

Assessment of New Media and Media Access in the Digital Environment

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Abstract

Digital technologies over the years have significantly changed and affected how information is created, accessed, and shared in the modern world. In recent times, internet-enabled devices, social media and digital platforms, have become essential to everyday communication. This study examined the relationship between new media and media access within digital environment, particularly in developing societies. The study focused on how digital platforms such as social media, mobile devices, and online information channels affect access to information, participation, and communication patterns. Data were collected from respondents within areas of Lagos State, specifically Iyana-Ipaja and, findings indicated that new media had greatly improved the speed and access to information and encouraged more users being involved. The study also encountered challenges such as inadequate internet infrastructure, high data costs, and limited digital literacy found, limiting equal access for all users. The study concluded that while new media expanded media access, some structural and socio-economic factors continue to limit a greater mass of the general population participating. The study recommended that improvements in digital infrastructure and to promote digital literacy to enhance inclusive media access.

Keywords

new media; social media; digital divide; digital literacy; information access



I. Introduction

Digital technologies over the years have significantly changed and affected how information is created, accessed, and shared in the modern world. In recent times, internet-enabled devices, social media and digital platforms, have become essential to everyday communication. These have over time reduced the use and dependence on traditional media, which majorly supports one-way communication such as newspaper, radio, television. It has also been observed that digital platforms have changed traditional media structures through the active engagement of users in information communications than remaining passive in their communication (Aondover et al., 2025).

Media access refers to the ability of individuals to obtain, use, and participate in media systems through digital tools such as smartphones, internet services, and online platforms. Though access to media has been improving rapidly, there is still no equal access to media around the world. UNESCO (2021) reported that factors such as income level, education, and geographical location continue to determine access to digital technologies. In developing countries like Nigeria, poor internet infrastructure, high cost of data, and limited digital skills remain major barriers to effective media access (NCC Report, 2023). The increase in reliance on digital platforms also shows issues that surround the digital limitation due to inaccessibility. According to Okoro & Nwankwo (2022), inadequate access to digital tools affects participation in education, governance, and economic opportunities. These imbalances affect how different people engage new media and determine the limit to which they benefit from digital provisions (Vitalis et al., 2025).

This study investigates how new media impacts media access, especially with the growth of developing societies. The study aims to understand the opportunities provided through new media, the reoccurring challenges of accessing digital platforms, and the wider implications for communication, participation, and development.

1.1 Problem Statement

Though there has been growth in the development of digital technologies, access to new media is still unequal partial in certain areas and this has created gaps in participation and exchange of information. While many individuals rely on social media and online platforms for communication and information, a substantial amount of people are still unable to access the benefits of these technologies due to economic and infrastructural constraints (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019).

In Nigeria, majority of the low-income earners and rural populations experience limited access to internet connectivity and digital literacy, which affects their use of new media platforms (NCC Report, 2023). Even though among the youth, who are the most active users of digital platforms, unstable networks and inability to afford internet access have limited their consistent access (Adekunle & Afolabi, 2022). These challenges have made it essential to examine how new media influences media access and identify the factors that limit equal participation.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to examine the impact of new media on media access. Specifically, the objectives were:

1. To examine how new media platforms have influenced access to information.
2. To assess the level of media access among users of digital platforms.
3. To identify challenges affecting effective access to new media; and
4. To examine the implications of the digital divide on media participation.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Concept of New Media

New media refers to digital communication tools or devices and platforms that have been developed with the growth of the internet, mobile technologies, and interactive software. Unlike traditional media, which mainly sends information on a one-way trail like television, radio, and newspapers, new media allows for two-way communication, user participation, and content creation (Olapade, 2022). Through channels such as social media, blogs, online news portals, streaming services, podcasts, and mobile applications, users can both receive and create information (Kurfi et al., 2021; Mojaye & Aondover, 2022).

These platforms enable users to not only receive information but also to create, share, and engage with content in real-time. One unique feature of new media is its interactivity, which allows users to respond immediately and engage in a 2-way communication. One other important feature of New Media is the ability of media to converge or intertwined, where content flows easily across different platforms and devices, making information more accessible to a wider audience. These features have improved communication practices by encouraging more interactions, global connections, and increased public participation (Aondover et al., 2022). However, unequal access to digital

technologies indicates challenges about the inclusion and equal participation in the digital world (UNESCO, 2021).

2.2 Functions of New Media

New media is an important player in modern communication as it fosters interaction, information sharing, and promotes social engagement (Aondover et al., 2025). It enables users to search for content that fits their specific needs, such as information, entertainment, and social connections (Okoro & Nwankwo, 2022). One of the theories associated with the study, The Uses and Gratification theory highlights that users are not passive recipients of media; they actively choose platforms and content that meet their personal and social goals. Also, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory explains how new media technologies fit in, into daily life, and change how people communicate, learn, and engage in society (Ibrahim, 2021; Aondover et al., 2023).

