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The New Media and Capacity Building: Frontiers

[1]Godson O. Okafor , [2]Harry Obi-Nwosu
(PhD Hallam) Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: godsono.okafor@unizik.edu.ng
(PhD) Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: ho.nwosu@unizik.edu.ng

Corresponding Author:
[1]Godson O. Okafor

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore a psychological perspective to the use of the new media in capacity building. The new media refers to internet based avenues of exchange of information, news, knowledge and skills. Capacity is conceptualized in this paper as the ability of any individual to receive and/or retain knowledge and information which enables that individual to effectively undertake mental or physical tasks in an efficient and effective manner. Capacity building (as used in this paper) entails improving on already existing capacity, and this is done primarily through learning and restoration of biological integrity where there is defect. This expansion of horizon is most times dimensional and directed towards particular areas of need. Notwithstanding recent developments in the use of the new media in medicine and engineering, from the standpoint of the analysed theories, short comings of the new media seem apparent: the drive theory of social facilitation explains that sophisticated skills and complex information that require complex cognitive processing may be difficult to inculcate through the new media. Also the instrumentality theory as applied rests the potential of the new media to enhance capacity on the preferred reward system of media content generators, and their value orientations. These among others, strongly suggest that the value of the new media in capacity building is being over gauged. The paper opines that while the gains of the new media should be exploited to the fullest, emphasis should be stressed on capacity development which is significantly independent on the social media.

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Key Words Capacity building; Capacity development; New media, Frontiers

Introduction

The media are avenues of exchange of information, news, knowledge and skills; they are avenues of communication, which is a primary characteristic of the animal species that engender survival within an ecosystem. Its methods and styles differ from species to species but certainly, a commonality exist which is that through communication information, knowledge and skills are transferred from older ones to neonates (younger one and the less skillful), and feedbacks are obtained. Hence, intrapersonal, interpersonal and

intergroup communication, together define learning which is a cardinal determinant of the level of adjustment of individuals to an ecosystem (society or environment). In this connection, communication and psychology are married, and the inevitability of understanding how the avenues of communication operate becomes obvious.

The objective of this paper is to explore a psychological perspective of the use of internet based avenues of information exchange, news, knowledge and skills, commonly referred to as the new media in capacity building. This paper will employ a definitional approach, and in logico-deductive manner express the possible applications and frontiers of the new media in capacity building.

Capacity

Capacity refers to the maximum ability of an individual to receive or retain knowledge and information, or to [effectively] function in mental or physical tasks. It is the potential of an individual for intellectual or creative development or accomplishment (APA, 2007). It is sometimes used synonymously with ability; defined as competence to perform a physical or mental task, which could be innate or acquired. Ability is more closely related in meaning to capability which may be defined as possession of able qualities: the possession of talent, know-how, and facility that can be put to constructive use. As an adjective, capability refers to 'ableness' and efficiency in performance of specific tasks.

Capacity also describes the frontiers of ability and capability of an individual, not directly related to immediate or definite state and act (as with ability and capability), including those resources the individual may not be aware that he or she possesses. Capacity is usually a product of biological and environmental factors combined.

However, capacity is conceptualized in this paper as the ability of any individual to receive and/or retain knowledge and information which enables that individual to effectively undertake tasks which can be mental or physical in nature in an efficient and effective manner. It is simply the potential of an individual for intellectual and creative accomplishments and/or development.

Biological Basis of Capacity

Three main biological factors bear direct influence on capacity development: genetics, the nervous system, and the glandular system. Pesser & Smith (2001) record that genetic research through twin studies have shown that some consequential characteristics are heritable, especially certain aspects of intelligence (for example verbal reasoning, clerical speed and accuracy, and language use), and personality (e.g. active, vigorous, impulsive and sociable). Obviously, intelligence and personality are directly and positively related to knowledge acquisition, problem solving and adaptability. On the other hand, genetic abnormalities definitely make impact on phenotypic expressions, that is, not withstanding how little alterations in genetic chemistry may be, it will surely affect the bearer's overall adaptability. Obvious cases of genetic aberrations (chromosomal abnormalities) like the Down's syndrome, Klinefelter's syndrome and others, manifest severe mental and physical health challenges as the case may be. These directly impact cognitive and physiological functioning hence adversely affecting the potential for information acquisition and processing, intellectual, and creative development and accomplishment: which adversely affect capacity.

