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AUDIENCE ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS ON THE GLOBAL NEWS FLOW CONTROVERSY

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Introduction

Communication, at whatever level, is vital to human existence and the understanding of human relationships. It is a *prima facie* factor in international relations and engagement. Communication does not take place in a vacuum; it takes place between two or more persons, groups, communities, nationalities, states, and even nations. At the international level, it is concerned with how nations relate to other nations as well as concerned with the gathering, dissemination, interpretation and analysis of global news, information and communication (Ekeanyanwu, 2008).

The world is now interdependent and there is no one single nation that is an island unto itself, therefore, different countries of the world need mutual interaction and understanding with one another. Furthermore, some of the threatening major issues in the world today have taken global implications, necessitating global consciousness on the need for concerted efforts at tackling them. For instance, issues of poverty, hunger, war, terrorism, women and

child trafficking, refugee crisis and so on, are no longer concentrated at particular locations and nationalities. They all have wider global dimensions and implications.

Communication at the global level comes with many consequences. Some of these consequences arise because of imbalances, news manipulation, and sometimes, misrepresentation of some nations and people in the media system of others. The development and deployment of Information and Communication Technologies have also brought a mixed reaction to these consequences. However, the advent of ICT in global interaction has introduced flexibilities and revolutionary changes in the way the world communicates. It has also widened the information gap between the developed and the developing societies and aided the entrenchment of news flow imbalances that caused a major hullabaloo in the early 20th century.

This chapter is therefore concerned with how users of social media networks assess the impact of social media on the Global News Flow Controversy (GNFC). First, we need to take a cursory and historical look at the news flow imbalance to establish the existence of an Old Order before we consider how social media have affected the scene.

In the process of international communication, there are news flow imbalances or news inequalities as some scholars have argued. Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peters (2012, pp. 137-138) describe two of the major types of these imbalances thus:

Quantitative imbalance is about the amount of news flowing from industrialized nations to the un-industrialized nations and vice versa. For instance if a content analysis of CNN, BBC etc is carried out, it is likely that out of 100 news stories, maybe only 10 will be about the un-industrialized nations put together.

Ekeanyanwu (2005) also noted that out of the paltry 10 news stories about the un-industrialized nations, nine may be all negatives. This is qualitative imbalance.

From the above, one could understand that imbalance is a major issue in global communication and there are enough literature and empirical evidence to support this (MacBride, *et al*, 1981; Ekeanyanwu, 2005, 2007, 2008; Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peter, 2012). The North (developed western capitalist nations) recognizes the fact that things happen in developing countries. However, they only beam their wide searchlight on the issues that have a hidden national interest for them. This, most times, results in over reportage of negative, damaging, and scandalous news events and stories about the developing African societies in the media of the developed western capitalist nations. Apart from this skewed and biased coverage of events in the developing societies, the western media give a one-sided view of the situation leading to what Chimamanda Adiche calls “The Danger of a Single Story” (Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peter, 2012). According to her, the single story may not be wrong but it is not the entire story. It also devalues a people and their collective will to succeed because it has the tendency for people to see themselves in the way that they have been framed over time.

Ekeanyanwu (2008, p. 30) confirms this position when he noted that “Most developing nations never get a mention in the media of the Western World unless the bizarre/crisis oriented event occurs”. He further argues that the implication of this is that only news about poverty, hunger, political strives, diseases etc are reported in the media of the western world and these same types of unfavourable news are relayed back to the developing countries for consumption”.

From the picture painted above, no country that finds itself in the position of the developing countries will fold its arms and watch these news manipulations continue. Based on this, the developing

countries are not wrong in seeking for the intervention of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to address global news flow imbalances. The supposed intervention by UNESCO did not yield the desired result as the industrialized nations continue to use their technological superiority to maintain the unhealthy status quo.

The Global News Flow Controversy (GNFC) is about the imbalance in the flow of international news between different countries of the world. This controversy has resulted in a debate known as the 'News Flow Debate'. According to Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peters (2012, p. 135), the News Flow Debate “is a conceptual framework whereby developing nations demanded for a change in the present pattern of news flow between them and the Western industrialized nations”. This Debate has remained fluid and therefore continues to generate interest in communication research because the issues that gave birth to the Debate in the first instance are still relevant today notwithstanding the emergence of the Internet that was suppose to liberalize the sourcing and dissemination on international news and information.

Before the emergence of social media networks (SMNs) like *Facebook, Twitter, Hi5, WhatsApp, MySpace, Skype* etc, the News Flow Debate has been based on the traditional media of communication notably television, radio, newspaper, magazine etc. Even the development and deployment of the Internet did not address the issues raised by the South in the Debate. The emergence of social media networks, however, seems to have revived the Debate because of the inherent features in the SMNs that have capacity to level some of the issues that were hitherto in favour of the North.

Social media networks have spiced up ways in which information are disseminated, opinions/views are expressed and most especially the instant nature of message delivery and feedback as well as creating an open environment for easy interaction. Unlike

the usual traditional ways of information dissemination, social media have made the news more interactive, more participatory and timelier than ever before. Itua (2012) also agrees that social media now empowers people globally, serving as a platform for the expression of views on global issues.

Objectives and Key Questions

Generally, this study is meant to assess how social media users perceive the influence of social media networks on the Global News Flow Controversy. Specifically, the study aims at the following:

1. To find out if social media networks have had any influence on global news flow controversy.
2. To find out if the News Flow Debate is still relevant in this 21st Century with the emergence of social media networks.
3. To find out the influence of social media networks on global newsgathering and dissemination.
4. To determine if social media networks are credible sources of international news.
5. To determine if social media networks are credible media for international communication.
6. To find out if users of social media network see the platform as bridging the information gap between the developing and developed nations.
7. To find out the tone (in terms of positive or negative) of the information/news that flow through social media networks, as perceived by social media users.
8. To determine if the quantity of news from developing to developed nations and vice versa have improved since the emergence of social media networks as perceived by social

media network audiences.

Deducing from the objectives of the study as stated above, the key questions that this chapter seeks to answer are:

1. Do social media networks have any influence on the Global News Flow Controversy?
2. Is the News Flow Debate still relevant in the 21st Century with the emergence of social media networks?
3. What are the influences of social media networks on global newsgathering and dissemination?
4. Are social media networks credible sources of international news?
5. Are social media networks credible media for international communication?
6. Do users of social media networks see the platform as bridging the information gap between the developing and the developed nations?
7. From the perspective of social media networks users, is the tone of the information/news that flow through social media networks positive or negative?
8. From the perspective of social media networks users, has the quantity of news from developing to developed nations and vice versa, improved since the emergence of social media networks?

