



A Discursive Reassessment of the World Information and Communication Order: Social Media Bridged the Gap

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Abstract

The World Information Order otherwise known as the New World Information Order (NWIO) can also be referred to or viewed as the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The term or concept describes the aspirations and yearnings of the Global South for the establishing of a world where there is democratisation of the international communication system and a rebalancing of the global information flow channels. This conceptual study sought to reassess the concept in light of the development and advancement in technologies including social media – where information flow has been liberalised in diverse ways. The discourse is built around and/or aligned to a democratic liberal approach in respect of the use of social media in the digitally evolving world. The researchers argued that social media reinvigorated the quest by the Global South to ensure information flow worldwide and that is an indication of a fight for democratisation of the communication system. The study concluded that though the traditional media circle gradually tilts to all-encompassing communication and information in the world, the pace is slow and that gap created is now (in some dimension) bridged by social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (now X) and many more.

Keywords: information, communication, social media, democracy, liberal

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INTRODUCTION

Since the MacBride Commission (1980) set the pace for bringing about a transformation in the world's communication pattern aimed at bridging the glaring gap to the benefit of developing nations, debates in the direction have raged on. It is actually with a view to correct the largely skewed flow of information that the commission recommended 82 steps to be taken (Buchanan 2014). Quoting Carlsson (2003), Buchanan revealed that most of the recommendations made by the commission were not implemented. This means that there was an initiative and decisions reached but recommendations from the brilliant idea have aspects that remained unimplemented.

It is unarguable that the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) movement was, in large part, perceived to have failed, however not without certain changes been made to the pattern, flow, infrastructure and pattern of information and communication (Buchanan 2015). Mobile media have increasingly become available and accessible to people in developing countries (James 2020). This has led to a situation of less reliance on the big media of the world. In other words, there is a shifting of focus away from the more traditional media forms making the smaller mobile ones more prominent in contemporary society.

It imperative to re-emphasise that with the advent and wide adoption of the digital technologies in the millennium, the story has further changed as there is a liberal and democratised information flow across the globe; except in countries where the use of social media is either restricted or heavily regulated. Before the entrant of social media into the mix, there have been alternative arrangements in the past to address the problem of the unbalanced flow of information and communication. Alternative mechanisms have been put in place to address the challenge of domination in the flow of information, a move which led to the creation of several blocs championing economic, geo-political, ideological, strategic, and trade cause. One of such is BRICS, an association of five emerging economies of the time namely Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa.

In Nigeria, attempts have also been made to provide analysis as to why the issue remained dominant in academic discourses (Igyuve, Agbo and Olubodede 2022). Same applies to the African context in respect of the relevance of NWICO (Cong 2022; Mpuya 2025). It is even more so with the soaring popularity of the

social media space. Controversy surrounding the news flow imbalance is real as inequalities exist in the global news flow (especially as seen in the case of information flow from countries in the Global South – Africa to the developed countries of Europe and America). This imbalance and inequality is seen as a major contributory factor to why negative news and information about Africa dominate Western media reportage.

The soaring popularity of social media in global information and communication cannot be over-emphasised as platforms are said to be providing the much talked-about bridges, exactly the ones the NWICO recommendations could not achieve. Santas and Inobemhe (2021) observed that "in a world where mediated communication is fast becoming adopted, appreciated and useful, social media has become a driving force in bridging gaps and enabling information sharing" (p. 72). However, this study focused on the role of social media within the mandate of NWICO. Specifically, this study was tailored to address two objectives which were to: (1) Reassess the New World Information and Communication Order – NWICO, and (2) Examine how social media bridged the gap in the information flow imbalance or inequality.

Therefore, this study is guided by the points offered/presented herein to drive home the points on ways social media bridged the information and communication gaps between the two worlds on opposing poles, with one considered as affluent and the other as peasant, poor and struggling. By this we mean those regarded as the Global North and the others known as the Global South.

METHODS

The concepts for review under this section are NWICO and social media. These concepts require a review to place them in perspective.

