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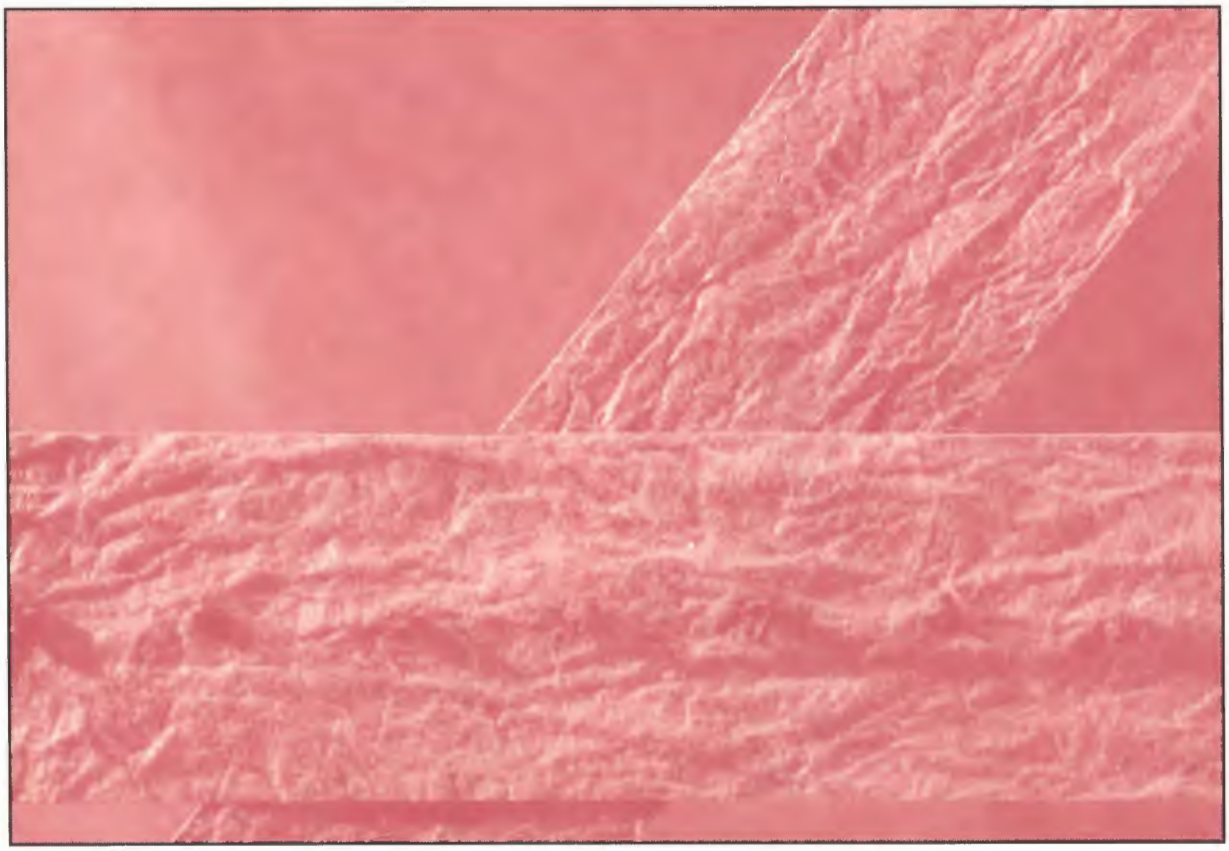

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ICTs and Human Development in Nigeria: Forging a Nexus