Through social media, blogs, and streaming services, new media helps increase information exchange, instant feedback, and cooperative engagement, which encourages the culture of participation.

2.3 Benefits of New Media

New media offers many benefits that have changed how people communicate, access information, and interact in society. Users are able to engage media to satisfy their need to access information, social interactions and entertainment (Okoro & Nwankwo, 2022; Aondover et al., 2022). This active engagement allows users to decode information personally, making communication more relevant and faster. The availability of digital platforms increases learning opportunities and awareness, and better decision-making personally, and professionally. It also helps individuals connect with communities, share ideas, and organize themselves for collective action. Also, it strengthens global connectivity, enhances marketing and business platforms, and supports digital growth, which shows it many benefits to the world today.

2.4 Empirical Review

There have been several studies which examined the relationship between new media and media access. UNESCO (2021) shows that though global digital access has increased, there is still significant differences in access to media between developed and developing countries. In Nigeria, smartphone usage has increased, especially among youths, making social media a major source of information (Adekunle & Afolabi, 2022). Although, challenges like high cost of data, unstable internet services, and low digital literacy have continued to limit access to new media (NCC Report, 2023). Also, Eze (2023) observed that though digital platforms improve participation, local communities still face infrastructural challenges that restrict full access. Similarly, Okoro & Nwankwo (2022) found that university students heavily rely on digital platforms for their studies but face problems related to cost and inconsistent internet service.

Although previous studies have examined digital engagement, infrastructure challenges, and digital inequality, there is limited research that integrates these factors to examine how new media directly influences media access and participation within specific urban and semi urban communities in Lagos State. Most studies either focus on youths, rural populations, or national statistics without combining user experience, access level, and participation patterns in a localized setting.

Therefore, this study fills this gap by examining the combined influence of new media on access to information, identifying practical barriers, and analyzing how socio-economic factors affect participation among users in Iyana Ipaja, Lagos.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework connects three major communication theories that explain the basis for understanding the extent to which new media has expanded communication processes, user engagement, and societal interaction patterns. These theories are: Diffusion of Innovation Theory, Uses and Gratification Theory, and the Network Society Perspective.

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory, proposed by Everett Rogers (1962), explains how new ideas, practices, and technologies spread within a social system over time. This theory states that individuals adopt media gradually through five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. In the context of new media, this theory helps to analyze how digital tools like social media platforms, mobile apps, and online communication technologies become popular among users (Maradun et al., 2021).

More researches also show the importance of perceived usefulness, ease of use, trialability, and observability in determining users' willingness to adopt new digital innovations. The theory also categorizes adopters into groups innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards which helps explain the different rates of adoption across demographic groups. This theory helps to understand how digital innovations increase and the factors that influence their adoption rates.

This theory was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), and brought attention from just media content to the active participation of the audience in choosing and using media that meets their specific needs. This theory suggests that individual intentionally select media channels based on the gratification they seek.

The understanding of the theory in new media research shows that people use digital platforms for various reasons, including entertainment, information-seeking, personal identity formation, social interaction, and convenience (Okoro & Nwankwo, 2022). With the rise of social media, interactions and user-generated content have broadened the range of gratifications available to audiences. Users can now participate in content creation, self-presentation, community building, and real-time communication. This theory is relevant to the current study as it helps explain why individuals choose new media platforms and how their preferences affect their usage.

The Network Society Perspective was introduced by Manuel Castells (1996) and argues that modern societies increasingly revolve around digital networks rather than traditional social systems (Onyejelem & Aonover, 2024). This theory views information and communication technologies (ICTs) as very crucial in shaping economic systems, political engagement, cultural production, and everyday social interactions.

Hence, media connection has become a very important source. Individuals, institutions, and communities with better access to digital networks have more opportunities to participate in global information flows (Eze, 2023). New media technologies promote decentralization, real-time communication, and merges geographic boundaries, which enables users to form relationships, share information, and influence social outcomes. The network society provides a comprehensive platform for understanding how digital communication tools reshape interactions and broaden communication processes in today's society.

III. Research Methods

The research design is the plan, structure or strategy of investigation deemed appropriate to provide answers to the research questions. The study adopted a survey research design. This design was suitable because it allowed the researcher to gather first-hand information directly from respondents on how new media affects media access. The survey design also made it possible to gather information on users' experiences, perceptions, and challenges associated with digital media access.