NWICO. The term "NWICO" is an acronym which stands for the New World Information and Communication Order which is also referred to as the New World Information Order (NWIO) coined following a series of debates over the ways developing countries of the world were represented in the media around the 1970s and 1980s (Aliegba 2023). The term gained popularity following its use by the UNESCO Commission headed by MacBride which deliberated on the need to

quash the information and communication imbalance as witnessed in the 70s and 80s. The main agitations stemmed from the seeming underreporting of the countries of Global South, the belief that whoever has control over information largely controls the economy, and the main origin of news being Western countries (Igyuve, Agbo and Olubodede 2022).

According to Brendebach (2021), the term NWICO is a result or product of political proposal in respect of the issues concerning media and communication arising from debates on imbalance and inequalities in the 1970s. The origin of the concept or term can also be traced to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which first championed the quest to ensure a balanced flow of information and communication between the developing countries (Global South) and those considered as developed (Global North). A NAM conference was organised in Algiers; capital of Algeria in 1973 with deliberations that bordered on imbalance flow of information where it was declared that imperialism transcends economic and political environment to include social and cultural matters provoking a concerted effort to cause a change in global mass communication (Padovani and Nordenstreng 2005). One of the main areas of focus of NAM was to enhance the capacity of members states (Aliyeva 2023) and to promote the media in the Global South to guide them to produce stories fit enough for the consumption of people in Western countries (Kharel 2020).

NWICO did not just come up out of a vacuum; it was a result of protests and agitations of the developing countries that prompted UNESCO to set-up a commission from whence the christening took its base. The term has also been described as a younger sister to one organised by the United Nations in 1974 christened the New International Economic Order otherwise known as NIEO (Brendebach 2021). The primary objective of NWICO was to foster a communication concept that is equitable between the Global North and South or between the developed and developing countries (Mpuya 2025). That way, it was widely anticipated that the communication gap and information sharing and distribution gap occasioned by the unequal level of infrastructure can be bridged and a balance restored. Though NWICO is believed to have failed in most part, the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) first held in Geneva and then in Tunis was introduced in the millennium to deal with issues relating to information in the era of digital technologies.

It is, however, imperative to note that the term NWICO, NWIO and NIIO may appear in usage in this study interchangeably – largely on the account that since the concept was first coined, there has been lack of uniformity in its application. This aligns with notion of Sanjay (2017) that there is a problem of uniformity with the concept of the "new order" as the NAM nations favoured the phrase "New International Information Order (NIIO), while the MacBride Commission substituted the term "international" with "world" and placing "Communication" in the mix to now have the "New World Information and Communication Order" (NWICO).

Social Media. The term "social media" is an umbrella term for all forms of digital technologies that enable information sharing and communication in modern, unprecedented dimensions. Social media has also been described as applications that are Internet-based and rest on the framework of the technological and ideological concept of web 2.0 with which users are able to create and exchange content that they generate (Aichner et al. 2021). It is not a coincidence, therefore that social media users are able to generate content either by way of information (news) or other form of production by ways of entertainment and shared with other users at a little or no cost. Through mastery and understanding of the social media landscape and the successful use, users have shown that the platforms have potential to yield good results. In other words, social media platforms through the ingenuity of users have proven to be impressive is the results seen so far as platforms have been deployed for political (campaigns), social movements (protests) and many more (Inobemhe and Santas 2022).

Accordingly, Manning (2014) noted that new forms of media technologies that enable interactive participation is what social media is all about. In other words, social media include platforms powered by modern technologies with the capacity to allow users participate in forms of activities ranging from debates through comments and instant contributions to live events and happenings around the world. Furthermore, Grover, Kar, and Dwivedi (2022) aver that social media falls within the historical perspective of interactive age. In the present age, digital media and mobile technologies have enabled interactivity on a large scale as opposed to what was obtainable in the broadcast age where feedback was delayed, indirect, and

impersonal. The delayed feedback feature is a major characteristic of the traditional media forms prior to the digital age.

