

# **Ethical and Policy Issues in Current Trends of Media Technological and Mass Communication Development in Nigerian Society: Perspective from ICT Administrative Management and Sociology**

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## **Abstract**

*The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) into media communication completely transformed the communication industry in Nigeria towards faster, easier, cheaper, and all-inclusive information generation, processing and spread. However, it has raised new ethical challenges, which this paper tends to analyse to identify their implications for policy formulation. With the aid of qualitative research, contents analysis and consequentialism –deontology theories, the paper observes that ICT has generated new and enormous ethical challenges in media communication such as impersonation, piracy, defamation and calumny, fraud and hacking of information/database among others. The paper further observes the ineffectiveness of existing information policy to proffer solution to these problems. Therefore, it recommends a professional/stakeholders' national workshop to review the policy, and government's pro-active actions to adopt and fund new policies in line with the recommendations of the workshop.*

**Keywords:** *Information and Communication technologies, ethics, challenges, policy, media communication technology*

## **1. Introduction**

The sweeping impacts and consequences of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on all aspect of the socio-cultural, economic and political life of people have generated many ethical issues with attendant policy options since the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Business Software Alliance, 2007; Gonsalves, 2008; Mullins, 2006). Cooper (1998: 71) notes that every new technology creates hidden effects in its environment, rearranging the social order it penetrates. Many of these effects are inextricably linked to ethical issues. Some are eternal issues such as censorship and free speech, but others have new names and dimensions, and may even be new issues.

The thrust of these ethical issues is on what is good or bad. It is all about morals and the rules guiding them. Moral actions as used here was viewed by Floridi (2008) as a dynamic system, which emanates from the interaction of factors such as the agent, the

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patient, their interactions, the agent's general frame of information, the factual information concerning the situation that is at least partly available to the agent, the general environment in which the agent and patient are located, and the specific situation in which the interaction occurs.

Generally, ethics as a discipline is concerned with differentiating between what is right from what is wrong, and what is good from what is bad, which is an analysis of the morality of human behaviours, policies, laws and social structures (Brey, 2007; Capurro, 2008). Thus, ethics is a set of beliefs concerning what constitute good and bad or right and wrong behaviours in any given society. It is, therefore, a reflection of standard morals or codes of behaviour, which the society or organisation expects an individual member. Majority of these beliefs are generally accepted and seems to be universal although some of them are subjective. They exist in the forms of "code-oriented" and "self-oriented" morality.

Every code of behaviour is structured to enhance the actualisation of groups or organisational corporate goal or interest. It is, therefore, a typical list rules and principles set up by which members of the group or organization are expected to abide for the survival of the general interest or goal. This, which is called policy or law, does not cover all aspects of human or individual behaviours within the group. However, the harsh or negative consequences of some of these excluded or omitted behaviours bring them up as new ethical issues clamouring for new defining policy or law among such group, people, or organisation. This, which synchronises with the postulation of Moor (2005: 112-113), observes that 'as technological revolutions increase their social impact, ethical problems increase', because revolutionary technology provides many new opportunities for action 'for which well thought out ethical policies will not have been developed.'

For instance, the proliferating use of ICTs has led to increasing potential for the emergence of new ethical issues and problems. This has led most media organizations to develop policies that were intended to protect against the abusive use of ICTs. Such policy is pro-effective, cost reduction, and improved services to users and consumers. They set boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and stipulates punishments for violators. This paper is set to assess these trends or scenarios in Nigerian media industry its digitalisation and/or integration of ICTs into its activities.