David Imhonopi, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

Ugochukwu Moses Urim, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

Friday Abaye Igbadumhe, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

ICTs have successfully changed the social, economic and political spaces globally. Through globalisation, ICTs have reduced the world to a global clan and assumed a cyclopean force driving human civilisation by the scruff. The impact of ICTs has virtually diffused through all sectors, forcing technological changes and creating a culture of dependence on technology. In Nigeria, the presence of ICTs has become ubiquitous and its knowledge has deepened. However, the use of ICTs for human development purposes has remained grossly limited. ICTs have only been co-opted for the creation of web portals, email addresses, B2B, B2C interactions and for inconsequential undertakings. The use of ICTs for educational and manpower development, knowledge transmission, health education, research and development, medical treatment and others for human development purposes is yet embryonic. This may not be unconnected with the byzantine socio-economic crises like spotty power supply, moribund infrastructure, witless political leadership, lack of priority in investments by the state, endemic official corruption and a host of challenges facing the Nigerian state. To assume a pole position in the present knowledge economy, Nigeria needs to find that nexus between ICTs and its human development needs. This study is cast against the backcloth of the Diffusion of Innovations and Human Development Theories which support the diffusion of ICT-enabled human development programmes in Nigeria to realise true development. This paper argues that the political leadership in Nigeria will benefit more at a fragment of the cost when it adopts ICTs in catalysing its human development programmes. In addition, resolving some of the embedded social and ethical problems facing the country will free resources for the government to invest massively in ICTs that could help it leap-frog its human development challenges and improve the lives of its citizens.

Keywords: *Human Development, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Innovation, Nigeria, Political Leadership*

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INTRODUCTION

The role of information and communication technologies in redefining social relations, hurrying the linkage between individuals and institutions within the intricate and global geo-political space leaves no room for incredulity. Vast swathes of human populations, divided along ethno-cultural and geographical lines, have been united in an intriguing interconnectedness enabled by ICT tools. This must have informed the postulation that ICTs have succeeded in reducing the globalised cosmos to a global clan (Imhonopi & Urim, 2011a & b; Okafor, Imhonopi & Urim, 2011). Through ICTs, the world has become greatly interconnected, interdependent and without borders (Salawu, 2008). Spence & Smith (2009) argue that ICT is quickly changing the world, creating a distance-less and borderless world of instantaneous communication. Increasingly, too, ICTs are becoming more affordable to those Collier in Spence & Smith (2009) tag the "bottom billion" or "next billion' or "bottom of the pyramid", thus empowering the world's poorest and offering them, at the same time, massive opportunities and possibilities that were considered mere Shangri-la many years ago. ICTs through globalisation or globalisation through ICTs has continued to drive human civilisation by the scruff. A corollary of the hegemonic posture of ICTs in the global society is typified by the patent dependence of the social structure on technology. Put differently, social institutions have willy-nilly paid obeisance to the powerful gravitational pull of technological changes and this is predicted to continue ad infinitum.

The irresistible evolution and rapid diffusion of ICTs in societies even labelled traditional, developing and satellite, have been considered as an instrument that can crystallise human development on different seminal fronts. Studies therefore have been initiated to investigate the role ICTs can play in stimulating human development in such important areas as education, maternal and infant health, community health, income redistribution, poverty eradication, employment generation, better standard of living and higher quality of life for the world's poorest populations (Anyansi, Onianwa, Akpaida, Idiakheua, & Ebegba, 2012; Dasuki & Abbott, 2010; Sesan, 2009). Thus, ICTs have been seen to have much potential to create opportunities and possibilities for growth and development in traditional, pre-industrial or industrialising societies. Since the 1990s, drawing from the works of Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, the strictly GDP-based economic development construal supported by the modernisation approach has been gravely challenged. Communities of modern academics, economists, social researchers and policy makers have been forced to conceive and interpret development as it affects the human population in every country. Thus, relying on strictly GDP, GNI and other statistical figures to pontificate or theorise development is misguided, insufficient and even absurd. Until development translates into human development, resulting in positive Human Development Indices, development becomes amoebic or better still theoretic. In Nigeria, for instance, it is not enough for the representatives of government to bandy figures suggesting that the country has continued to experience economic growth without pointing to how this growth has affected the education, health, income potentials, standard of living and quality of life of Nigerians.

Consequently, this paper seeks to find that nexus between the unstoppable ICTs and the role they could play in directly or indirectly crystallising the human development needs of the Nigerian peoples. Resting on the Diffusion and Innovation cum Human Development theoretical paradigms, the paper seeks to investigate the role of ICTs in stimulating human development in Nigeria, identify drawbacks to effective ICT-driven human development initiatives and proffer solutions that could quash these deep-seated social conundrums.

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