Social media also include applications or websites specifically designed to enable quick, real-time and efficient sharing of content by people – which can be accessed through smartphones and computers (Lins 2022). While certain social media platforms are built to share link and short messages (e.g. Twitter, now X), others are simply tools curated to optimise the sharing of images in form of photos as well as videos (e.g. TikTok). Various social media types include social networks (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc.), media networks (Instagram, YouTube etc.), discussion networks (Reddit), and review networks (TripAdvisor and Yelp). In this modern age and time, these are unique some of social media platforms that enabled communication and interactions across borders.

There are certain characteristics that distinguish social media from other forms. According to Manning (2014), virtually all social media (whether stationary or mobile) incorporate some sort of digital platform (even though not all digital platforms are considered social media). Inobemhe and Santas (2022) averred that the two common characteristics that help to define social media their participatory-enabled format and that of interactivity nature. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that social media allows participation. Unlike what sometimes obtains in the traditional media settings, there are no situations where social media platforms completely left the audience in passive state (though it is possible to see few cases where social networking sites such as Facebook enables passive viewing of what others are posting). In this case, users are enabled to disable comments feature preventing a situation of interactivity for a particular or content.

Another unique characteristic is that social media are participatory nature on account of being platforms that enable interactions. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that social media allows participation. Unlike what sometimes obtains in the traditional media settings, there are no situations where social media platforms completely passive (though it is possible to see few cases where social networking sites such as Facebook enables passive viewing of what others are posting). According to Manning (2014), the usual thing is a user to create a profile to gain access and this process allows for the beginning of the possibilities including interaction with other users. It is one of the most unique qualities of social media

that sets them apart from traditional media forms where personal profile creation is not considered.

The social media platforms are unique in many ways and are characteristically interactive platforms that enable online conversations (Inobemhe et al., 2024). Social media interaction is multifaceted as it is between family, friends, or acquaintances or with new people who share common interests or even acquaintance circle with related or common interests. "Although many social media were or are initially treated or referred to as novel, as they continue to be integrated into personal and professional lives they become less noticed and more expected" (Manning 2014: 1158). This implies that the users (members of the society) are acquainted with the features, the platforms and the dynamics to the point that they are not much celebrated anymore on account that the innovations and modifications are user-specific and also based on their numerous needs over time.

Review of Literature. A lot of scholarly attention has been given to NWICO and the information and communication gap. In fact, there was a period that academic writings were mostly about the issues around the information gap and international communication system. However, literature on possibilities offered by social media to bridge the gap remain scanty as the area of research can be considered relatively novel. Nonetheless, attempts is made to marry the two concepts together whilst establishing how social media being a 21st century creation has helped in democratisation and liberalisation of communication and information in a world where the computer, mobile technologies coupled with associated technologies revolutionised the way people communicate and live their lives.

Quoting Calabrese, Schmitt (2018) noted that the MacBride Commission is perhaps the first comprehensive modern attempt aimed at defining international code of information rights within the context of human rights. The commission's report in its concluding part specifically raised a three-point keynotes that communication is part of the basic human rights, and the need for freedom of information which include the right to seek, receive and impart information (MacBride Commission, as cited in Buchanan 2015). In respect of the right to seek information, Buchanan explained that it is a relatively new thing for users to have

unhindered access to variety of information from multiple perspectives (opposed to the previous single perspective i.e. that of the West). Furthermore, Buchanan commented on the right to receive information with the note that the advent of digital technologies, comes with huge amount of information – that was hitherto difficult to find, though available – however, now available and easy to locate. On the right to impart information, Buchanan also referenced the concept of citizen journalism coupled with the rise of cellular technologies as the game changers. In modern times, the Internet, mobiles phones and social media all combined to give the user a unique experience as per information access and communication at different levels.

Interestingly, one of the most significant characteristics of the social media and associated new media technologies is their ubiquitous nature (Adjin-Tettey, Selormey, and Nkansah 2022; Gatti and Procentese 2024; Hossain et al. 2020). Interestingly, there is a growth in the use of the Internet and social media in Africa – and people in the continent now use the platforms as source of new information on a larger scale (Akanbi et al. 2022). What this reveals is that with social media, people get more information than was possible some decades before their emergence and it is what has been dubbed "the social media revolution" considered to have helped bridge the information and communication gap between the developing and developed world.