Literature Review

Communication and information are essential factors to human existence and relationship. That is, man cannot exist and relate without communicating and having information that are necessary and are of concern to him. Communication and information can sometimes be misunderstood to mean the same thing. Communication is simply an act of exchanging views, ideas,

information etc between two or more persons, countries, groups, etc. Information, on the other hand, is the data, fact, news, event etc communicated to another person or group of persons. Moemeka (2000, p. 3) states that communication is all about “Providing facts (information) and exchanging ideas (communication)”. On the same note, Christopher (1999, p. 34) posits thus:

Communication is the maintenance, modification and creator of culture. In this sense, the processes and institutions of communication of culture, and of development are well woven together. It becomes impossible to think of communication as predominantly a process of information transmission.

This means that there is more to communication than information transmission. It will involve some forms of interaction and it is through the media (traditional and social media) that countries interact. Embedded in the communication are the cultures of different countries, this means that through communication, cultures interact. Therefore, the medium used to communicate and pass information also transmits cultures. The MacBride Report (1981, pp. 30-31) cited in (Ekeanyanwu, 2008, p. 54) confirm this thus:

The role of communication may be regarded as that of a major carrier of culture. The media of communication are cultural instruments, which serve to promote or influence attitudes, motivate, to foster the spread of behavior patterns, and to bring about social integration. For millions of people, they are the principal means of access

to culture and to all forms of creative expression. In the modern world, the mass media supply the cultural fare, and shape the cultural experience of many millions of people.

The world is now interdependent; no country can survive alone without relating with other countries. That is why Ekeanyanwu (2008, p. 23) argues that “Most nations of the world have discovered that they cannot survive without some form of social, economic, and political co-operation with other nations. Therefore, efforts have been increased at the international level in order to positively exploit this interdependency”. Amadou-Marthar M'Bow cited in MacBride et al (1989, p. 13) confirms the position thus:

Every nation now forms part of the day-to-day reality of every other nation. Though it may not have a real awareness of its solidarity, the world continues to become increasingly i n t e r d e p e n d e n t . T h i s interdependence, however, goes hand-in-hand with a host of imbalances and sometimes gives rise to grave inequalities leading to misunderstandings and manifold hotbeds of tension, which combine to keep the world in ferment.

Apart from interdependency, international communication helps to maintain peace, understanding, unity etc. Ekeanyanwu (2008, p. 19) notes that, “International communication arose because of the need to maintain international friendship and relations as well as to understand and keep abreast of happenings around the world”. In the affirmative, (MacBride et al, 1981, p. 14) explain, “The need for international communication is to integrate

nations and societies with one another so as to understand and appreciate others living conditions, view points and aspirations better”.

Haven established the importance of information, communication and international communication; it is evident that different countries of the world do interact. In the process of interacting, some countries (developing countries) are of the view that there exist some forms of imbalances or inequalities in the ways and manners communications take place. The developing countries bemoan the fact that the developed nations are intimidating them because the wide spread and utilization of information and communication technologies are not evenly favourable. The main argument raised by developing nations is that, due to their lack of modern communication facilities, the developed nations' media do not consider the ripple effects that the news quality and quantity have on their image (developing countries).

The issue of news flow imbalance or news inequality has remained contentious in international communication. Imbalance ordinarily would mean lack of stability or equality between equal parts. “In international communication, imbalance refers to the unequal flow of mass media messages from the First World or industrialized countries to the Third World also known as the underdeveloped or developing countries” (Ekeanyanwu, 2008, p. 28). This is the situation of news flow today. The ways news ought to flow have been altered by the developed nations. News flow ought to be an exchange of ideas, opinions, information etc. The reverse is now the case. What exist at the global level is just a producer (the North) and a consumer (the South). There is no exchange as is expected. MacBride et al (1981, p. 34) confirm the position thus:

Unfortunately in today's world,
communication has all too
frequently become an exchange
between unequal partners, allowing

the predominance of the more powerful, the richer and better equipped. Discrepancy in power and wealth, by its own weight or by deliberate action, has an impact and influence on communication structures and communication flows. Herein lie many of the underlying causes of the inequalities, disparities and imbalances so characteristic of international communications, in particular between industrialized and developing countries.

From the above, it is obvious that wealth and power influence news flow. That is, countries with more wealth and higher power influence the way news flow from developed to developing countries and vice versa. As a result of this, the negative reports about developing countries and the positive reports about the developed countries are all regarded as news by both groups (developed and developing countries).

The question now is; is the news flow controversy still relevant with the emergence of social media networks? It is a good question because Social Media (SM), Social Media Networks (SMNs) and Social Networking (SN) are now available to allow different countries to utilize them in sourcing and disseminating news and information that are useful to them.

It is important in this review that we understand the origin of news imbalance, the reason for the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and why it failed. It is also vital to understand the Global News Flow Controversy from the perspectives of the developed and developing countries. This review will also help us understand the role of the media in

determining what should be regarded as news and further help us take a retrospective look at the relevance of Global News Flow Controversy in this dispensation (emergence of social media networks).

The shape that news flow and information dissemination on the global platform have taken as a result of the emergence of social media networks, have again reinvigorated the debate on global news flow controversy. Social media networks have really changed international news flow and communication thus confirming the global village phenomenon as envisaged by Marshall McLuhan. It is now a global village where people from different countries are affected by virtually every event that happens anywhere in the world. It is an interdependent world where a nation can no longer live in isolation except it has refused to embrace the advantages of information and communication technologies. The adoption and use of information and communication technologies, the full awareness of its merits and demerits, the ability to use them in projecting diverse cultures in ways peculiar to each nation are what every country yearns for. The success of all the above mentioned, will make the world a better place to inhabit.

The issue of news flow imbalance or news inequalities in international communication is not an abstraction; it is real and debates on it have been ongoing. This is the major reason MacBride *et al* (1981, p. 36) argue thus: “Today, virtually no one disputes the reality of this imbalance”. A major cause of news imbalance could be hinged on colonialism. It could be traced back to when the colonialists (now developed nations) colonized Africa. They exploited the natural and human resources available at the expense of the rightful owners. “The Europeans or the colonialists partitioned the Third World nations amongst themselves and commenced the exploitation of their abundant natural resources” (Ekeanyanwu, 2008, p. 33).