The nervous system, especially the central nervous systems has been acclaimed to be the core determinant of 'humanness'. Biologists and evolutionary theorists hold that the major difference between primates and Homosapiens is found in the anatomy and physiology of the central nervous system, and executive functioning, control over muscular-skeletal system and even primary needs and drives depend on the functionality of different parts of the central nervous system.

The brain monitors and regulates the body's actions and reactions, it continuously receives sensory information and rapidly analyses this data and then responds, controlling bodily actions and functions. The brainstem controls breathing, heart rate, and other autonomic processes that function independent of consciousness. The neo-cortex is the centre of higher-order thinking, learning, and memory. The cerebellum is responsible for the body's balance, posture, and the coordination of movement. In effect, the brain (and CNS) holds the ace for capability and capacity development. It is plausible that human capacity may not be

fully tapped in the immediate generations especially if it is considered that the brain contains about 50 - 100 billion cells (neurons) which interact with each other through as many as 1000 trillion synaptic connections.

Unfortunately, in spite of being protected by the skull, suspended in cerebrospinal fluid, and isolated from the blood stream by the blood-brain barrier, the delicate nature of the human brain makes it susceptible to many types of damage and disease (Wikipedia, 2010). The most common forms of physical damage are closed head injuries such as a blow to the head, a stroke (CVA), or poisoning by a wide variety of chemicals that act as neurotoxins. Infection of the brain is rare, but very serious, with susceptibility to degenerative disorder, multiple sclerosis, and Alzheimer's disease. Also, a number of psychotic conditions including schizophrenia and depression are widely believed to be caused (at least partly) by brain dysfunctions (Obi-Nwosu, 2011). These inadequacies and dysfunctions degrade the functionality of the brain and ostensibly reduce capacity.

The endocrine glands also contribute to stability and response to internal and external stimuli hence are implicated in capacity development. To cite but a few examples, hormones of the thyroid gland support metabolism, therefore directly impact on nourishment of the body and energy level; those of the Anterior pituitary among others, stimulate growth (Somatotropic hormone), those of the Adrenal cortex (steroid hormones) regulate water balance, energy expenditure, and assist in stress response. Obviously, the functions of these hormones prepare and sustain the body's physiology for learning and adaptation, hence contribute significantly to capacity development.

Hormonal dysfunction from the foregoing will then translate to dysfunction in the body's apparatus responsible for learning, adjustment, and task performance. These have the ability to significantly decrease capacity.

Environmental Contributions To Capacity Development:

Both physical and more importantly, social environments do affect capacity development. It has been suggested that positions in the womb differentially affect child features latter in life, for example height

(Pesser & Smith, 2001). Diseases, maternal accidents, and habits (including drug habits) also have consequential effects on the anatomy and physiology of the child, and such effects which may involve the central nervous system (as in foetal alcohol syndrome) adversely affect capacity development.

In the context of psychological study of maladaptive behaviors, psychologists have sought to understand the extent to which the social environment affects children and adolescents. Citing Luther (1999) and Mcloyd (1998); Phares (2003), holds that socio-economic status (SES) is a major determinant of differences in children's mental health: for instance, many types of psychopathology are higher in children from lower SES families in the US, but it appears that the effects of poverty are even more severe for mental health of African American children than children of other races and ethnicities. "In addition, the connection between children's mental health problems and lower SES may be mediated by harsh, inconsistent parenting and more severe stressors in the children's lives" (pp 24)

Lower SES is a pre-cursor of poor housing quality, poor dieting, reduced likelihood of attending good schools (secondary/tertiary education), as well as good healthcare. Consistent with deductive reasoning, motivation for learning, knowledge and skill acquisition that require investment of scarce resources may be quite low. Creative reasoning might also be hampered by frustration and allied psychological states, further encumbering capacity development.

