

FOREWORD

I am deeply honoured to be asked to pen a brief forward for this admirable, highly insightful and timely volume. Nigeria is a country of immense importance in the contemporary world; the changes that take place in the individual lives, in the villages, towns and cities of this vast, populous and heterogeneous country are felt not just regionally in West Africa but across the continent if not the world. In this collection of scholarly papers the authors consider the various ways in which the emergence and penetration of digital media into the public and private spheres, life-worlds and communicative practices impacts upon the production, flow and consumption of information in Nigeria.

Scholars have long-debated whether digital media (or for that matter any technology) can directly change and transform social practices or whether such technology simply facilitates prior-existing desires and allows us to do what we want to do, but do it better. Some argue that the widespread use of a particular technology such as digital technology will drive a society in a particular direction. It is argued that digital technology can be used to encourage development and bring about societal-level transformation. However, if countries all over the world use the same technology then they will gradually converge as the technologies shape them and they slowly lose their distinctiveness. Other scholars assert an opposing view that technologies do not drive societies or us individually. Rather technologies are developed, deployed and locally appropriated for specific intents and purposes that were present before to the technology, we use technology to do our bidding and there is no inherent drive or logic that affects anything beyond its immediate use. From this perspective we are in charge and we deploy digital technologies to achieve our self-interests (at an individual or societal level).

Whatever the perspective adopted, the dramatic insertion of digital communications technology since 2000 when (as is noted in the introduction) only 0.1% of the population were online to the current situation in which over 46.1% are online into Africa's most populous country has had a dramatic effect not just for those online but for the entire population. Whether the technology itself has wrought change, or whether the technology has afforded Nigeria and Nigerians the tools to enact their desires, the impact has been substantial. Used in the manner it has been, digital media has influenced aspects of life way beyond its immediate use. Directly connected or not digital media has influence upon multiple aspects of people's lives in Nigeria.

In this volume, the authors address the various facets of this impact or influence. This may be the news people receive that shapes their understanding of politics, the awareness of disasters and emergencies within and without the country; how those who engage in reporting and packaging the news are trained and understand their role or how digital media is used in the planning and dissemination of health information.

Such understanding is vital to engaging and dealing with some of the complex and extremely trying issues facing Nigeria in the 21st century and how those in power seek to address these issues. Indeed, the manner in which Nigeria faces 21st century problems will be widely felt across the continent and world. Academic volumes such as this serve to render understanding of complex issues, the manner in which they are dealt with and the myriad of ways in which digital media is being used to advance the interests of Nigerians, Nigeria and the wider world.

Professor Marcus Leaning FRSA,

School of Media and Film,
University of Winchester
UK