The developing countries that were exploited would not have been so bitter if the resources were used to develop their

motherlands. The colonialists rather, used the resources to develop their own countries. “The exploitation of these natural resources were never meant to develop the Third World nations (the original/natural owners of these resources), rather they were meant to help the industrialization of the European nations at the detriment of the Third World countries (Ekeanyanwu, 2008, p. 33).

In a situation where the economic, political and technological powers are in the hands of few nations, they therefore control everything (communication technologies and information flow are also included) thereby, making the less powerful countries extremely and continually dependent on them. However, it is not out of place to say that the developed nations because of their total control from the colonial period until today, is one of the major causes of news imbalance that exist in international communication. Communication and understanding exist between two equal groups or nations but in a situation whereby one party is more superior to the other, there is hardly a balanced flow of communication and understanding. The likelihood that the superior party will dominate and outshine the less superior one will be there. The worse scenario would be where the less superior party is dependent on the superior one. This is the situation of news flow that exist between developed and developing countries.

News imbalance has two dimensions: quantitative and qualitative news imbalances, which have been explained earlier. MacBride et al (1981, p. 36), however, confirm that these imbalances could exist at different levels and have different dimensions.

Alike quantitative and qualitative, it may occur at different levels and in different forms: (a) between developed and developing countries, insofar as the information flow is governed by the existence or non-existence of appropriate

infrastructures; (b) Between countries having different political and socio-economic systems; (c) Between developed countries belonging to same political system, particularly between smaller and bigger ones; (d) Between political news and news concerning the social, economic and cultural life of countries battling with ills of underdevelopment; (e) Between the Third World countries themselves; (f) Between what is conventionally called 'good' news and 'bad' news, i.e. news of catastrophes, failures, conflicts, set-backs, follies and excesses; and finally (g) between topical news of current events and information dealing in greater depth with issues important in the daily lives of people and nations.

In the words of Giffard (1989, p. 23),

UNESCO set up an international body to investigate global problems associated with communications between the developed and developing worlds. The commission acknowledged the presence of imbalances in international communication, or media influence, especially between industrialized and developing countries (MacBride Commission, 1980) and called for a

New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), which would address information flow issues and the problematic Western media reporting of underdeveloped and developing countries.

The imbalance and inequalities that exist in international communication scene led to the demand for New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). That is, the cry of the developing countries concerning the way international news and information flow from source (developed nations) to receiver (developing nations) and vice versa has led to the demand for NWICO to address the issue of imbalances. "...the fundamental objective of NWICO debate was to seek for transnational flow of information, to resolve inequality in information resources, to promote cultural and commercial values of information and maintain fairness in the news distribution" (Onwutalobi, 2012).

According to Dahir (2009), "The debate was generated by the developing 'non-aligned' nations in an attempt to shed off some light on the negative image crystallized by the Western media strong-hold nations". This had created a model of dependence, with negative effects on the polity, economy and society of developing countries" (Thussu, 2000). While the developing countries were demanding for a 'New Order' of things, the developed countries on their part maintained that there is and should be a free flow of information because of democracy and freedom of the press. This has led to two opposing views. The MacBride Report contained "The need for plurality of sources and conduits of information. It also recommended the 'elimination of negative effects of certain monopolists, public or private, and excessive concentrations' and called for the democratization of communication and augmentation of national media to circumvent dependence on only external sources" (Dahir, 2009).

However, Wilson (1986) note that “NWICO is rather amorphous set of demands, originating principally from Third World nations, aimed at correcting what those countries view as an imbalance in the international flow of information”. Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peters (2008, p. 14) corroborate this fact when they observed that “The NWICO as envisaged by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was a still born when it was mooted in the late 70s”. The authors further state thus:

It was a legitimate demand though, but wrongly timed and poorly conceived because the socio-economic situation of the un-industrialized nations then could not support such an agitation. The prevailing power structure during the mooting stage was also entirely in favour of the West against the east or south. The countries that were supposed to champion the course could not even pay their annual subscription to the United Nations or financially support UNESCO.

The above obviously shows one of the reason why NWICO failed. Furthermore, Raube-Wilson (1986) confirms, “In December 1984, the United States withdrew from membership in United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). One of the major reasons for the U.S. withdrawal was the perception held by U.S. officials that the UNESCO secretariat has supported the debate over the establishment of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)”. On the same note, talking about the huge debate that sparked off among the Western countries especially the United States and United Kingdom, Dahir (2009), noted that both countries “saw this as a

'Soviet-inspired Third World design' to attack the freedom of the press and also a direct threat towards their business interest in the developing world. This dispute rose to the effect that the US and UK withdrew from the UNESCO in 1984 and 1985, respectively”.

The withdrawal of the US and the UK worsened the state of the Debate as the developing nations that the debate favoured lacked the financial resources to champion its course. This is why NWICO was referred to as a 'still-born' because as at the time it was conceptualized, the support to push and achieve the desired positive results were not available (Ekeanyanwu, 2008).

Though “some Westerners admit the charges of imbalance but note that the Third World countries are also biased in its coverage of the rest of the world because according to them, bias is a characteristic of every journalism” (Ekeanyanwu, 2007, p. 25). Free flow is a two-way flow of mass media messages from one country to another without any form of obstruction or hindrance. In emphasizing total freedom, as it is obtainable in most Western states such as the U.S., it is stated in the Constitution that “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press”. This is a good law suitable for a democratic society as it allows for the sourcing and dissemination of information. Today, it has become a flaw in global information flow because the total application of this freedom from the perspective of the developed nations is to the detriment of the developing countries' cultures and images. Furthermore, instead of a free and balanced flow as agitated by the developing countries, what is practicable is a uni-directional or one-way flow of information from the developed to the developing nations. The developing nations have been portrayed as mere consumers of information in whatever taste they are produced and the developed nations are the major producers and distributors of the information and news of the world.