## **2. Framework of Analysis**

This paper considers the two fundamental theories in ethical studies, namely: consequentialism and deontology. The principle of Consequentialist theory holds that 'actions are wrong to the extent that they have bad consequences, whereas deontological approaches assume that people have moral duties that exist independently of any good or bad consequences that their actions may have'(Brey, 2007:p.21).Morality here refers to widely shared conventions and understanding about right and wrong, which become the basis for an established consensus on an issue. Although individual views of this may vary due social orientation, religion, age, life experiences, education, and gender, there is always a consensus of opinion on issues that possess devastating consequences like murder, rape *etc.*

An analysis of these theories reveals that two factors define the consequences of any behaviour and these are morality and legislation. Thus, ethical issues in information and communication technology revolve around moral responsibilities of ICTs users and the morality and/or legislation that characterise public policy on ICTs development and use. For instance, Nigeria, like other countries, established a set of rules that that prescribes the indices of generally accepted behaviour in the development and use of ICTs for different issues particularly media and communication. The rules set behaviour standard and principles of engagement or doing any form of ICTs related businesses.

### 3. The Concept of Information Policy

The root of the emergence of the term information policy is traceable to governments' concern for the protection of privacy – a natural right, and guarantees for the protection of personal information– copyright (Relyea, 2001). It is government's direct response to public consciousness and complaints against the combined effects of information technologies on market and nonmarket events led to the emergence of the theory and practice of information policy (Rowlands, 1996; Browne 1997a). In addition to Freedom of Information (FOI), Privacy, Data Protection and Security, Official Secrets, Libraries and Archives, Scientific, Technical and Medical (STM) Documentation, Economics of Government Publications, Copyright and Intellectual Property, National Information Infrastructure, International Information Flows, and Academic identity identified Duff (2004), Duff further outlined these effects as;

'.. affordability of new technology, the impact of centralized editorial staffs on local diversity, alterations in the scope and content of news coverage, concentration of media ownership, survival of national dailies, and broadband and satellite capacity for electronic distribution of news. .... from energy planning to tanker safety, to use of paramedics, to aesthetics of architecture, to regulation of the domestic airline industry, to national security' (p.4)

Policy, as used in this paper, refers to 'a set of principles and strategies which guide a course of action for the achievement of a given goal' (Aman and Buchanan, 1997:5). On the other hand, information refers to 'news, facts, statistics, reports, legislation, tax-codes, judicial decisions, resolutions and the like.'(Bell, 1985: 17)

### 4. Trans-nationalising Information Policy

Formulating and enacting an effective integrated information policy has been an agenda for most countries in the world (Oppenheim, 1996). The importance of such a policy has also been reflected in the current drive by certain regions like Europe, West Africa to establish 'a regional response to the putative absurdity of policy fragmentation' (Duff, 2004:9). This is an offshoot of the movement spearheaded by Global Knowledge Partnership, and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) among others for the establishment of international information policy that is associated with the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The movement clamoured for rectification of information flow and distribution of telecommunications resources (Kahin and Nesson, 1997).

The point being made is that the establishment of a coordinated and coherent information policy is a national, regional, and international project. Therefore, the policy is a universal phenomenon. However, the goals or objectives of this policy at these levels differ. This difference is caused not only by each country's ideological orientation and level of development but also by their perception or characterisation of information. Some view information as an inalienable distributable public good while others view it as a pure commodity *i.e.* value additive (Koenig, 1995). In these lies the clamour for information liberalisation, struggle for unhindered access, efforts to catch-up, innovations and new inventions, property rights and piracy protections, ICT infrastructural development and integration into different facets of state and human endeavours.

Consequently, each country in the global space pursues an information policy that addresses their own relative national need and in accord with its national wealth and capability. It is important to assert here that each information development policy adopted to solve these challenges begets new challenges, in most cases ethical challenges, that require policy reformulation. The process is developmental in nature and requires close monitoring, patriotic evaluation/assessment, high human factor and financial investments. In this regard, this paper attempts to analyse Nigeria's stride in information and communication technology integration into media communication with the aim of

explicating the new trends of ethical challenges therein for purposes of policy moderation or modification.