The adult whose childhood/adolescence was marked by such 'deprivation' might also have had an encumbered social environment: lack of care and love, exposed to aggression and abuse/exploitation, and confused values, definitely has reduced resources for coping with the demands of creativity. He/She has low capacity but may possess special skills for dealing with specific problems or performing well in specific trades, that is, capability may still be high.

Evidently, education (formal and informal) is the most specific environmental determinant of capability, and the most important facilitator of capacity development. Education is the inculcation of desirable behavior from one person (or group) to another or others in a methodical manner. It involves the exposure of the less/uneducated one to pre selected set of stimuli and showing him/her way(s) to respond to the stimuli (and

similar ones) to serve personal or group purposes. Education promotes learning, adaptation, and motivation for improvement on already achieved levels of adaptation.

Capacity Building

At this point, it becomes incumbent to make a distinction between capacity building and capacity development. Capacity development as used here represents the creation of a 'potential' state of readiness which if 'ignited' would accrue desirable results. It refers to the process of accumulation of mental and physical efficiency by an individual up to the time of assessment, while capacity building as used here implies addition to already existing status, with a view to enlarging/improving mental and physical efficiency. Capacity building therefore means to increase already existing level of information, knowledge, and skill, to accommodate current and future adjustment needs, that is, to increase innovative problem solving and creativity, especially along specific domains or dimensions. In this sense, just like the foundation of a physical structure determines what weight it might carry, the developed capacity of an individual determines the quality and amount of additional information that could be imbibed (extent capacity may be built). Indeed, there are individual thresholds, and preferred domains of capacity building.

The New Media

The new media (also referred to as the social media) are all the internet based avenues of information exchange, news, knowledge and skills. They are technologies that mediate human interaction. With advancing web and mobile technologies, social media are ubiquitously accessible and are enabled by scalable communication techniques. Ekeli & Enobakhare (2013) define social media as a group of new kinds of online media that share most or all of the following characteristics: Participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. For Kaplen & Haenlein, (2010), social media are all the internet based applications that build on the ideological multi-faceted and technological foundations of web2.0 and allow creation and exchange of user-generated content. Okafor & Okoye (2015) explain that the social media is

part of the online interactive communication platforms generally referred to as the New Media which generally manifests in on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere and on any digital devices, as well as interactive user feedback, and creative participation. Another aspect of the New Media is its real-time generation of new, unregulated content.

The definitions above sufficiently highlight the characteristics and qualities that differentiate the new from the "old" media. The major ones being: interactivity, openness, creation and exchange of user generated content, and community. Interestingly, the old media which appear to be losing patronage was designed for professionalization: to inform the public about facts and important events, provide for diverse viewpoints, serve as society's watchdog and protect government and state institutions, and promote changes that engender development with unwavering commitment (Rolnick et al, 2007). In this connection, Ekeanyanwu & Kalyango (2013) argue that the international communication arena, especially the areas of information flow and agenda setting has undergone dramatic changes because of the unprecedented fallouts from the social media on the processes and procedures of communication. The authors believe that the social media has significantly altered the international communication scene leading to what they described as people journalism or citizen journalism.

People journalism is best understood in line with the foregoing descriptions, as unprofessional journalism, free floating or unguarded/indiscriminate release of information, news and knowledge, and the usurpation of the power to set agenda by the people. People journalism may also be referred to as citizen journalism, which was defined by Rosen (2008) as what occurs when the people formally known as the audience employ press tools in their possession to inform one another. Radsch (2013) was more elaborate saying that it is an alternative and activist form of news gathering and reporting that functions outside the main stream media mostly as a response to shortcomings of the later, that harnesses similar journalistic tools but is motivated by different objectives and ideals, and relies in alternative source of legitimacy. It is based on the public (people) playing active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information (Bowman &Willis, 2003).

The salient point here is that the people (individuals in people journalism and the media houses in professional journalism) who determine what is news worthy or what agenda to canvass do that based on their perception of the world, motivation, knowledge, and indeed their own capacities. The new media is not automatic in production of information or knowledge. It is as well not metaphysical or catholic in dissemination. It also has targets. Based on the features of the new media, it becomes clear that the new media can be useful in the process of human capacity development and capacity build in general.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will draw it's foundation from these two theories: the Drive Theory of Social Facilitation, and the Instrumentality Theory.

