



VALUES AND THE NEW MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY: A CRITIQUE

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Abstract

Values are fundamental to the development and integration of societies, guiding social relations and fostering stability. They play a crucial role in shaping individuals' impulses and desires within a structured societal framework. This paper argues that values represent the moral principles, beliefs, and accepted standards of a social group. The collective aspiration of society is to advance culturally, economically, politically, scientifically, educationally, and technologically. Without societal values, these goals would be difficult to achieve. The purpose of this study is to critically examine the impact of new media on societal values in contemporary Nigerian society. It explores how digital technologies have influenced moral standards, social interactions, and cultural norms. Using an analytical and critical discourse approach, this study evaluates the extent to which new media has contributed to the erosion of traditional values and the implications for national development. The research methodology employed involves a qualitative analysis of secondary data, including scholarly articles, media reports, and theoretical perspectives on values and digital influence. This paper advocates for a reorientation of societal values to restore moral order. It further contends that to address Nigeria's political, social, and economic challenges, values such as justice, integrity, respect, trust, fairness, transparency, and honesty must be reinstated as essential criteria for leadership positions. A society governed by just, honest, responsible, and transparent leaders will, in turn, cultivate a moral and responsible citizenry.

Keywords: Values, Morality, Ethics, Society, Culture, New Media.

Introduction

Media is an essential component of society, facilitating communication, information dissemination, and social interaction. The impact of new media is profound and pervasive, shaping the nature and structure of contemporary society. The expansion of thought and ideas has been significantly influenced by advancements in science and technology (McQuail, 2010). Historically, communication relied on symbols, sketches, signs, and pictures. However, technological progress has transformed communication methods, making information more accessible and instantaneous. The internet, satellite communication, and digital platforms have revolutionized how people connect, share ideas, and engage with global information networks (Castells, 2011).

New media has democratized access to knowledge, breaking down traditional barriers to information flow. The rapid exchange of ideas has fostered intellectual growth, enhanced global awareness, and facilitated cross-cultural interactions.



However, the unprecedented ease of communication also brings challenges, particularly concerning the preservation of cultural values, ethical conduct, and the integrity of information dissemination. Social media platforms, online news outlets, and digital forums have become primary sources of information, often shaping public perception and societal norms. While they promote knowledge-sharing and connectivity, they also serve as conduits for misinformation, cyberbullying, and the erosion of traditional values (Boyd, 2014).

This paper critically examines how new media has influenced Nigerian society, both positively and negatively. It explores the role of new media in shaping, reinforcing, or undermining societal values and provides recommendations for balancing technological advancement with the preservation of cultural and ethical standards. The study employs an analytical and critical discourse approach, drawing on empirical data, theoretical perspectives, and case studies to assess the impact of digital communication on Nigeria's evolving value system.

The Concept of Values in Nigerian Society

Values are fundamental principles and standards that guide individuals and societies in their interactions and decision-making. In Nigeria, values are shaped by cultural heritage, religious beliefs, historical experiences, and socio-economic realities. While traditional values such as respect for elders, communal living, and honesty remain important, modern influences, including globalization and digital media, have led to significant changes in the value system. This essay explores the concept of values in Nigerian society, examining their traditional roots, contemporary shifts, and their implications for national development.

Traditional Values in Nigerian Society

Nigeria is a culturally diverse nation with over 250 ethnic groups, each possessing distinct traditions and customs. Despite this diversity, there are core values that cut across ethnic boundaries, shaping the moral and social fabric of Nigerian society (Adejumo, 2018). These traditional values have long guided interpersonal relationships, community interactions, and national identity. However, modernization, globalization, and socio-economic changes have significantly influenced these values, leading to both positive transformations and moral dilemmas (Olayemi, 2020).