## 5. The Evolution of Information Policy in Nigeria

The background of Nigeria's ICT/communication policy was laid when the former military president, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida promulgated Decree 38 of 1992 as a national mass communication policy that established the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Decree 41 of 1992 that established the Nigeria Postal Service (NIPOST). This generated infinitesimal progress as Nigeria's 'total fixed telephone lines were less than 400,000 while regular internet users were less than 200,000' (The Ministry of Communication Technology, 2012:16). Adeyemi, Awojobi, Osisanwo, Appah, Ezeudu and Aghama (2014:91) tracked and documented this sluggish growth as follows by noting that available statistics on the status of ICT in Nigeria indicate the following:

- i. Mobile Penetration (per 100 people) - 55.76
- ii. Fixed penetration (per 100 people) - 0.48
- iii. Internet penetration (per 100 people) - 23.48 (2010)
- iv. Internet Users (per 100 people) - 43.270 (2010)
- v. Broadband Penetration - 6.1% (2010)
- vi. PC Penetration (Number of PCs per 100 people) - 4.7 (2010)
- vii. Number of registered ICT companies - <500,000.
- ix. Broadcasting stations nationwide - 308
- x. Post offices (total inc, postal agencies and post shops) - 1,065(3000+)
- xi. Licensed courier companies - 250
- xii. Radio Station - 211
- xiii. TV stations - 141
- xiv. Cable Retransmission stations - 41
- xv. Direct to Home(DTH) Station - 13"

Thus, the federal government adopted the Nigerian National Telecommunications Policy (NTP) in 2000 as a guide for the development of the sector, which was subsequently legalised in 2003 through the enactment of the Nigerian Communications Act (NCA) 2003. The major thrust of the policy is on the structural development and regulation of the sector. In pursuit of this, the National Information Technology Development Agency Act 2007 enacted and led to the creation of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). The policies target the development of National ICT backbone and Broadband infrastructure; Infrastructure that will foster digital literacy and Internet usage; Reasonably priced Universal Access to ICT; Protection of ICT infrastructure; National physical infrastructure (including power); Financial systems infrastructure; and The secure and sustained adoption of the national critical internet (The Ministry of Communication Technology, 2012:28).

These policies have led to the remarkable development of the ICT sector and the improvement of the communication industry. As at 2011, Nigeria has over 90.5 million available mobile telephone lines (The Ministry of Communication Technology, 2012), while ICTs are now the major pilots of media, government and organisational activities. Nevertheless, as technological advancement and market transformation continue worldwide, the key requirements and focus of these existing policies were modified and/or replaced in order to meet the contemporary challenges or demands. According to The Ministry of Communication Technology (2012:27), the core objectives of the modifications are:

- i. To review existing legislation and facilitate, where necessary, the enactment of Laws that would enhance the development of ICT sector for national growth;

- ii. To enact appropriate legislation that ensures the protection of physical ICT infrastructure, addresses cybersecurity, and enhances national security; and
- iii. To prevent the occurrence of multiple regulations, the occurrence of which is a disincentive to investors.'

According to Federal Republic of Nigeria(2001), the fundamental goal of Nigeria's information policy is to modernize and expand rapidly the telecommunications network and services and social development and to integrate Nigeria's communications environment internally and globally. This is to engender efficient, affordable, reliable and available communication to all. However, according to the Ministry of Communication Technology (2012: 25-26), the specific objectives of this National ICT Policy are:

- i. To ensure that the reality of convergence is reflected in the ICT sector, notably in the areas of regulation, operation, and service delivery;
- ii. To unify all Policy Administrators under a single Ministry;
- iii. To facilitate the development of an appropriate legal framework for effective implementation of ICT policies;
- iv. To promote universal access to high quality and advanced Information and Communication Technologies and services;
- v. To develop and enhance indigenous capacity in ICT technologies and software development;
- vi. To ensure the country's effective participation in regional and international ICT in order to promote ICT development in Nigeria, meet the country's international obligations and derive maximum benefit from international cooperation in these areas;
- vii. To actualize the implementation of an administrative and legal framework for the transition to digital broadcasting and ensure a smooth switchover in accordance with ITU guidelines;
- viii. To develop the framework for the implementation of Community Broadcasting in Nigeria;
- ix. To reposition the Postal subsector so that it can deliver universal access to postal services, to all Nigerians;
- x. To pursue the elimination of multiple regulation and taxation in the ICT sector;
- xi. To foster the development of Broadband services that will enable Nigerians to enjoy the benefits of globalization and convergence;
- xii. To ensure an enabling environment, and provide incentives in order to sustain investments into the Information and Communications (ICT) sector in Nigeria;
- xiii. To promote cyber, digital, ICT infrastructure, and national security;
- xiv. To utilize ICT in energizing and supporting the various programs and sectors that contribute to the Nigerian socio-economic development including Agriculture, Education, Finance, Health, Justice Administration, Oil and Gas, Power, Small & Medium Sized Enterprises, Solid Minerals, Sports, Trade and Commerce, Transport, Youth Development, *etc*; and
- xv. To facilitate the creation of a robust and consolidated national digital archive.

