national planning and misappropriation remains endemic and permanent. Can ICTs hide these from global awareness?

### **Repositioning Nigeria's image and reputation locally: is this possible?**

Nigeria is not completely dead, neither is she a completely "failed nation". The nation's sustainable resources still abound and the oil wells are not yet dry. Agricultural prospects still abound and the nation's population is not ageing fast. Nigeria has not enmeshed herself in a pool of problems or hardships more than what European countries and the United States of America experienced before and Our attitudes as citizens are corrupt.



Everyone at the top has a big bag to fill up and take home for prosperity and posterity. Rationing the national cake is a task that has always been done through “a – do – or - die” approach. The distinct ethnic groups need high-level development for themselves. Therefore, tribalism, despotism and nepotism are all ills of the immediate past independence era that constitute today’s national indiscipline. Respect, is a matter of efficient national resources. This will form the basis required for overall human dignity. Currently in Nigeria, the Obasanjo administrative reforms embrace the fight against corruption, generated largely by the Shagari regime and bloated by the Babangida and Abacha juntas. It is now conceived even domestically, that sanity has finally begun at home. Nigerians have accepted this as welcome development. ICTs should now be posited to relay in their information communication networks, this new development to the sceptical global community that seeks to scourge Nigeria at the pillar. The selfsame ICTs with their global spread and audience should take Nigeria in their communication channels to dimensions that foster a fresh, positive and acceptable image and reputation for all and sundry.

For effective national re-positioning, government and wealthy Nigerians can become part of the ICTs world, establishing and monitoring their own information and communication networks. In this way, damaging information propagation can be countered at a competitive global setting than that presently prevailing. The global information superhighway is now also at Nigeria’s disposal to balance whatever information it considers damaging, negative and uncomplimentary.

Let Nigeria re-position herself by adopting the new computer literacy programmes fully. This is imperative for information propagators and managers. Accessibility and application of the Internet, which have initially and arguably weakened Nigeria, will help create a new image for her.

In re-positioning Nigeria, and taking into account her battered image and reputation, ICT’s globalisation should advocate the need for the establishment of a world –wide network of satellite television. Alkali (1997), argues that, “...satellite television will give Nigeria an opportunity to tell her own stories rather than be portrayed through the socio-political prisms of other nations”.

American and European countries run into image and reputation problems. When this happens, what do they do? Image and reputation managers under the public relations field proffer enduring solutions. They engineer the type of communication that suits the situation and wade through the media channels that can contain the task. Bergen (2000), opined that:

...communicating and building relationships with media and other third parties is the work of public relations professionals. It should not be surprising therefore, that

the public relations industry is taking the lead in examining ways to better understand the relationship between performance and perception.

Nigeria established the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) through Decree 16 of 1990. It is expected that the Institute shall train or groom very high-level professionals to fine-tune the nation's image and reputation. In Nigeria, the relationship between Government and NIPR has been sour. From 2003 to 2005, there were no budgetary allocations to the Institute at all. Incidentally, that was the period that the nation's image needed domestic acceptance in the conduct of Nigeria's general elections. Also, top political appointments into the information ministries and departments by government at local, states and federal levels are given to charlatans lacking public relations experience. Government should, as a matter of professional experience, restore the Institute's operational funds from the budget. Currently, fresh information holds that about seventy million Naira (N70m) – about five hundred thousand United States Dollars (\$500,000) has been approved in the 2005 budget, for the Institute, to help launder Nigeria's image and reputation).

Political appointments into information ministries and departments at both federal and states levels should be reserved for professional public relations practitioners. These would help in formulating national policies geared towards national re-positioning. In doing this, Nigeria would surely be contributing to the new image re-engineering. The ICTs will certainly welcome this.

Recently, the NIPR established its website thereby joining the Internet world. It is therefore necessary for professional practitioners and public relations students to join in the study of the computer in order to have access to the Internet. Zabarsky (2000), said that,

...with the relentless growth of information technology, the nature of PR has changed... that in 1992 few people knew about the web and that most public relations agencies lacked the capability to build web sites”.

Locally in Nigeria, tourism is beginning to flourish and foreign visitors would arrive in large numbers to take advantage of our facilities. A fresh national orientation should therefore be fostered to govern the aspiration of indigenes in their relationships with foreigners. Hostility and the “419” fraudulent syndrome should be checked. Behaviour change in itself is based-building, a pointer to effective and proper national re-positioning.

## Conclusion

Dynamism is a phenomenon that will continue to change the texture and content of the world. Globalisation and ICTs are twin concepts that are now redefining every socio-economic, cultural and political sphere of human activity both within the developed and developing nations. Space technology came and did not affect the world as much as ICTs. Nuclear technology took its turn among world powers. The nuclear club shook the globe through armaments, wars and eventually, disarmament. When developing nations joined in the nuclear struggle, they were branded as “axis to evils” and vehemently resisted. Globalisation and ICTs are welcome phenomena. Therefore, change informed by these phenomena should not be disregarded as far as nation building is concerned.

Nigeria’s biggest problem today is her domestic and foreign links that are mostly reported for global consumption by ICTs. More often, such reports are damaging in contents. These cause harm to Nigeria’s image and reputation through these same ICTs’ media channels. It is therefore left for Nigeria to effectively assume control, by becoming an effective part-taker in the Internet race. Through this, the nation may showcase her values and talents to the world unhindered. Through this race also, the destructive or damaging characteristics of ICTs will be contained or resisted by using the very same ICTs’ nationally domesticated channels. It is this study’s considered view that suggestions proffered here would serve as a key option for re-positioning Nigeria in world affairs through a freshly groomed image and reputation. However, Nigeria must first beam the spotlight on herself with a new determination and get reformed intrinsically. Such will be a welcome development worldwide.

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