Though the agitation that led to NWICO was premised on the production of news by the traditional media of developed countries with portrayal of false image for the developing countries (Igyuve, Agbo and Olubodede 2022), it is important to note that the free media (social media forms) do not really align with the traditional forms in that regard. Aside providing the grounds for developing countries to access information, social media are now veritable tools for several indices of development such as education (Ida, Saud, and Mashud 2020), mental health support (Gbenga et al. 2023), sustainable business development (Onyekwelu et al. 2021), and human development in general (Mutanda 2024). Platforms of social media help create the desired access to information especially to those in developing countries who were once marginalised in the information and communication sphere, either by way of access or adequate coverage.

International communication and information flow has witnessed dramatic changes occasioned by the unpredictable consequences that accompanied the emergence of social media in the way and manner information can be gathered and processed (Ekeanyanwu and Kalyango 2013). The foregoing is premised on the rising dominance of citizen or people-oriented journalism where gatekeeping is in shred and news unfiltered, thereby birthing a new norm where news gets from the previously docile consumers of content to others without any form of intermediary but just the platforms social media; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. However, these also raised issues relating to the danger of the lack of gatekeepers in the world of information dissemination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is based on the technological determinism theory. According to Asemah, Nwammuo, and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2022), the theory's main proposition stems from the belief that technology in any society plays a major role in defining its nature because it remains a driving force in a society as much as it determines its course of history. The foregoing is based on the postulation of Karl Max as it relates to production with the aid of technology. However, same applies to other aspect of a society including how the media evolves from analogue to digital. The importance of technology was further broken down by Langdon Winner that "the technology of a given society is a fundamental influencer of the various ways in which a society exists and changes in technology are the primary and most important source that leads to change in the society" (Communication Theory as cited in Asemah et al. 2022: 295).

Innovation, to a reasonable extent drives the world and also determines a lot of things in the affairs of men. In various dimensions, it has been affirmed that technology remains a major determinant in human activities, from communication to information sharing among many other things. According to Asemah et al. (2022), numerous examples abound as to the reason behind the assertion that technology determines the society we live and how it controls a lot of things seen therein. Furthermore, Asemah et al. (2022) aver that:

The invention of the gun changed how disputes were sorted out and changed the face of combat. A gun required minimum effort and skill to be used successfully and could be used from a safe distance. This when compared to how earlier wars were fought with swords and archery led to a radical change in the weapons used in war. Today with the discovery of nuclear energy, future wars will be fought with nuclear arsenal. (Asemah et al. 2022: 296).

It was Marshal McLuhan who once noted that we are in an age of technology – never experienced before with new electronic media changing our experience of the society we live in. In like manner, social media is changing the packaging and dissemination systems of news. Journalism is mostly affected both as a profession or practice and as an institution. News delivery systems also was based on the analogue technology before the invention of cable news and then in modern times, technological advancement has brought about social media and the Internet where websites and blogs can be used as vehicles/channels for news delivery to a vast audience scattered across different geographical locations.

Technological determinism fits into the theoretical base for this study as it sought to reassess the NWICO debates and the role social media has played in changing the imbalances in information flow. It is also chosen as the theoretical foundation for this study because according to Asemah et al. (2022), technological determinism theory can be "applied to studies on social media, new media and information and communication technology" (p. 300).

A Look at Controversies Surrounding the News Flow. This controversy, in fact, is the main crux of the NWICO mandate. According to Sanjay (2017), majority of scholars traced the origin of new international information and communication order to the cold war era, coupled with the awakening of the Third World consciousness at some point in the 1950s. The main contentious issue borders on how a handful of media-rich countries determined the nature and kind of news and information flow between nations. The researcher noted that early 20th century NWICO debates were contentious, particularly because media-rich nations exploited international news operations for their own benefit, undermining the interests of Global South media.