The unequal sourcing and dissemination of information between the developed and developing countries has thus, led to the gap in knowledge between both parties. However, the gap will

continue to widen because the information rich nations will continue to get richer while the information poor nations will be striving to meet up and with less advanced technologies at their disposal. MacBride et al (1989, pp. 36-37) affirm this thus:

The gap between the fully informed countries and the less informed countries continue to widen as the imbalance between those imparting and those receiving information become accentuated. Although it is only fair to recognize that the international flows have enormously increased and that communication sources have enormously increased their output, it is necessary to stress that communicators have strengthened their power to control impact of messages transmitted as well as the selection of information available. Also, the attendant distortions and imbalance reflect in the way the dominant interest of the societies they emanate from.

The vertical flow is also a problem in international communication “because it does not encourage access and participation of the public. That is, some countries dictate the content of the flow and are always the producers and distributors while the majority of other countries are just mere receivers/consumers and are influenced by this type of flow to remain so” (Ekeanyanwu, 2008, p. 71). The vertical flow ought to be eradicated in this century because it is the opposite of what to some extent is obtainable (audience participation). The social

media networks allow for audience participation as against the vertical flow that hinders access to and participation of media audience. However, MacBride et al (1981, p. 151) note:

The predominantly downward flow of communication is one of its major flaws. A trend towards broader horizontal exchanges would liberate many more voices for communication and open up diverse new sources. However, more freedom to communicate is not synonymous with everyone having the opportunity to say whatever he wishes to whomever he wishes, at any time in and in any way. Obviously, each person will never have the possibility or the means to communicate with everyone. But increased participation by more people in communication activities should be accelerated to advance the trends towards democratization of the communication process and expansion of multidirectional information flows-up, down and across-from a multitude of sources. Full development of such trends will depend on the extent of popular demand and participation, as well as on public support and encouragement.

From the above, the authors pointed out the need to open up more and new sources of information of which social media networks within this context could be regarded as one of such

sources. Social media networks are also relevant here because of its participatory nature. Multiple sources also enable media audience not to always depend on a particular medium.

While social media could be referred to as the social instrument for communication, social media networks on the other hand, are software programs that enable a two-way communication, which gives media audience avenues to express their views and opinions on a any topic of interest. Social media networks as different from the traditional media (television, radio, newspaper, magazine) do not only disseminate information, but also give room for interaction about the information given. For instance, the issue of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria is a case in point. One cannot compare the level of discussion that went on AIT Kakaaki concerning fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria to the level of discussion and interaction that were on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *BBM*, etc. Just as there is an allocated time and a limit to which issues could be discussed on traditional media, there is no limit and time allocation to discuss issues on social media networks as long as you are subscribed to it, you can discuss as long as you desire.

Since the emergence of social networking sites, it has been a popular means of communication, leisure activity and active participation for many people across the world (Ofcom, 2007). According to Ellison *et al* (2007), “social networking sites allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks and establish or maintain connections with others”. An encompassing description of social networking sites or social media networks such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, is given by Ofcom (2008, p. 4) thus:

Social networking sites offer people new and varied ways to communicate via the Internet, whether through their PC or their mobile phone. They also allow people to easily and simply create their own online page

or profile and to construct and display an online network of contacts, often called 'friends'. Users of these sites can communicate via their profile both with their 'friends' and with people outside their list of contacts. This can be on a one-to-one basis (much like emails), or in a more public way such as a comment posted for all to see. Like other communication tools, social networking sites have certain rules, conventions and practices, which users have to navigate to make themselves understood and avoid difficulties. These range from the etiquette of commenting on other people's profiles to understanding whom one does and does not add as a 'friend'. Social networking sites also have some potential pitfalls to negotiate, such as the unintended consequences of publicly posting sensitive personal information, confusion over privacy settings and contact with people one does not know.

There are different social media networks that enhance instant communication, interactivity and immediate feedback. However, this chapter focused on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, which are regarded as the first two most popular social media networks respectively. Asoto (2011) confirms that “The list of top most popular social networking sites in ebizmba.com reveals five foreign sites on the top rank, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Linkeldln*, *Myspace* and

Google plus". Most topics of interest are been discussed more on *Facebook* and *Twitter* as these software packages are default applications in most mobile phones, ipads, and other mobile gadgets. "*Facebook*, one of the most popular of the social networks, has been reported to be the most trafficked social networking site with more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion pages views each day" (Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peters, 2012, p. 145).

Facebook was created in February 2004 by a second-year Harvard undergraduate named Mark Zuckerberg (Idakwo, 2011). He co-founded *Facebook* with his college roommates and fellow Computer Science students, Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. The site was initially created for Harvard students only. "Between early 2005 and 2006, *Facebook* expanded firstly to high school networks, i.e. college students, then work networks i.e. professionals and eventually to every Internet user in general" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Twitter, which has become internationally identified by its signature bird logo, was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, an undergraduate student of New York University and was launched in July. "The service gained worldwide popularity, with over 500 million registered users as of 2012, generating over 340 million tweets daily" (Wikipedia). *Twitter* today, is one of the most used social media network by social media audience as well as media practitioners and professionals.

The importance of *Facebook* and *Twitter* in recent times cannot be over emphasized. "The Egyptian protests that led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak were organized through a complex network that combined heavy *Twitter* and *Facebook* use with other forms of interpersonal communication" (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012, p. 266). The authors explained further "During this period, access to mainstream media were variably blocked, foreign and native journalists were intimidated, and access to the Internet was controlled and eventually shut down, *Twitter*, however,

provided a continuous stream of events in real time throughout the crisis”.

Today, majority of the citizens especially the youths, prefer to access news and information with their portable devices such as smart phones, laptops, tablets, etc. Considering the new ways news gathering and dissemination have taken, social media audiences want to participate in online discussions. Social media networks enable people to post news that are relevant to them. Just like the traditional media, social media are also reliable sources of information and one advantage social media networks have over traditional media is that audience can put up important topics for discussion at will even when traditional media fail to. Most young people prefer news they can control, talk about, condemn or appreciate at their own pace. “Social media is populated by citizens looking for a free space to express their opinion” (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012, p. 196). However, some of the news that audience post on social media platforms might not all be true and verified but traditional media as part of the professional ethics, will go as far verifying the sources before they disseminate to the audience.

In some countries, there are more social media users than traditional media users. For instance, “*Facebook* is the second most accessed Website in Egypt after *Google* and there are more *Facebook* users than newspaper readers” (Spot On, 2010) in Lim (2012, p. 235). However, only the technologically savvy are on *Facebook* and *Twitter* so if journalists decide to post news on social media networks only, they will be neglecting a large and silent majority.