One of the fundamental values in Nigerian society is respect for elders. Elders are regarded as custodians of wisdom and experience, and their opinions are highly valued in decision-making processes (Okonkwo, 2019). In many Nigerian cultures, addressing an elder disrespectfully is considered a grave offense, and younger individuals are expected to show deference through gestures such as kneeling, bowing, or using honorifics when speaking to them. This cultural norm fosters discipline, order, and a sense of continuity between generations (Nnadi, 2021). Another significant value is communal living, which emphasizes collectivism over



individualism. Traditional Nigerian societies operate on the principle that an individual is part of a larger community and must contribute to its well-being. The Igbo concept of “onye aghana nwanne ya” (no one should leave their brother behind) and the Yoruba philosophy of “omoluwabi” (a person of good character) reflect this deep sense of communal responsibility (Olayemi, 2020). In rural communities, people collectively engage in farming, child-rearing, and conflict resolution, reinforcing bonds of unity and shared responsibility.

Honesty and integrity are also deeply ingrained values in Nigerian culture. Traditionally, truthfulness and trustworthiness are qualities that define a person's character. Lying, stealing, and deceit are generally condemned, and individuals who uphold integrity are highly respected (Akinyemi, 2017). However, the pressures of contemporary life, economic hardship, and the influence of external cultures have led to an increase in moral decadence, with corruption and fraud becoming more prevalent (Ojo, 2022). Religious devotion is another pillar of Nigerian society. Christianity, Islam, and indigenous African religions play a crucial role in shaping moral and ethical conduct (Nnadi, 2021). Religion provides guidance on proper behavior, social responsibility, and the importance of charity and kindness. Many Nigerians rely on religious teachings to navigate personal and societal challenges, and religious leaders often wield significant influence in communities (Adetunji, 2022).

Closely related to this is the emphasis on hard work and resilience. Nigerians are known for their determination and ability to withstand hardships while striving for success. Hard work is viewed as a pathway to success, and perseverance in the face of difficulties is admired (Akinyemi, 2017). This value is evident in various aspects of life, from the bustling markets of Lagos to the farmlands of the North, where people engage in industrious activities to sustain their livelihoods (Okeke, 2023). Despite these deeply rooted values, Nigerian society has undergone significant changes due to modernization, globalization, and socio-economic factors. One major shift is the growing materialistic mindset and the rise of corruption. The pursuit of wealth has led to increased cases of internet fraud (commonly known as Yahoo Yahoo), bribery, and embezzlement (Ojo, 2022). The traditional emphasis on honesty and integrity is being overshadowed by a culture that prioritizes financial success, often at the expense of ethical standards (Ajayi, 2021).

Additionally, the erosion of communal living is becoming increasingly evident, especially in urban areas. Western influences, coupled with the pressures of modern life, have led to a shift towards individualism. People are now more focused on personal achievements rather than communal welfare, weakening the extended family structures that once served as strong support systems (Eze, 2021). Furthermore, the respect for elders is gradually declining, particularly among the younger generation. The rise of digital media and exposure to foreign cultures have encouraged a more questioning and independent mindset (Chukwu, 2020). While this has promoted critical thinking and self-expression, it has also resulted in



intergenerational conflicts, with older individuals often perceiving the younger generation as disrespectful or rebellious. Another notable transformation is the changing family structures. Traditionally, Nigerian families operated within an extended system where multiple generations lived together and shared responsibilities. However, the increasing preference for nuclear families has led to changes in parenting styles, marital expectations, and family dynamics. Divorce rates are also on the rise, as societal norms surrounding marriage and gender roles continue to evolve (Ibrahim & Bello, 2023).

Religion, which has historically been a guiding force for morality, has also been affected by commercialization and exploitation. Some religious leaders manipulate followers for personal gain, diminishing the sacred role of faith in promoting genuine moral values. This exploitation has contributed to growing skepticism about religious institutions and their influence on societal ethics (Adetunji, 2022). These shifts in values have had both positive and negative implications for national development. On the positive side, modernization has brought about advancements in education, technology, and governance (Ogunleye, 2022). Exposure to global values has encouraged gender equality, leading to increased female participation in leadership, business, and education. Furthermore, the emphasis on entrepreneurship has fuelled economic growth, with many Nigerians venturing into startups and technological innovations (Okeke, 2023).