## 6. Policy Effects

The enactment of Nigeria's national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policy led to the establishment of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA). This organ entered into a strategic alliance, collaboration and a joint venture with the private sector in pursuit of national objectives as stated above. The organ turned ICTs into an engine for economic growth, sustainable development, and instrument for global competition. It became a veritable tool for developing teaching, research, and learning in schools; and an effective instrument of job creation, wealth creation, and poverty eradication.

The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) equally developed the national information infrastructure backbone (NIIB) and contributed to human resources development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2001). Collectively, these achievements transformed media communication and enabled Nigeria's switchover from analogue to digital broadcasting. Information generation, processing, transmission or dissemination, and retrieval have been enhanced with speed and easy. The current number of fixed telephone lines (wireless inclusive) is over 102million compared to 400,000 in 1992 while regular internet users are not less than 30million compared to less than 200,000 in 1992. These achievements are not without effects. They generated monumental problems that pose ethical challenges and clamour for information policy advancement or modernisation.

## **7. New trends in Ethical and Policy Issues in Nigeria Media Communication**

The foregoing reflection on the evolving ethical issues in ICTs integration in media communication is considered from two divides, namely: the ICTs producers and IT users under the following headings:

a) Software Piracy: The high level of disparity between the value of Dollar and Naira, and the inevitability of ICTs application in daily production and services activities made ICTs costly. Consequently, ICT professionals have opted to flood the market with products and software piracy against the ethics of the profession. On this, they import and spend less to purchase the products but maximise profits in their sales in triple-fold. Complementing this, ICTs users equally engage in software piracy. Employees or workers in organisations copy software from office computers for their personal use at home. Consequently, ICTs market in Nigeria is filled with pirated and inferior copies of ICT products that are highly ineffective while the sale original software and other ICT products have dropped very low.

b) Inappropriate use of computing resources: Professional ICTs employees use official resources to surf popular Web sites that are at variance with their jobs such as chatting, watching of pornography (Armour and USA Today, 2009), and playing of computer games among others (Foley, 2004). Some of these are criminal in nature, while such activities deplete productivity, time, and official resources for private pleasure.

c) Inappropriate sharing of information: Capurro's (2006: 178) observed that the basic moral principle of the information environment "is to share knowledge, or the right to communicate in a digital environment which includes the right to preserve what we communicate for future generations." However, the illegal use of corporate ICTs resources for personal/private concerns has become the order of the day, and this subjects the system to hacking activities and exposes corporate classified information or data to the public. Examples of such data include salary information, staff health records, performance ratings, account information, staffing projections, manufacturing processes, product formulas, tactical and strategic plans, and research and development. The access of this information by an unauthorized party violates privacy policy and raises ethical issues.

d) The prevalence of anonymity and fake identities that propagate illegal activities and deception: ICTs in the media is fraught with an easy dissemination of electronic message that is characterised by falsehood, borrowed, encrypted, and fake identities (fake IDs) without restriction. Cooper (1998: 78) summarised this experience as follows:

'Numerous ethical problems such as digital manipulation, impersonation, false advertising, puffery, hype, masking, and data massaging abound. The deliberate and

accidental substitution of illusion for reality and propaganda for proper data have become far easier. Documents may be altered without detection by long-distance ghosts and realistic, albeit artificial, images may be quickly synthesized.'

