Culture, Media, Technology and Psycho-social Development in Nigeria

Edited by
Alaba Simpson
&
Esther F. Akinsola

Published by
Interlingua Nig. Ltd.
200 Igbosere Street
Lagos.

Printing
Fratel Prints Services
One Fola Agoro Street
Somolu, Lagos

CONTENTS

Chapter 12

GLOBAL INFORMATION NETFLOW: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT
Nkiko Christopher

Introduction

The vital role information plays in national development can be realised from the production of goods and services within a nation. The production process know-how and the tangible benefits that accrue to the individual citizen have strong correlation with the availability and accessibility of timely, accurate and relevant information. Information has been found to be very important in the well being of man and his environment. Man's advancement in the area of medicine, science, technology, education and industry or any other area of human endeavour is as a result of intensive use of information.

In this present age, information has been acknowledged as a factor of production. With it, individuals, organisations and countries interact such that higher knowledge is acquired, through which mutual benefits are achieved, operations are improved, resources are regenerated and more values are added continuously. It has become the essential basis for the maintenance of a modern society at whatever stage of development. Planning, decision-making and administration in all areas are increasingly dependent on the availability of reliable information. Without speedy access to relevant information countries cannot improve their lot

Concept of Information:

Information encompasses a wide variety of things ranging from oral, printed words, figures, statements, files and documents to such intangible elements as sounds, signals and waves. (Nwankwo, 1985).

Whatever form it takes, the essence is that it conveys a message. Another conceptualisation of information is that of data that have been processed into a form, which is meaningful to the recipient and of real or perceived value in current or prospective decisions and actions (Aluko, 1998).

To enhance the value of information, it must be relevant, timely, accurate, understandable and accessible. Information must possess the following other attributes (Aluko, 1998):

(i)   It reduces uncertainty
(ii)   It may be true or false. If the receiver of false information believes it to be true, the effect is the same as if it were true
(iii)   It may be incremental. It may update or add to the already available one.
(iv)   It may be a correction of past false information
(v)   It may confirm existing information. Such information is still valuable because it increases the recipient's perception of the correctness of the earlier one.

By information, we are not only referring to the radio, television, and bulletin which reach us everyday or the daily newspaper headlines which catch our eyes as one heads to office every morning, we are also referring to the mass of processed data stacked in government and company offices, files, reports, statistics and all other forms of information that can assist institutions or individuals in their decision-making (Ndavi, 1990).

Sources of Information

This refers to the means of conveying information from one place to another or from one form to another in order for the person who wants the information to have access to make use of it. Two broad sources have been identified as Library and Non-library sources (Uhegbu, 2001).

Library Sources: This represents one of the most important agents in information transfer. Libraries are repository of information (stored in different formats) accumulated by men and women, living or dead for posterity to be harnessed at will.

Non-Library Sources: These include radio, television, computer, telephone, fax. Internet. They are used to convey all sorts of information from individuals, corporate organisations, governmental and non-governmental agencies. Internet is the latest means of information transfer through computer network, which has more than ever-facilitated communication, and utilisation of information throughout the world.

Information Net Flow

The direction of informational movement defines its flow. It is indeed, a two-way affair that highlights the difference between the in and out flow. It is thus conceptualised as "information net flow".

Through a variety of electronically based communication technologies, international flow of information has profoundly increased since the second half of the twentieth century, Governments therefore began to regulate what information could come in and out of their countries in the sixties. That worked for a while but eventually technology breached the walls and today information moves around the globe as if there were no national borders (International Encyclopaedia of Social & Behavioural Sciences, 2001). In spite of attempts to control the type of information transmitted over the internet, the fact remains that anyone with access to the internet can send and receive just any kind of information. The technology with which to move information around the globe easily, quickly and inexpensively on a massive basis is now a reality.

Long experience in the development and application of technologies give the industrialised nations a competitive advantage over developing nations in the transfer of information (Popoola, 2000). Sub-Saharan Africa is therefore flooded with information from the West. Again, the industrialised nations are conscious of the developing countries' ever-increasing significance, as markets for their exports and the need to create awareness leads to great inflow of information. Conversely, the existence of minimum information technology to stimulate transfer of local information to the industrialised world causes lopsidedness in the flow of information.