Social media networks have been effective especially in the political and social environment. They are used to maintain relationships, mobilize support during a political campaign and during revolts, crisis and uprisings. Lim (2012) confirms this by stating thus:

The Arab revolts exemplify how

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social online social networks facilitated by social media have become a key ingredient on the contemporary populist movements. The role of social media in the Egypt revolt can be understood through its relation to social networks and mobilization mechanisms. In Egypt's oppositional movements, social media provided space and tool for the formation and the expansion of networks that the authoritarian government could not control. Although social media helped create fertile context for revolution and were essential during the heady days of Tahrir square protest in early 2001, their ultimate role continues to play out in the unfolding future of the Egyptian revolution.

The above shows the extent to which social media could be used. On the same note Valenzuela, Arriagada & Scherman (2012, p. 302) capture the functions and uses of social media networks thus:

Social network sites have several affordances for promoting participation, particularly protest behavior among youth. They facilitate access to a large number of contacts, thereby enabling social movements to reach critical mass (Marwell & Oliver, 1993). By allowing multiple channels for interpersonal feedback, peer acceptance, and reinforcement of group norms, these sites also promote the construction of personal and

group identities that are key antecedents of protest behavior (Dalton et al., 2009). Social network sites function as information hubs that allow users to remain in contact and exchange updates regarding their activities with others that share their interests. Those who belong to social movements and political groups can thus build relationships with one another, receive mobilizing information that they may not obtain elsewhere, thus expanding their opportunities to engage in political activities (Gil de Zuniga & Valenzuela, 2011; Kobayashi, Ikeda, & Miyata, 2006). Lastly, social media are effective means for social interaction. Finding a basis for conversation and social communication, connecting with family, friends, and society, and gaining insight into the circumstances of others – all these factors can instill in young people interest in collective issues (Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zuniga, 2011).

One can go on and on to state the numerous functions and uses of social media networks but it is however evident that advanced technologies and emergence of social media networks have come to stay and to change the face of communication in this dispensation. That is why Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peters (2012, p. 145) are of the view that “The entrance of social media networks

into the NFD added a unique twist into the Global News Flow Controversy (GNFC) and that they helped to deconstruct the structure of news gathering and dissemination”. Therefore, one cannot predict the next levels it will evolve to but media audience should come to terms with the fact that the global village phenomenon that looked like an abstraction before now is very real.

Theoretical Framework

The authors used three distinct but related theories in this context to address the issues raised in this chapter. The theories are Agenda-Setting, Knowledge-Gap, and Technological Determinism.

Agenda setting theory was first introduced in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their ground breaking study of the role of the mass media in the 1968 US Presidential campaign in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. “They attempted an assessment of the relationship between what voters in one community regarded as important issues and actual content of media messages used during the campaign” (Ngoa, 2012, p. 4). The study, however, suggests that “Although there could be other interplaying factors not mentioned, the media, to a large extent, shaped the way the American public voted for certain candidates who campaigned using the issues that were given more emphasis by media houses” (Denis, 2012, p. 260).

Folarin (1998, p. 95) who classifies the Agenda-setting theory as “The Conditioning Powerful Media Theory”, defines it as “the theory that implies that mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important in a given society”. It, however, does not determine what we actually think but does ascribe them the power to determine what we are thinking about. Ekeanyanwu (2005, p. 115) is also of the view that “Agenda-setting is where the mass media is accredited with the power to set the agenda of the topics for discussion”.

McLuhan (1968, p. 204) cited in Folarin (2005) is of the view that “the press can colour events by using them in a particular

way, or refusing to use them at all". This means that it is what the media want us to think or talk about that they project to the public as an important issue and at the end of the day, it appears important in the public's eye. This theory is selected to support this paper because of certain similar key points between the theory and news flow controversy which (Folarin, 1998, p. 95) stated thus:

1. The quantity of frequency reportage
2. Prominence given to the reports through headline display, pictures, newspapers, magazines, graphics, etc
3. The degree of conflict generated in the reports
4. Cumulative media-specific effects over time
5. That the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as particularly important to the public at any given time.

On issues where the print media or central government set the agenda, bloggers are allowed a great deal of latitude to write posts that are satirical or even harshly critical of official policy, so long as discussion remains online" (Hasid, 2012, p. 221).

Agenda-setting theory (that the media have the power to shape audiences' perception about certain issues) could be related to how the international media have the power to shape audiences' perception of issues concerning the developing countries. The developing countries argue that such issues are negative. This means that the way the western press report themselves and Africa today will eventually shape the global media audiences' discernment of developed and developing countries respectively. Obviously, the representation of Africa by western media has an effect on the depiction of Africa across the world considering the fact that what we know about foreign nations is learned from the media and most people depend on the media for news.

Furthermore, the type (negative or positive) of news sourced and disseminated determines the quality and quantity of news about

the developed or developing nations in the global media. The developing countries argue that news concerning them are biased and distorted because the western media, which dominate international communication, portray to the world negative images of Africa as poor and backward. Africa, unfortunately, lack the technological capabilities to correct this negative impression of her. That is why Guest (2004, p. 6) said that “Africa, the poorest continent on earth, and the only one that, despite all the technological advances that are filling stomachs and pockets everywhere else, has actually grown poorer over the last thirty years”. This means that poverty is one key issue that has set Africa back and the West with their technological superiority predominantly portrays Africa as poor. It is because the mass media can influence audience perceptions of reality that the developing countries have insisted on their demand for a New World Information and Communication Order. This 'New Order' if properly handled and executed can reduce the international media portrayal of Africa in the negative light, and thus, balance it with positive news.

Haven established that the media have the power to set agenda for what people should think about, it would be right to say that the international media bring to the fore negative stories of Africa and thus, the audience of global media will develop poor perception about developing countries. The developing countries can change the way they cover international news. That is, instead of giving more time (television, radio) and space (newspaper, magazine) to international stories, they should rather use it to project developmental and positive stories of Africa. This will perhaps change the agenda of the international media on Africa.