In addition, e-mail bombs, viruses, harassment, laundered money, invasion of privacy, libel, obscenity, and other ethical problems are now widespread or prevalent.

a) Policy Impotency: Trends in ICT media communication have made it impossible to implement relevant and existing Codes of ethics, guidelines, norms, standards, policies for internet and cyberspace practice become impossible to implement. This is because the technologies, their users, consumers and servers, which represent different but multiple languages, ethical guidelines, and transient sites, lack central management and control point. Many countries and civilisations have their different internet gateway and a satellite system that pursues some forms of nationalist and often conflicting interests. Thus, what one considers unethical, the other may consider it ethical. Consequently, lack of harmony in the management of ICTs media relations multiplies the emerging ethical challenges in the system.

b) Defamatory activities: ICT-media communication activities tend to be filled with slander and libellous publications due to character assassination that is orchestrated by anonymous smear campaigns. The real perpetrators of these crimes are not apprehended or prosecuted because of fake identities, yet the phenomena are on the increase.

c) Anti-democratic activities: The superlative influence of ICTs on socio-economic and political lives has placed the control of the democratic process in the hands of owners and operators of major media communication outfits. This has made possible the concentration of power into the hands of a few mega-hackers who, sitting in a remote apartment, distort/alter electoral data or results and history, and erase power-points records via hyper-virus. This has generated conflicts and crisis in many countries including the United States of America. Similarly, it has led to computer theft and breaking into people's bank accounts.

d) Gender and race phobia: The decentralised and liberalised nature of the internet has led to the emergence of many racist sites, gender biased chat-groups, holocaust denial locales, *etc.* These, which can be limited by local policies, national laws, and international agreements, are prevailing uncontrolled in the ICT propelled media.

e) Incoherent policies: According to the Ministry of Communication Technology (2012), there are many ICT and media communication policies in Nigeria but these policies are uncoordinated. Similarly, there are many but unrelated laws enacted to guide these policies and different aspects of the communication sector. These uncoordinated and fractious policies and laws generated gaps, lack of cohesiveness, and incomprehensiveness that render the policies and laws ineffective support bases for the converged ICTs and media communication in Nigeria.

f) The transition from analogue to digital broadcasting in Nigeria has raised the challenges of content integrity, mobilization of indigenous participation, and the problem of managing the migration process in the face of lack of freedom of expression, access to information and knowledge, transparency and accountability in governance.

g) Solidification of Dependency: The on-going telecommunications development in Nigeria is fully dependent on foreign technologies. Investors, which are mostly multi-nationals only relocate their facilities to Nigeria without transferring the ability to

innovate. This tends to deepen the challenges of rapid telecommunications development in Nigeria, which include lack of science and technology, capacity for operation and maintenance of facilities, technical and managerial activities *etc.*

## 8. Summary and Conclusion

The quest to catch up with the globalisation of international development agenda and socio-economic and political transformations generated by technological advances in the field of Information and communication propelled Nigeria to adopt an information policy in 1992. The policy, which was progressively modified to take care of some national development requirements, and evolving problems in the communication industry led to ICTs integration into media communication.

The integration led to remarkable national economic growth, job creation, Nigeria's switchover from analogue to a digital system and subsequent integration into the global socio-economic and communication systems. Media communication has become not only easier, faster, democratised, cheaper, and accessible but also enjoys greater geographical coverage and internationalization. However, this is not without some consequences. Many ICTs providers and users embarked on behaviours that are unethical and/or immoral, which if not checked, threaten the very development and foundation laid by the technologies. Such ethical issues include among others impersonation, piracy, racist activities, gender phobia, social deviant activities, defamation and calumny, electronic theft and 419 activities, hacking of information and database, alteration of electoral results *etc.*

Unfortunately, the national information and communication technologies policy failed to anticipate these outcomes and is ineffective in handling them. Therefore, this paper recommends the convocation of a professional/stakeholders' national workshop to review the policy in the light of these ethical challenges. It is further recommended that the national information and communication technology policy should be re-casted to provide solutions to the prevailing challenges.

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