Implications for African Development

Neelamegham (1985) observed that the socio-economic level of a nation or its capacity for development appears to be closely linked to its capacity to mobilise and use information effectively in activities related to development. Information like money gives economic, political and intellectual power to those who possess it. It enables one to take better decisions, take advantages of opportunities and to control people. It creates social inequalities among people, organisations and nations (Nzotta, 1991).

While admitting lopsidedness in the flow of global information, it is noteworthy that the internet transformation of higher education around the world by rapidly expanding access to the materials necessary for both research and teaching is undeniable. For Africa in particular, where universities and other institutions of higher learning are relatively young, fragile, devoid of library resources and deficient in funds and international scholarly contacts, the Internet offers integration as full partners into the global academy. African scholars, university policy-makers and educational leaders are looking to the Internet for access to educational resources and the development of intellectual networks.

With the increasing importance of information, a broad array of businesses related to the creation, transmission and processing of information has crystallised in the continent. The GSM has been a kind of revolution in the telecommunication sub-sector of the continent. It has engendered effective communication and/or transfer of information by subscribers. This has made investors in this sector to witness a boom of a sort both economically and socially.

Electronic-commerce (E-commerce) is another popular component of the Information Communication Technology sector that has affected economic activities in the continent. E-commerce is the means by which goods and services are bought, paid for and delivered through the Internet. The ease with which business transactions take place across the globe is traceable only to the free flow of information. Banking activities are now carried out at the speed of light (e-banking).

Greater access to information has become an essential component in combating the spread of diseases. This has contributed directly to the relative success of tackling AIDS in Africa. The informed reporting has strengthened the ability of individuals to take effective precautionary measures. The Internet and mass media have become part of the most effective ways of spreading information to the public about steps they need to protect their health.

It may be true that irresponsible reporting can inflame inappropriate public concerns. But that is no reason to suppress information, rather it confirms the need to ensure the mass media is adequately prepared to report accurately and authoritatively on major public health hazards and that governments pursue policies on access to information that allows journalists to carry out this task.

Every government, just like any other institution would like to have control of the flow of information in and out of its domain if only to avoid the leakage of highly sensitive issues. African states frown at information flow which is derogatory to them and would stop at nothing in censoring such. However, today there are so many channels of information flow that preventing inter-nation communication is quite impossible.

One of the greatest challenges facing African countries is that of pollution of their culture by foreign influences. Violent and pornographic materials are transmitted uncontrollably (Mann, 1998). Many young people are lured into crimes and prostitution as a result of the negative impact of such obscene information.

The almost total reliance on foreign information technologies puts developing countries on a competitive disadvantage in generation and dissemination of information hence the information flow imbalance. The risk in developing information technology locally is not only that it may technically fail to fulfil its function but also it may not be marketable. These competitive disadvantages of developing countries, combined with the industrial nations' information technological dominance, impede any independent development of local information technology (Popoola, 2000).

175

Conclusion and Recommendation

There is so much information coming into the continent that using traditional retrieval techniques makes it absolutely impossible to keep pace with the inflow. African States must invest in the development of technological infrastructures, which lead to the efficient information access, and processing of transactions across multiple organisations. The existence of commercial databases, some of which provide easy and faster access to specialised information, is revolutionising professional practices in the continent.

References

Aluko M. (1998) "Management Information Systems" in *Business Policy and Strategy*, Lagos, Punmark.

International Encyclopaedia of Social and Behavioural Sciences (2001), Amsterdam, Elsevier Science Vol. 23

Mann Thomas (1998) "Proper Relationship of Real Library and Information Super-highway" in Lamolina Guy & Grunke Ralf (ed.), *Library Institute Focuses on Electronic Tools*, L.C Information Bulletin.

Ndavi M. (1990) "Coordination of information for socio-economic and rural development in Kenya" in *Coordination of Information System and Services in Kenya* edited by L. Huttermann and S.K Nganga. Bonn: Education, Science and Documentation.

Neelamegham (1985) "Some Issues in Information Transfer: A Third World Perspective" *IFLA Journal* Vol. 7

Nwankwo J.I. (1985) "Management Information System" in *Educational Management* University of Ibadan

Nzotta B.C (1991) "Towards an Information Conscious Nigerian Society," Ibadan, University of Ibadan, 10pp

Popoola S.O (2000), "On Information Technology Transfer to Developing Countries, Journal of Technology" in *Entrepreneur and Rural Development* 38p

Uhegbu A.N (2001) *The Information User*, Enugu, John-Jacob Classsics.