The basic tenet of the Drive Theory of Social Facilitation posits that when an individual performs a task, the effect of an audience or coactions increases that individual's arousal levels, which in turn increases the emission of dominant responses in the individual's responses repertoire. If the task is simple or well learned, then the dominant responses are likely to be mostly correct, and the audiences or coactions effect results in an improvement or enhancement of performance, but if the task is difficult (complex) or inadequately learned, the wrong responses are likely to predominate and the effect is an impairment of performance (Colman, 2003). This theory emphasizes the place of feedback from the audience in enhancing performance (reinforcing behaviour) or otherwise. Hence, positive responses from the audience lead to improved or sustained emission of the behavior. The razor end however is that this is true only for simple tasks or those that could be well learned not complex tasks or those that are not well learned. It follows therefore that some issues necessarily generate audience responses that are not correct but probably appropriate to the level of information from the performer (in this case the journalist).

If this is logical, then it is plausible that people journalism has some serious flaws. It is arguable that for complex tasks that require specialized information and technical knowledge, as is often the case with

analyses of social, political and economic agenda, relying on people journalism (the social media) may be counterproductive. Audience positive responses may be predicated on wrong or insufficient information and increasing performance (going ahead with consequential decision) based on such feed backs may become catastrophic. A ready example is the current situation in Libya where the new media was used to build citizens' capacity for rebellion and the adverse effects were never contemplated.

The instrumentality theory on its part postulates that a person's attitude towards an event will depend on his or her perception of its function as an instrument for bringing about desirable or undesirable consequences. This theory may be appreciated better ''within the context' of the valency-instrumentality-expectancy theory, an industrial organizational theory, which according to APA (2007), postulates that the level of effort exerted by employees will depend on a combination of three variables: (a) the expectancy of employees that effort will lead to success on the job, (b) the belief of employees that success will lead to particular outcome (instrumentality), and (c) the value of those outcomes (valence). Accordingly, numerical value can be obtained for variable (a) using the subject probability estimates for employees, then for variable (b) by measuring the correlation of performance to rewards, and for variable (c) by asking employees to rate the desirability of their rewards. The motivational force or the amount of effort an employee will expend can then be calculated.

This implies that one's responses to a stimulus predicate mostly on the level of anticipated reward or rather to the measure of stimulus' potency to either solve a problem or facilitate the overcoming of an obstacle to actualizing a goal. A person is almost always likely to jettison (avoid) any stimulus that is potentially harmful (undesirable or goal blocking), or seek to destroy it where possible. Accordingly, this theory portrays the media as instruments in the hands of operators for the actualization of their goals. If operators perceive a particular outlet as most likely to enable the achievement of desirable outcomes, they will patronize it, and antagonize/reject the one(s) perceived as potential obstacles or anti-desirable instruments. In this connection, the new media (the people' media) must be popular because it enables people (mostly as individuals) to gain desirable consequences. However, it is plausible that the content generators may be

manipulative, and the recipients may either be gullible or at least share some characteristics in common with the content generators.

The New Media and Capacity Building

Capacity building was defined earlier as increasing already existing levels of knowledge, skill, and information to accommodate current and future adjustment needs. This aligns quite well with the definitions offered by World Customs Organization (WCO) that sees capacity building as activities which strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills, and behavior of individuals and improve institutional structures and process such that the organization can efficiently meet its mission and goals in a sustainable way.

Internet based avenues have been deployed extensively in education and political mobilization. In education, distant and online learning and exchange of information have so blossomed that many seem to think that everything education is now possible through the internet, people including academics share research experiences, ideas, and professional information through these avenues whether the ‘open’’ access ones, or specially created internet community media that require registration and pass words to access. The speed and reach of these media and the comfort of access, joined with the volume of information available at a click unquestionably fascinates every connected person. Information accessed through these avenues contribute to capacity building at such levels as; self-help skills, social skills, work related skills, and general problem solving through provision of solutions to simple and/or very serious questions.