However, there are also negative consequences. Corruption and social decay continue to hinder national progress, as ethical lapses in governance and public administration have led to economic stagnation (Ojo, 2022). The breakdown of moral values has resulted in an increase in criminal activities, dishonesty, and moral relativism (Ajayi, 2021). Additionally, the weakening of traditional leadership structures has contributed to political instability and ethnic conflicts, as younger generations challenge the authority of traditional rulers and elders (Nwosu, 2023). Traditional values remain the foundation of Nigerian society, shaping its moral compass and social interactions. While respect, communal living, honesty, religious devotion, and resilience continue to be significant, modern influences have introduced new challenges and shifts in societal norms. Balancing these traditional values with contemporary advancements is essential for ensuring sustainable national development. Strengthening ethical standards in governance, education, and social institutions will be key to preserving the positive aspects of Nigerian culture while embracing progress.

Implications of Value Changes on National Development

Values are the fundamental principles that guide individual and collective behaviour in a society. They shape attitudes, ethical standards, and decision-making processes, ultimately influencing national development. In Nigeria, traditional values such as respect for elders, communal living, honesty, hard work, and religious devotion have long been central to social organization. However, with modernization, globalization,



and socio-economic transformations, many of these values have evolved—some for the better, while others have contributed to societal challenges. These changes have profound implications for Nigeria's economic growth, political stability, social cohesion, and governance.

Positive Implications of Value Changes on National Development

One of the most significant positive outcomes of value changes in Nigeria is the increasing **embrace of modernization**. Exposure to global values has accelerated advancements in education, technology, and governance. The adoption of digital technology, for instance, has improved communication, business operations, and public administration. Educational reforms have also been influenced by modern values, leading to an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, which fosters innovation and economic competitiveness. Improved governance structures, influenced by democratic ideals and global best practices, have enhanced accountability, transparency, and efficiency in public administration (Adewale, 2021).

Another crucial benefit is the **progress in gender equality**. Traditional Nigerian society has been predominantly patriarchal, limiting women's roles in leadership, business, and governance. However, shifting values have led to increased gender inclusion, enabling women to participate more actively in politics, economic activities, and decision-making processes. Legislative efforts, such as affirmative action policies and advocacy for women's rights, have further strengthened gender empowerment, leading to a more equitable society (Ogunleye, 2022). The inclusion of women in leadership positions has not only improved economic productivity but also fostered a more diverse and inclusive governance structure.

Additionally, value changes have contributed to **entrepreneurial growth**. The shift from a predominantly subsistence and agrarian economy to a more business-oriented mindset has fuelled the rise of startups and technological innovations in Nigeria. Many young Nigerians now embrace entrepreneurship as a viable career path, leading to the establishment of businesses in various sectors, including fintech, e-commerce, agriculture, and creative industries. This entrepreneurial spirit has boosted job creation, foreign investment, and economic diversification, positioning Nigeria as a hub for innovation in Africa (Okeke, 2023). The rise of digital entrepreneurship, particularly in the gig economy, has empowered many young Nigerians to create wealth and contribute to national development.

Negative Implications of Value Changes on National Development

While value transformations have led to modernization and economic progress, they have also introduced significant challenges, particularly in the areas of corruption, moral decay, and political instability. One of the most pressing issues is **corruption and social decay**. The increasing pursuit of material wealth, often at any cost, has led to a decline in ethical values. Traditional emphasis on honesty and integrity has been



overshadowed by the normalization of fraudulent practices, such as internet fraud (Yahoo Yahoo), bribery, and embezzlement. Corruption remains a major impediment to national development, undermining governance, discouraging foreign investment, and reducing public trust in institutions (Ojo, 2022). The prevalence of corrupt practices in both the public and private sectors has stunted economic growth, widened inequality, and perpetuated poverty, as resources meant for public welfare are often diverted for personal gain.