The second theory that helps us discuss this chapter is the Knowledge-Gap Theory. This theory as proposed by Tichnenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) cited in Severin & Tankard (2010) suggests that each new medium (social media inclusive) increases the gap between information rich and information poor because of

differences in access to the medium and control over its use, among other factors. The authors believe that members of a society do not evenly acquire new information in that community. The implication is that people with higher socioeconomic status tend to have better access to more information than those with low-income status. In this context, information rich nations and information poor nations are the developed and developing nations respectively. Oladepo (2012, p. 137) citing Ekeanyanwu (2008) says, “The information-rich nations are those with sufficient human, natural and technological resources to exploit the production and distribution of global information. The information poor nations however, lack those resources, even for mere local production and distribution of news and information”. Folarin (2005) also noted, “The basic assumption is that as media output grows in a given society, so will the knowledge gap between the privileged and unprivileged social groups”.

Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) in (Severin & Tankard, 2010, p. 249) present five possible reasons for knowledge gap thus:

1. There is a difference in communication skills between those high and low in socioeconomic status.
2. There is a difference in the amount of stored information or previously acquired background knowledge.
3. People of higher socioeconomic status might have more relevant social contact.
4. The mechanisms of selective exposure, acceptance and retention might be operating.
5. The nature of mass media system itself is that it is geared toward persons of higher socioeconomic status.

It is evident that the socioeconomic state of a nation's citizens can influence the type and quality of news, that is why economic relevance, technological advancement amongst others

are the reasons why some countries get better coverage than others. Obviously, there exist a gap in knowledge as well as in information flow between the developed and the developing nations. Lee (1980) cited in Ekeanyanwu (2005, p. 145) explains this below:

The Knowledge Gap hypothesis describes the present pattern in the news flow controversy. He describes the present pattern in the flow of global news and information as very uneven and unequal. The pattern of flow favours rich and powerful nations and places great disadvantage on the Third World nations who are poor and less powerful.

The third theory that helps us argue our thesis in this chapter is the Technological Determinism Theory. This theory “gives users of new technology rational and discerning face” (Presly, 2012, p. 345). Presly (2012) citing Croteau & Hoynes (1997, p. 266) notes “Speak of it as an approach that identifies technological advancements as central to the process of social change which narrowly aligns with McLuhan's views that the dominant technological advancements of the era help to refocus society”.

Emergence of social media network is part of technological advancement. It has both advantages and disadvantages but our focus here is on the advantages because it outweighs the disadvantages as earlier stated. It has really changed the communication environment. It is true that the developing nations lack the technological power to produce these technologies, they can however, acquire and use them to their (developing nations) advantage.

Technological determinism theory recognizes the positive effect of technology and its wide usage by people with diverse cultures. The theory simply explains how technology do not

adulterate cultures but help in reshaping, polishing and fine-tuning them. Croteau & Hoynes (1997, pp. 266-267) as cited in Presly (2010, p. 346), however, note that:

In the technological determinist's lens, people exist only as rational employers of technology or pieces on the proverbial chessboard who will be moved by the requirements of the technologies. In other words, this view is all structural constraint and no human actions. It argues the technological properties demand certain results and that actual people do not use technology so much as people are used by them. In this view, society is transformed according to a technical, rather than a human, agenda...Nothing inherent in technologies forces us to adopt them in a particular way.

This study is concerned with what social media audiences do with social media networks and the influence on news flow controversy. Literature suggests they use it to discuss issues of concern. To buttress this, let us consider a recent event that took place in Lagos, Nigeria. The issue of “my oga at the top” and how social media networks were used to discuss how incompetent some of our leaders are. The Lagos State Commandant of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), Mr. Obafaiye Shem on Tuesday, 12 March 2013 granted an interview to *Channels Television*, Lagos. In the interview, Shem kept on referring to the Corps' Commandant General, Dr. Ade Abolurin as “my oga at the top” and failed to name the organization's official website correctly. Mass media audience on social media platforms expressed their opinions; while some blamed Mr. Shem for his incompetence,

others like Ruggedman on his *Twitter* handle blamed the team of Channels Television anchors. However, social media audience made funny jokes about it; the video was all over the platform. There were rumours concerning Shem's suspension and the wife going to Channels station to protest against the shame and bitterness the interview has brought to their family. However, on Monday 18 March, 2013, on the *Daily Sunrise News*, The rumours were confirmed to be untrue. Famutitmi (2013) noted that “Apart from hashtag 'My Oga At The Top' bearing various coinages, that has gone viral on *Twitter*, there is a music video of “My Oga At The Top” by DJ Ziggy on *Youtube*”. He further stated, “The hullabaloo about 'My Oga at the Top' joke has, no doubt, highlighted the power of the social media in driving public debate around issues in the country”.

Methods

The survey research method was used to address the research objectives and questions raised for this paper. This method provides the most effective means of collecting the views of social media network users/international communication students concerning the influence of social media networks on the Global News Flow Controversy. According to Sobowale (2008, p. 27) “The survey technique is the most commonly used by behavioural scientists and it involves drawing up a set of questions on various aspects of a subject to which selected members of a population are requested to react to”.

The population for this study was all the undergraduate students of mass communication in three tertiary institutions located in Lagos, Ogun and Rivers states of Nigeria. The institutions are University of Lagos, Covenant University and Rivers State University of Science and Technology. The three institutions were selected using the simple random technique. All the Federal, Private and State universities in Lagos, Ogun and Rivers State that offer mass communication as a course were put in

ballot system and a draw made to select one University each in each category.

After the Universities were selected, the authors purposively selected 300 and 400 level students of the three institutions who are studying mass communication for the following reasons;

1. Topics that centre on news flow controversy are included in their academic curriculum. Therefore, the respondents are believed to be able to adequately respond to the questions raised in the research instrument (questionnaire).
2. Majority of these students at this level have social media accounts on *Facebook*, *Twitter* and others. This is a prerequisite to participate in the survey.

The authors gathered the following statistics from the mass communication department of the three selected institutions: University of Lagos has 135 and 128 students in 300 and 400 levels respectively. Covenant University has 56 and 67 students in 300 and 400 levels respectively and Rivers State University of Science and Technology has 130 students in 300 level and 92 students in 400 level. Therefore, the total population figure is 608.

Fifty percent of the population was selected as sample size for the study. This amounted to 304 respondents. The selection was purposive. Purposive sampling, according to Wimmer & Dominick (2006, pp. 91-92) “includes subjects or elements selected for specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria. Furthermore, the quota sample was used to get a percentage of the population in order to get the sample size.