However, from the standpoint of the analysed theories, short comings of the new media seem apparent. The drive theory of social facilitation highlights the likelihood that many operators (media content generators) are motivated by public applause and popularity (audience feedback), and the desire to set agenda/sustain public applause, hence they must live up to their own perception of what the audience desires. For simple tasks, the dominant response partners are mostly correct, leading to enhanced performance. This could be true for simple research and uncomplicated professional and social issues. In these cases, the new media would be expected to assist in building capacity since majority of operations would be conversant with such tasks (they are the content generators).

Although a report of how a group of online gamers successfully mapped the structure of enzyme M-PMV believed to be responsible for HIV replication in just three weeks of playing 'foldit': a game that prompts players to break down the model of three-dimensional protein structure (Coren, 2011) seems to indicate that complex issues may be handled through the new media, since the game was purposefully created to incorporate human reasoning into decoding process, it is logical that close contact players of the same experience might have decoded same earlier than three weeks. More importantly, the 'game content' was not ''people generated', such reports may therefore not invalidate the claims of this theory in the arena of science. Nonetheless, current breakthroughs in Nano-medicine and other high-tech simulations processes made possible by digital technologies in Engineering and in the Sciences generally tend to question the validity of the assumptions of this theory that the new media technology can only serve simpler purposes.

For social, political and economic issues, it is obvious that the more complex (multifactor) an issue is, the less the number of people who may master all perspectives become, therefore the likelihood of irrational and rationalized opinions from the social media become high, leading to impairment of performance (wrong or inadequate responses). The recent devastation in Libya and other North African countries readily come to mind again.

However, efforts must be made to ascertain the quality and extent of information that was made available from the beginning. That is, whether every information needed for a clearer understanding of the situation, as well as the likely consequences of every action was made available to all the people before assessing the rationality or otherwise of their opinion and actions.

It has been observed that the new media is assisting in no small measure in improving accessibility to health care services and in particular, counseling. Available evidence shows that this is more so for less complex procedures. For instance most of the available literature on successful application of on-line counseling/psychotherapy are on neurotic conditions, and application of the simpler forms of intervention like CBT, forms of psycho-education, and psychodynamic therapy (Anderson, Bergstrom, Buhrman et al,

2008, and Anderson and Cuipers, 2009). Morrissary (2009), expressed reservation over the standard of counseling delivered through the media.

No wonder Giles (2005) as quoted in Ekeli & Enobakhare (2013) asserted that in a country as polarized as Nigeria, with multifaceted problems, the people needs the skills of professional journalists, as well as their experience (expertise) to give vital information necessary for the populace to take good decision that can unite and prosper the country.

Summary and Conclusion

Capacity development depends on the interplay of biological and environmental variables. Anatomical or physiological aberrations substantially limit capacity since heredity, status of the nervous and glandular systems, sensory modalities and even the musculo-skeletal system determine what an individual can carry, and to what extent he/she may experience the environment. These biological variables and structures define adjustment frontiers (capacity) within a given environment. If the integrity of the biological systems is not in any way compromised, learning (and adjustment) becomes easy and one develops higher overall capacity.

Capacity building (as used in this paper) entails improving already existing capacity, and this is done primarily through learning and restoration of biological integrity where there is defect. This expansion of horizon is most times dimensional and directed towards particular areas of need. Hence additional skills or knowledge in communication language may be required to build one person's capacity; while for another it is anger management, or numerical reasoning, since it is directed at presenting or anticipated challenges. This also applies to institutions. Content and paradigm of capacity enhancement required by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) obviously differ from what is required by the Joint Military Task Force against insurgency.

The new media can, and do contribute significantly to capacity building in several domains and at different levels. However, the drive theory of social facilitation explains that sophisticated skills and complex information that require complex cognitive processing may be difficult to inculcate through the new media. Also the instrumentality theory as applied, rests the potential of the new media to enhance capacity on the preferred reward system of media content generators, and their value orientations. This theory by extrapolation implies that facilities of the new media at the disposal of psychopaths/sociopaths tantamount to enhancement of destructive tendencies (negative capacity building). Again, there are limitations posed by the capacity level of the individual media content generator.

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