Another important aspect of the issues in respect of agitations has to do with the international news agencies' monopolisation of the news space. As observed by

Sanjay (2017), since the inception of the international news agencies, practices that are termed monopolistic in the business have remained ever-growing. It is on record, as revealed by the researcher, that the first target of the big European news agencies were their home regions which came under their stiff monopoly before an extension of it to regions that fell within the influence of their home countries through the famous cartel agreements of the 1870s. Schmitt (2018) also referenced a shift in the international news agency hegemony from Europe to America. Quoting Cooper, the researchers noted that the shift provided America a position at the table of big international news agencies but the impact was not on a global scale as the barriers seemed further entrenched in different dimensions. Furthermore, the researcher revealed that the cost of procuring cable technologies and transmission, hostility mainly led by Western actors coupled with politics played major roles in the unabated global news flow barriers as non-Western countries could not afford to acquire the needed technologies manufactured in the West.

Continuing on the line of the cartel of the 1870s, Sanjay (2017) noted that there was an unequal relationship among the cartel members where for example, Reuters owned by Britain controlled a territory vast enough that it extended to the British Empire which spread across Africa, America, Asia, Australia and other European territories which by implication covered almost one-fifth of the globe. The researcher also made reference to how Reuter wielded influence with its extensive network that was bolstered by virtue of Britain's control over transoceanic cables which became instrumental in its status as the world's most powerful news agency bar none.

The controversies surrounding the monopoly continued to receive attention especially from the United States of America. In fact, by the 20th century, the monopolisation of the international news business by the European triumvirate was challenged or attacked by increasing voices, mainly led by the US, whose fortunes changed by the end of World War I, moving from a largely indebted country to a lender at the time (Sanjay 2017). Furthermore, the researchers captured the changing landscape of the international news business that:

Its increasing control over transoceanic cables and an expanding media at home provided the much-needed muscle power to its agencies to

challenge the European cartel. Many in the US have come to realize the advantages that accrue from the international news business. At this juncture, the AP synthesized its commercial interest with diplomatic interest of the US by stressing how the Reuters, through European news cartels, controlled all foreign news sent into the US, and all American news to the rest of the world, and how such practices promoted Britain's interests while affecting the interests of both the US and the AP. (Sanjay 2017: 37)

It was in 1934 that the AP ceded from the cartel and solely ventured into the business of news collection and distribution around the world ushering in a new regime which saw the United States dominating the landscape for several years to come. This is seen as one of the epoch-making periods of time, as it can be likened to a military overthrow in the international news business and consequently the news flow.

A Reassessment of the Nwico. Though the NWICO debates held in the 1970s and 1980s are somewhat over, there are signs that the arguments are still very much fresh, and technology has played a huge role in new ways. It was, indeed, borne out of the desire to ensure a balance in international communication and information flow. In other words, the debates sparked as a result of the seeming imbalance in the global information flow and a communication process considered non-liberal. In order to do a reassessment of NWICO, it is imperative to look at the concept of international communication and information flow vis-à-vis the progress made so far in respect of its principles and recommendations.

In its simplest form, the concept of "international communication" could be seen as a communication process between two or more national and cultural systems (Furomfate and Sokari 2023). It may be a communication at the international level between two similar or dissimilar cultural systems, nations or regions. Sanjay (2017) emphasised that though the ground realities are different, it is at the behest of nations to assume any role in the process. In other words, certain nations can be consumers while other may be producers depending on the choice and the wherewithal of the nation in reference.

The above painted picture is the case at both the communication and information flow levels. The status of any nation or its institution is more of a complex one than imagined. Sanjay (2017) pointed out that the status of any nation and its media institution in system of international news flow is a product of the

destiny of that particular national media system, and this is based on its owners' performances as it could be either that of consumer-buyer or producer-distributor. This is similar to the arguments put forward as to how America took over from Britain in the news flow controversy. A nation's ability to establish its own newsgathering, production and transmission infrastructures is a product of its economic powers and capabilities. In other words, economics of a nation determine its media capacities. This could easily materialise in a nation's ability to acquire necessary technologies to gather, produce and transmit information over a short or long distance. In line with the foregoing, Sanjay (2017) averred that needless it is to emphasise the importance of the technology factor in the international communication process, and as to why those with access to modern communication tools have assumed the status of producer-distributor of media content or products.