Another major concern is the **breakdown of moral values**. The erosion of traditional moral teachings has resulted in increased dishonesty, violence, and a general decline in ethical conduct. The growing influence of social media and Western cultural ideologies has contributed to the normalization of behaviours that were previously considered unacceptable, such as drug abuse, cybercrime, and sexual exploitation (Ajayi, 2021). The emphasis on individualism over communal well-being has also weakened societal bonds, leading to rising crime rates and a decline in social responsibility. Furthermore, the decline in respect for elders and traditional institutions has created generational conflicts, as younger generations challenge established norms and authority figures.

The **erosion of traditional leadership structures** has also contributed to **political instability and conflicts**. In the past, traditional rulers played a significant role in mediating disputes, maintaining order, and preserving cultural heritage. However, the weakening of these structures has left a leadership vacuum, often filled by opportunistic politicians who manipulate ethnic and religious divisions for personal gain. Political instability, fuelled by ethnic and religious conflicts, has hampered national unity and economic progress (Nwosu, 2023). The frequent outbreak of violence in different parts of the country, including insurgencies, communal clashes, and electoral violence, is partly a result of the breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

Striking a Balance for Sustainable Development

To ensure national progress, it is crucial to strike a balance between preserving beneficial traditional values and embracing necessary modern changes. While modernization and globalization are inevitable, efforts must be made to reinforce ethical standards, social cohesion, and accountable governance. Educational institutions, religious organizations, and community leaders must collaborate to instil values such as honesty, integrity, and social responsibility in younger generations. Anti-corruption campaigns and legal frameworks should be strengthened to curb unethical practices and promote good governance. Additionally, policies that encourage gender equality, entrepreneurship, and technological advancement should be supported while ensuring that cultural heritage and social stability are not compromised.



Value changes in Nigeria have both positive and negative implications for national development. While modernization, gender inclusion, and entrepreneurial growth have propelled progress, issues such as corruption, moral decay, and political instability threaten societal stability. The challenge lies in fostering a society that embraces innovation and economic growth while maintaining ethical values and cultural identity. A deliberate effort to balance these forces will ensure sustainable development, national unity, and long-term prosperity for Nigeria.

The Role of New Media in Shaping Values

New media plays a dual role in shaping Nigerian values. On the positive side, it promotes awareness of issues such as gender equality, human rights, and environmental sustainability. Social media influencers and thought leaders use digital platforms to advocate for social justice, transparency, and accountability, fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry. Conversely, new media has contributed to the erosion of traditional values. The anonymity and freedom associated with digital platforms have led to the proliferation of cyberbullying, hate speech, and misinformation. The glorification of materialism, explicit content, and instant success narratives on social media has shifted societal priorities, often placing wealth above integrity and hard work. New media, which includes digital platforms such as social media, online news outlets, blogs, and video-sharing sites, plays a significant role in shaping values in Nigerian society. As a double-edged sword, it both reinforces and erodes traditional moral, cultural, and ethical standards. On one hand, new media promotes awareness of critical societal issues, fosters civic engagement, and provides a platform for positive change. On the other hand, it has facilitated the spread of misinformation, cybercrime, and the decline of traditional values.

Positive Contributions of New Media to Nigerian Values

Advocacy for Gender Equality and Human Rights

Social media has become a crucial tool for promoting gender equality and human rights in Nigeria. Digital platforms have given voice to marginalized groups, enabling widespread advocacy against societal injustices. The #EndSARS movement, which mobilized young Nigerians to protest police brutality, exemplifies the power of new media in shaping national discourse (Ajayi, 2021). Similarly, campaigns such as #SayNoToRape have highlighted issues of sexual violence, leading to increased public awareness and policy reforms aimed at protecting women and children (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2022). Digital activism has also fostered discussions challenging traditional gender biases, encouraging more women to participate in politics, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Promotion of Transparency and Accountability

New media has empowered citizens to demand accountability from public officials and institutions. Investigative journalism platforms like *Premium Times* and *Sahara Reporters* utilize digital technologies to expose corruption, inefficiencies, and human rights violations (Ogunleye, 2023). Through social media engagement, Nigerians



actively participate in governance discussions, exerting pressure on leaders to act in the public's best interest (Adebayo, 2020). This has led to increased political transparency, as seen in the public scrutiny of election processes, budget allocations, and policy implementations.