From each of the selected universities, 300 and 400 level students were selected purposively on the premise that they have fair knowledge of the theme of the study. They must also be active users of any social media network by possessing an active *Facebook* account or a *Twitter* handle, or others.

Results

From the 304 copies of the questionnaire that were administered, only 302 copies were properly filled and returned. This represents a high response rate of 99.4%. The gender distribution of the respondents showed that females were 197 representing 65.2% while 105 representing 34.8% were males. For the level distribution, 153 of the respondents representing 50.7% were in 300 levels while 149 of them representing 49.3% were in 400 levels. In terms of the social medium the respondents were subscribed to, 95 of them representing 31.5% subscribe to *Facebook*, 32 representing 10.6% subscribe to *Twitter*, 168 representing 55.8% had both *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts while 7 representing 2.3% subscribe to *MySpace*.

The respondents were asked if Social Media Networks had influence on Global News Flow Controversy and if those influences

TABLE 1
Respondents Perception of the Influence of SMNs on Global News Flow Controversy

Responses	Perception that SMNs have Influence on GNFC	Perception that SMNs' Influence on GNFC are high
Strongly Agree	38.7%	24.5%
Agree	56.3%	56.3%
Undecided	2.0%	12.6%
Disagree	2.3%	6.3%
Strongly Disagree	.7%	.3%
Total	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302

The respondents were further asked to state if SMNs had negative or positive influences on News Flow generally. Their responses are presented in Table 2 below:

Audience Assessment of the Type of Influence SMNs Have on News Flow

Responses	SMNs have Positive Influence on News Flow	SMNs have Negative Influence on News Flow
Strongly Agree	25.5%	23.2%
Agree	57.6%	39.4%
Undecided	8.6%	15.9%
Disagree	6.0%	15.9%
Strongly Disagree	2.3%	5.6%
Total	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302

One of the objectives of this study was to find out if the News Flow Debate is still relevant in the 21st Century with the emergence of social media networks. To capture this objective fully, the respondents were asked if the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) can be revisited and implemented and if SMNs could help portray cultures. Table 3 shows the results.

TABLE 3
Audience Assessment of the Relevance of the News Flow Debate in the 21st Century

Responses	Relevance of the News Flow Debate in the 21st century	NWICO can be revisited and implemented considering the emergence of SMNs	Social Media platforms can be used to showcase diverse cultures

Strongly Agree	44.4%	46.0%	42.4%
Agree	46.7%	39.1%	48.0%
Undecided	3.6%	8.6%	5.6%
Disagree	4.3%	4.0%	2.3%
Strongly Disagree	1.0%	2.3%	1.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	n=302	n=302	n=302

This study did not only seek to find out the influence of SMNs on the GNFC; it also considered how SMNs are affecting newsgathering and dissemination. The analysis of this finding is presented in Table 4:

TABLE 4
Respondents Assessment of How SMNs are Influencing Global News Gathering and Dissemination

Responses	Influence of SMNs on global news gathering and dissemination
Strongly Agree	29.5%
Agree	57.3%
Undecided	8.6%
Disagree	3.3%
Strongly Disagree	1.3%
Total	100.0%
	n=302

It is also important to know if social media audiences perceive social media networks as credible sources of international news and credible media for international communication. The responses are presented on Table 5 below.

TABLE 5
Audience Perception of SMNs as Credible Sources of International News and Credible Media for International Communication

Responses	SMNs are Credible Sources of International News	SMNs are Credible Media For International Communication
Strongly Agree	22.5%	22.5%
Agree	58.9%	46.7%
Undecided	5.6%	16.2%
Disagree	9.3%	9.3%
Strongly Disagree	3.6%	5.3%
Total	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302

One other major objective of this study is to find out if users of social media networks see the platform as bridging the information gap between the developing and developed nations. The responses are summarized in Table 6 below.

TABLE 4.6
Perception that SMNs are Bridging the Information Gap Between Developing and Developed Nations

Responses	Perception that SMNs bridge the Information Gap Between Developing and Developed Nations
Strongly Agree	13.2%
Agree	29.1%
Undecided	10.6%
Disagree	28.1%
Strongly Disagree	18.9%
Total	100.0% n=302

Another critical objective of this paper was to determine the tone/quality and balance of news/information that flow through SMNs from developing to developed nations and vice versa. Table 7 presents a summary of the responses.

TABLE 7
Audience Assessment of the Tone and Quality of News that Flow Through SMNs

Responses	The tone of news that flow through SMNs are balanced	News that flow from developing to developed nations via SMNs are positive	News that flow from developing to developed nations via SMNs are negative	News that flow from developed to developing nations via SMNs are positive	News that flow from developed to developing nations via SMNs are negative
Strongly Agree	12.3%	12.9%	10.6%	15.9%	18.9%
Agree	14.9	46.0	19.2	17.5	47.4
Undecided	14.2	14.6	14.9	11.3	11.6
Disagree	28.5	15.6	36.1	23.2	16.2
Strongly Disagree	30.1	10.9	19.2	32.1	6.0
Total	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302

Another objective of the study was to find out if the quantity of news from developing to developed nations and vice versa have improved since the emergence of SMNs. Table 8 below clearly answers this question.

TABLE 8
Audience Assessment of the Quantity of News Flow from Developed to Developing Nations and Vice Versa

Responses	The number of news that flow from developed to developing nations have improved since the emergence of SMNs	The number of news that flow from developing to developed nations have improved since the emergence of SMNs
Strongly Agree	15.6%	20.5%
Agree	32.1	32.5
Undecided	17.2	12.6
Disagree	21.5	19.5
Strongly Disagree	13.6	14.9
Total	100.0% n=302	100.0% n=302

Conclusion and Recommendations

Deducing from the data gathered, presented and analyzed in this chapter, it is evident that social media networks have considerable influence on the Global News Flow Controversy. Obviously, SMNs have helped to liberalize the processes involved in the gathering and dissemination of international news (global flow of news and information). This new media platform has also helped to improve access, mass participation, news interactivity, and complementary flow between the developed and developing societies. They have also aided the capacity of professionals and non-professionals alike from the developing societies to counter negative and widespread misrepresentation of the developing nations in the traditional/modern media platforms of the developed nations.

Beyond the ability to dispel some of these misrepresentations, social media platforms have also increased the capacity of developing societies and people to tell their own stories, generate their own news and disseminate same without the traditional gatekeeping managed by the developed nations for their selfish and national interests.