It is also on record that in the 1960s, UNESCO was somewhat used as a willing tool by nations with producer-distributor status for the promotion of media contents or products and associated technology. Sanjay (2017) corroborated the foregoing with the assertion that UNESCO became a willing tool when it released its proposition in 1961 that "for each 100 inhabitants of a country, the minimum standard be, at least, 10 copies of daily newspapers, 5 radio receivers, and 2 television sets" (p. 38). Furthermore, the researcher explained that due to the lack of requisite technology, manpower and financial resources to actualise the foregoing proposition, the emerging nations of the time automatically assumed the consumer-buyer status of the big Western media (who assumed producer-distributor status). Therefore, the new nations became consumer of content produced and distributed worldwide in terms of hardware and technology, and software programmes.

The domination continued for such a long time – even as seen today, there are still signs of it everywhere in the media of Global South countries. However, in modern times, cultural domination is glaring, as seen in media content. Relatedly, Sanjay (2017) itemised the implication of such domination that: (1) It was at the prerogative of the agencies to determine the nature of news flow in the global community, north and south. (2) Consumers of news the world over were conditioned to have a world view based on the prism of the agencies as provided in

their reports. (3) International news flow was, to a great extent, one-way, straight to the developing nations from those considered developed. (4) Since the flow is one-way, there was huge underreporting of countries in the Global South as they lack the wherewithal to tell their story from their point of view. Therefore, even the reporting they got was negative, as they were presented in a bad light by the big agencies that controlled the news flow.

As seen above, the consequences of the spread of Western media hegemony were grave. Chiefly led by the US media and the rest of them, it became expedient for countries, especially new and emerging nations, to complain about the negative effects of the international communication monopoly witnessed in the 1970s. Again, Sanjay (2017) noted that the US took a preeminent position in the scheme of things together with her allies and caused what many feared as a threat to their national sovereignties through various means, including the export of US indigenous cultural products such as books, films, TV programmes, and magazines.

Furthermore, Sanjay (2017) revealed that these were fused with a perceived growth of a new kind of imperialism, 'cultural imperialism', as well as a promotion of one-way flow of information from the US to the rest of the globe. Based on the foregoing anomalies, the following factors, according to Sanjay, are at the base of the demand for a new order in the field of information: (i) the new nations that emerged following the dissolution of the colonial empires at the end of World War II. (ii) The economic relationship between the new nations and the Western industrialised ones is described as asymmetrical, which was considered camouflaging because while strengthening the latter's power and wealth, it was seen to have entrenched dependency of the new nations not just on the economic front but also that of culture and politics. (iii) The cooperation of the emerging nations under the umbrella of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as a response to the aggressive bloc-building by the US and the USSR. (iv) The reawakening of the consciousness of the new nations, which led to the realisation that their underdevelopment was based on dependence on rich nations, coupled with the resolve to take assertive actions to correct imbalances in world trade and commerce, and cultural exchanges. (v) The gaining in strength by the new nations and their commitment to international organisations such as the UN and UNESCO

According to Sanjay (2017), the events that led to NWICO have been categorised into four clear stages, with the first being that of 1973-1976, which was

referred to as the evolution era of the new order, a period which saw its emergence. The period from 1976 to 1979 is the second era during which the focus was on the accumulation of data and empirical evidence to give credence to the new order demand. The publication of the MacBride report in 1980 is regarded as the third stage of the evolution of the order. The fourth stage is the period that witnessed the adoption of the NWICO resolution in the UNESCO, and the creation of International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) in 1983, and the US pulled out from UNESCO a year later exactly on December 31, 1984 and withdrawing its financial support following what has been tagged a constant waging of war against NWICO till it collapsed (Ekeanyanwu et al. 2013).

In modern times, the goals of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) have become more inclusive, involving organizations like UNESCO, the ITU, the OECD, and the IPDC, along with increased participation from Global South entities. This shift underscores that achieving an equitable information and communication landscape requires not only institutional efforts but also a collective awareness among individuals. This includes understanding rights to information, the need for diverse media representation, and the vital role of technology in shaping societal narratives.