The population of the study consisted of users of new media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), YouTube, and online advertising channels. Generally, users of social media, online news portals, and mobile applications within urban and semi-urban areas of Lagos State, with Iyana-Ipaja used as the case study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 180 respondents for the study. This method was appropriate because it gave every user an equal opportunity of being selected, thereby reducing sampling bias and ensuring diverse opinions.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect the Data. The questionnaire was divided into sections, answering each of the research questions. The questions were designed in plain and easy-to-understand formats to enable respondents provide accurate responses. The questionnaires were distributed both physically and through online channels such as WhatsApp and email. This combined method ensured a higher response rate, as respondents could choose the convenient method for participation.

Simple percentages and frequency tables was used in analysing the data collected. Each research question was addressed using descriptive statistics, enabling the researcher to interpret trends and patterns in consumer behaviour as influenced by new media advertisements. The questionnaire was reviewed by academic experts to ensure clarity and relevance, establishing its face and content validity.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	82	49.7%
Female	83	50.3%
Total	165	100%

The table shows that respondents were almost evenly distributed by gender.

Table 2. Age Distribution

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25	68	41.2%
26–35	59	35.8%
36–45	26	15.8%
46 and above	12	7.2%
Total	165	100%

All larger number of the respondents fall between ages 18-35, which shows that majority of the respondents are young and digitally active.

Table 3. Frequency of New Media Usage

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	132	80%
Weekly	21	12.7%
Occasionally	12	7.3%
Total	165	100%

This tables shows that most respondents are frequent users of social media with higher percentage on daily.

4.2 Analysis Based on Research Questions

Research Question One:

How has new media influenced access to information?

Table 4. Influence of New Media on Information Access

Item	SA	A	D	SD
New media makes access to information easier	95	48	14	8
I rely on new media for news and updates	102	40	15	8
Information is accessed faster through new media	110	38	11	6

The majority of respondents agree that new media influences their access to information. This also shows that digital platforms provide faster and easier access to news and updates, and shows the important role of new media in information dissemination.

Research Question Two:

What is the level of media access among users of digital platforms?

Table 5. Level of Media Access

Item	SA	A	D	SD
I have regular access to the internet	88	47	20	10
I can access new media anytime I need information	84	49	21	11
My device supports easy access to new media	96	42	18	9

Most respondents have regular access to the internet and suitable devices for accessing new media. This suggests that there is high level of media access among the respondents, although some still have limitations.

Research Question Three:

What challenges affect effective access to new media?

Table 6. Challenges Affecting Access to New Media

Item	SA	A	D	SD
High cost of data affects my access	104	39	15	7
Poor network connectivity limits usage	98	53	27	13
Lack of digital skills affects effective use	72	12	6	2
Power supply challenges affect access	90	46	18	11

The findings reveal that high costs of data and poor network service are major challenges affecting access to new media. Also, limited digital skills and power supply issues also restrict effective use of digital platforms.

4.3 Research Question Four

How does the digital divide affect media participation?

Table 7. Digital Divide and Media Participation

Item	SA	A	D	SD
Not everyone has equal access to new media	108	39	12	6
Income level affects access to new media	101	42	15	7
Educational background influences media use	93	43	16	8

The table above shows that most respondents agree that differences in income and education contribute to unequal access to new media. This also shows that the digital disparities affects individuals in participating more in media, especially among different groups in society.

4.4 Summary of Findings

1. The study revealed that new media has significantly improved access to information by making communication faster and more convenient.
2. It also showed that most respondents have regular access to digital platforms, although challenges such as high costs of data, poor internet connections, and power supply issues are still a limitation.
3. The findings show that the differences access to digital which is majorly influenced by income and educational background affects equal participation in media activities.

V. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, the study concludes that new media plays a key role in expanding access to media in the modern society. Digital platforms have also made it easier for individuals to obtain information, communicate, and participate in social activities. Though access to new media is not evenly distributed as several socio-economic and infrastructural factors continue to limit effective usage for some groups.

While new media shows great potential for promoting inclusive communication and participation, this best used of new media can only be fully realized if challenges such as

high costs of data, poor internet infrastructure, and low digital literacy are properly addressed. Dealing with these challenges will help to ensure that the benefits of new media are more accessible to a wider population.

Recommendations

1. Government and relevant stakeholders should invest more in improving digital infrastructure, particularly internet connectivity in underserved areas.
2. Internet service providers should adopt measures to reduce the cost of data services in order to improve affordability for users.
3. Educational institutions and relevant organisations should promote digital literacy programmes to equip users with the skills needed to effectively use new media platforms.
4. Policies aimed at reducing the digital divide should be strengthened to ensure equal access to new media technologies for all segments of society.

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