Encouragement of Social Justice and Environmental Sustainability

Climate change awareness and environmental activism have gained momentum through digital platforms. Nigerian environmentalists use social media to highlight pressing issues such as deforestation, flooding, and oil spillage in the Niger Delta (Oladipo, 2021). Campaigns like #SaveOurForests and #CleanUpNigeria have mobilized communities to take action against environmental degradation, influencing policy decisions and corporate social responsibility efforts. The amplification of these concerns through new media has encouraged responsible environmental practices and strengthened civic engagement.

Fostering Entrepreneurial and Educational Growth

New media has opened up opportunities for financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and professional development. Online platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn provide access to knowledge-sharing communities, mentorship programs, and e-learning resources. Digital influencers promote ethical business practices and skill acquisition, empowering young Nigerians to become self-reliant (Ibrahim & Adekunle, 2022). Moreover, the rise of e-learning platforms has expanded access to education, allowing students and professionals to gain new skills that enhance their competitiveness in the global job market.

Negative Impacts of New Media on Nigerian Values

Proliferation of Cyberbullying, Hate Speech, and Misinformation

The anonymity and reach of digital platforms have led to increased cyberbullying, hate speech, and misinformation. Many Nigerians have faced online harassment due to their ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations (Eze, 2022). The spread of fake news, particularly through WhatsApp and Facebook, has fuelled ethnic and religious tensions, posing a threat to national security (Olawale, 2023). For instance, misinformation during the 2019 general elections influenced political decisions and exacerbated societal divisions (Nwachukwu, 2020). The challenge of regulating false information remains a significant concern in the digital space.

Glorification of Materialism and Instant Wealth

The rise of social media influencers and "celebrity culture" has contributed to the glorification of materialism. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok often portray extravagant lifestyles, reinforcing the notion that wealth and fame are the primary indicators of success (Akinola, 2023). This has led to an increased desire for quick wealth, influencing some Nigerian youths to engage in fraudulent activities such as *Yahoo Yahoo* (internet fraud), ritual killings, and get-rich-quick schemes (Ojo, 2021).



The normalization of these unethical behaviours challenges traditional values of honesty, integrity, and hard work.

Decline of Traditional Moral and Family Values

Exposure to explicit content, profanity, and Western ideologies has led to a decline in traditional African values such as respect for elders, humility, and modesty. Many young Nigerians prioritize Western lifestyles over indigenous cultural heritage, leading to cultural erosion (Okoro, 2022). Furthermore, the shift towards individualistic attitudes, often promoted on digital platforms, has weakened communal bonds that once defined Nigerian society (Chukwu, 2023). This cultural shift has affected family dynamics, leading to generational conflicts between the younger and older populations.

Erosion of Work Ethic and Integrity

The instant success culture promoted by social media influencers and viral content has diminished the appreciation for hard work and perseverance. Many young Nigerians now seek overnight wealth through social media fame, cyber fraud, or illegal activities rather than through education and diligence (Uche, 2021). This normalization of dishonesty and moral compromise poses a significant threat to Nigeria's future, as it undermines the values necessary for sustainable national development.

Conclusion

The relationship between values and new media in contemporary Nigerian society is complex and multifaceted. While new media has the potential to reinforce positive values and contribute to societal progress, it also poses significant challenges to traditional values and social cohesion. As Nigeria navigates the digital age, it is crucial to balance the benefits of new media with the preservation of ethical, cultural, and social values.

Achieving this balance requires collaborative efforts from government agencies, educators, religious leaders, and media stakeholders. Strategies such as digital literacy programs, ethical media policies, and community-based initiatives can help ensure that new media serves as a tool for positive societal transformation rather than a catalyst for moral decay. By fostering responsible media consumption and reinforcing core societal values, Nigeria can harness the potential of new media to drive national development while preserving its cultural and moral identity.



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