In the digital age, empowering communities to contribute information is crucial. Bridging the digital divide involves not only access but also creating a culture where every voice is respected and valued. We must adopt a transformative approach that emphasizes ethical communication and acknowledges local knowledge. Achieving the ideals of NWICO requires a collective effort to foster awareness among individuals from diverse backgrounds. The challenge is to ensure these goals resonate with both international organizations and grassroots communities, promoting a balanced information order.

Social Media: A Bridge to The News Flow And Communication Imbalance. The issue of NWICO has dominated discourses in the academic circle for over 5 decades, starting from the 1970s through the 1980s and even as recently as the millennium. No doubt that technology has been responsible for the elimination of certain barriers to even information flow between the Global South and North. In a way, one such technology bridging the digital and access divide is social media

(Singh and Zerger 2021). It is even so that there is more access to educational, mobile health, and financial services in rural communities in modern times than at any other time in history, and it is social media that leads in this regard. Aside from enabling information flow, social media has also been instrumental in economic empowerment, mobilisation of public opinion, organising protests, election monitoring, as well as monitoring and reporting of corruption.

Information sharing has seen a new dimension in social media era (Ma, Meng, and Ma 2021; Masele 2021; Wang et al. 2021). It suffices to state here that in ways that have stunned the world, social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Digg, MySpace, etc.) are transforming information-sharing and communication that industries and news media are finding the space challenging. Prior to the new challenging times, traditional media organisations simply gave out information with the expectation that people would just go through them and read; however, modern technologies, chiefly led by social media, are changing the way news is packaged. In the same vein, the traditional media of the West is losing grip on the control of news or information flow due to the majority of people's access to platforms in contemporary society.

Social media has fundamentally transformed the News Flow Debate (NFD) in ways that were previously unimaginable. As a result, the dynamics surrounding various arguments have undergone significant changes, shifting away from a landscape that favors a democratised information flow and a more liberalised communication process. This transformation is crucial because it highlights how information is not just disseminated but also contested and restructured in a rapidly evolving digital society.

Ekeanyanwu et al. (2013) pointed out that the advent of social media introduced a distinctive twist to the narratives associated with the global news flow controversy. Unlike traditional media, which often operated within rigid structures, social media platforms have disrupted conventional methods of news gathering and dissemination. By enabling users to participate actively in the news-making process, these platforms have effectively deconstructed established hierarchies and empowered audiences in unprecedented ways.

Furthermore, social media platforms are increasingly being recognised as informal news institutions. They serve not only as conduits for information but also as "pervasive agents of globalisation as well as democratisation," as emphasized by

Olajide and Samuel (2022). This characterization underscores their role in facilitating the rapid and widespread sharing of information across national and cultural boundaries, enabling diverse perspectives to emerge in the public discourse.

In addition, Azzaakiyyah (2023) highlighted the importance of social media, also referred to as social networking sites, in supporting the social interaction needs of individuals. These platforms have revolutionised the way people engage with news and each other, transforming static broadcast media monologues—where one entity communicates information to many—into dynamic social media dialogues that allow for back-and-forth interactions among millions. This shift creates an environment where audiences are no longer passive consumers of information but active participants in discussions and debates, reshaping how we perceive news and its implications in our lives.

The impact of social media on the News Flow Debate cannot be overstated. The increased accessibility of information and the ability for anyone with internet access to share their insights and experiences have led to a more pluralistic media landscape. However, this democratization of information also brings challenges, such as the spread of misinformation and the potential for echo chambers—where individuals only engage with information that reinforces their existing beliefs.

Consequently, while social media enhances the ability for rapid information exchange and diverse viewpoints, it also necessitates a critical approach to information consumption. Audiences must navigate this complex landscape with discernment to distinguish credible sources from unreliable ones. As we continue to explore the evolving relationship between social media and the News Flow Debate, it becomes clear that understanding this intersection is vital for fostering informed public discourse in a globalised world.