However, issues of technology ownership and transfer remain knotty. The social media platforms are creation of the developed world. The technology driving the revolution in this area remains a production of the advanced capitalist world that has refused to let the third world societies into the fold. To worsen the situation, the developing nations, as usual, have dived whole-heartedly into this revolution without a moment reflection of how other technological revolution in the media industry has been used against them. There is no indication that developing societies are thinking of indigenizing, remodeling, or even producing their own technology to drive social and communal interaction at whatever level so that their citizens do not become victims of another western ploy to keep them perpetually under covered or manipulate news coverage/news flow in their favour.

The analyzed data that were earlier presented have also helped to answer the research questions that were posed at the beginning of this chapter. Table 1 gives insight to the audience perception and answer to research question one while Table 3 answers research question three. For research question three, it is important to emphasize here that the News Flow Debate is still relevant in the 21st Century notwithstanding the emergence of social media networks to defuse some of the hot contentions in the controversy. Our conclusion remains that SMNs have done little to remove the agitations and highlights that characterized the global news flow in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In research question three, the respondents were affirmative that SMNs have both positive and negative influences on global newsgathering and dissemination. This conclusion is deduced from Table 4 above. This conclusion is further collaborated in a related conclusion by Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peter (2012, p. 145) that “The entrance of Social Media Networks into the News Flow Debate added a unique twist into the Global News Flow Controversy (GNFC) and that they helped to deconstruct the structure of news gathering and dissemination”.

There have been debates concerning the credibility of social media networks as news sources and channels especially as it concerns international news. This was the focus of research question four. The respondents have mixed feelings about this. The general conclusion is that SMNs cannot be trusted as sources and channels of global news without recourse to the now regarded traditional news channels. The good news, however, is that these traditional news channels have active online presence on social media platforms. CNN, Aljazeera, Channels Television for example have *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts where they tweet their headlines or post their stories. This could help counter falsehood coming from individuals on *blogs*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* etc. This conclusion also suffices for research question five on the credibility of social media platforms as media for international communication.

In research question six, the authors sought to know if the respondents perceive social media networks as helping to bridge the information gap between the developing and the developed nations. The answer is presented in Table 6 which is further supported by the conclusions in the literature and the underpinnings of the Knowledge-Gap theory which suggests that each new medium (social media networks in this case) increases the gap between information rich and information poor because of differences in access to the medium and control over its use, among other factors.

Respondents, as expected, had mixed reactions on their perceived understanding and perspectives on whether the tone of social media network news is balanced, positive or negative. The analyzed result is presented in Table 7, which answers research question seven. This conclusion flows to research question eight where respondents are of the view (as presented in Table 8), that the quantity of news from developed to developing nations (and vice versa) have improved since the emergence of social media networks.

In conclusion, we strongly argue that the following recommendations could help further refocus the GNFC in the light of emergence of SMNs on the scene:

First, developing nations should see social media platforms as fertile grounds to plant positive seeds of the African image. They should deploy the media to counter western media manipulation and misrepresentation of news about Africa and developing societies in general and make sure the danger of a single story is eliminated. The expectation is that developing societies should use these platforms more positively, especially in projecting a good image of the society's culture and values.

Second, developing nations must take specific steps to see to the development of a comparative new media technology in the developing societies. It is not enough to have access and deploy another's technology; it is better to begin to use such as

springboards to the development of indigenous African technology for the media industry.

Third, there should be a reawakening of some of the national news agencies that appear to be moribund and dependent on transnational news agencies that owned by the West. Developing nations can have transnational news agencies as well as credible news channels of international repute. This is possible. CNN and BBC (from the West) remained unchallenged until United Arab Emirates established Aljazeera that is now a credible alternative to the western dominance in the global news flow scene. A similar situation could happen in Africa. This recommendation is in tandem with MacBride et al (1981, p. 281) view that:

Strong national news agencies are vital for improving each country's national and international reporting. Where viable, regional networks should be set up to increase news flow and serve all major language groups in the different nations, the agencies should buttress the growth of both urban and rural newspapers to serve as the core of the country's news collection and distribution system. National book production should also be encouraged and accompanied for the establishment of a distribution network for books, newspapers and periodicals. The stimulation of works by national authors in various languages should be promoted...; adequate education and training facilities are required to supply personnel for media production organisations as well as

managers, technicians and maintenance personnel. In this regard, co-operation between neighbouring countries and within regions must be encouraged.

Fourth, the developing nations should address issues of their economic buoyancy to reopen the NWICO Debate for positive ends. Ekeanyanwu (2008) has argued that NWICO was a stillborn because it came before the New International Economic Order (NIEO) that was supposed to come before it. Economy is the infrastructure that must be in place before NWICO can have any positive ends in favour of the developing societies.

Fifth, African nations have social media platforms that are more local than foreign. For example, *NairaLand.com* is a platform where issues concerning Nigeria are debated. More of such platforms should be produced and promoted. Such social media platforms that are accessible by citizens at home and in Diaspora could be effectively used to correct certain negative impressions about African nations. A famous Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in one of her public speeches on TED.com once said, “One of the consequences of a single story is that it robs people of their dignity”. Developing nations have always had a single story told and portrayed by the developed nations. It is time for us to tell the world the other side of our story so we can regain and retain our dignity, culture and pride. Enough have been said about news imbalance; let us strive to get to a point where we can say enough have been done about news imbalance.

Dahir (2009) noted that “NWICO debate was generated... in an attempt to shed off some light on the negative image crystallized by the Western media strong-hold nations”. This shedding off some light on the negative image for Chimamanda, would be telling the other side of developing nations? story and in this case, SMNs could be deployed to achieve this end.

Whatever role the social media networks are now playing can only serve as palliative. Africa, to address the gulf between her and the rest of the world in news flow, must own and operate big media firms and agencies like CNN, Aljazeera, BBC, and AP respectively. This can never be wished away. One creative way to handle this is for the various governments within the African setting to pull resources together and set up such big media organisations to redress the obvious media imbalance. The government can also encourage private individuals to take up the challenge and provide initial capital, tax relief, etc. The issue here is that without an African version of CNN, Aljazeera, BBC, VOA, etc, Africa will continue to be misrepresented in the global media (Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango & Peter, 2012).

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