Findings of a research by Ekeanyanwu et al. (2013) revealed that even the in the United States of America the mainstream traditional media have embarked on a gradual shifting away from mainstream international news coverage and reporting to one that has taken on a global media with national outlook. Media organisations in the country all attempt to keep their teeming social media audience informed through alternative channels away from the usual concentration on cable

technology. In line with the point raised by Ekeanyanwu and Kalyango (2013), there are several ways through which social media has had influence on international news flow; such are discussed in the paragraphs below:

One of the most unique contributions of social media to international communication and information flow (especially in the area of newsgathering and reporting) is that it enables mass participation in the process. Accordingly, Ekeanyanwu and Kalyango (2013) revealed that with social media platforms, virtually everyone in the new mix feels the process because they are part and parcel of it. The new feeling is so because the audience used to be seen as passive consumers of content, but are now active content creators (Bleier, Fossen, and Shapira 2024; Inobemhe and Santas 2021; Schee, Peltier, and Dahl 2021; Talabi as cited in Igyuve et al. 2020). What social media have done is encourage those who used to be the audience to be active participants (journalists) just by owning a phone or computer, coupled with access to an Internet facility.

In a unique way, social media has bridged the gap created in international news flow controversy because they come in handy, are ubiquitous, and are affordable. Before now, the news audience would need to afford a satellite system to be able to catch up with global happenings as packaged by Western media. However, with social media and alternative platforms to broadcasting, audience members in all parts of the world can now keep up with their favourite media organisations at any point in time. It also provides an opportunity to carry on with busy schedules because social media also serves as a good archival platform, as the audience is able to see news at the time of their choosing (convenient time). Put in a different way, the audience members have the flexibility of visiting their favourite news websites or social media platforms to see news as they choose and at the time of their choosing as well.

It must be stated that the traditional media organisations in Western developed countries, such as Europe and America, have attempted to create news delivery systems through the Internet that allow interaction, coupled with the advent of social media, which has made things more simplified. Another advantage of social media is that it has made news more interactive, leading to the creation of an open conversation system (Ekeanyanwu and Kalyango 2013). Unlike the old ways of just disseminating news to the Global South, social media, by virtue of their nature, now provides opportunities for newsmakers and their audience to engage in

open conversation on areas of common interest. On ways such possibilities aid the news process, Ekeanywanwu and Kalyango (2013) opined that "the interactive nature of such social media platforms also stretches the news a bit so that credibility challenges may be reduced as many different sources could confirm or refute an angle of the twist to the news" (p. 155). Therefore, the interactive and open source available in international news streaming on social media platforms provides a good source of credibility, as those familiar with authentic versions of news are at liberty to make input. That way, the problem of fake news peddling will also be fought and won by news lovers.

On a final note, the concept of citizen journalism promoted by social media platforms empowers the citizens of the Global South to package content and tell the world their story from their perspectives. In addition, local media organisations can now also make use of social media as alternative channels to reach a wider audience. For example, news packaged by local Nigerian television stations such as Independent Television (ITV) or Channels Television can now be accessed by people in Europe and America through various social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and many more. In other words, social media networks broaden the horizons of local media organisations as they can be seen and heard clearly by a more heterogeneous audience, something previously made difficult due to the technological gap between the Global South and the developed world.

CONCLUSION

On this basis of the discourse as presented above, the researchers conclude that though the NWICO debates may have fizzled out somehow, there is an underlying impact on the arguments as put forward through the 21st-century social media inventions and the powers they wield. In other words, the arguments and the debates, somehow, have an impact on the future of innovations as seen in those involving new media and associated technologies – social media, gaming, virtual reality, and so on. On a massive scale like never before, access to information and communication tools is made easier with better experiences on the part of the users and independent content creators in modern times, thereby providing a bridge of

some sort to rebalance information flow and access to communication tools. It is also part of the conclusion of this study that the new media technologies create a window of opportunity for engagement like never before, as newsmakers and audiences now can find a common ground to dwell on issues that require attention with respect to media content. On this note, a network is built where newsmakers, newsmen and women, as well as their audience, can interact. Such interaction that hitherto took the form of "letter to the editor" is now immediate and made possible in an affordable manner, all thanks to social media. With just an Internet-enabled mobile device and access, users can interact with one another from any part of the world, making communication and information sharing easy and interesting.

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