

FOSTERING THE AFRICAN VALUE OF HOSPITALITY THROUGH THE NEW MEDIA: ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Mark Omorovie Ikeke, PhD

Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy,
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

drikeke@delsu.edu.ng

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Abstract

African Hospitality which is one of the most vibrant forms of orality is currently challenged by violent and predatory forces from the new media. African hospitality is shown in the form of the presentation of kola nuts, welcoming, and habitation of strangers, sharing of meals, telling of stories at moonlight, communal festivities, and so forth. The new media has produced a great deal of good but some aspects of it have also been used by antihuman forces to create terrorist attacks, violent behaviours, illicit sexual predation, pornographic images, rugged individualism, internet fraud, and cybercrimes. The new media and creative industries in their electronic forms create an interactive community and on-demand content on the go which can foster wrong examples. The new media is filled with reports of persons who have committed terrorist attacks and violent crimes as a result of influences from the internet. Some on-demand content dehumanizes the human person. Amid all these Africans through their orality especially hospitality can help re-direct online conversations to promote humanism and hospitality to persons and groups met online. This can be a vital way for Africa to contribute to the new media. The critical method is used here to interpret the value of hospitality and how it can be promoted through the new media to enhance healthy and ethical flourishing. The paper finds and concludes that African hospitality can help to curb and abate some antisocial behaviours coming from the new media.

Keywords: Orality, New Media, Religions, Ethics, and Creative Industries.

Introduction

The new media has come with a lot of ethical challenges that impede the moral and social well-being of society. In traditional media which is constitutive of radio, television, films, and a few others, it was easy to know the source of information and even subject it to vetting before it is offered to the public. In the traditional media, because information demanded often came later and not on demand, it was

easy to control it. Through the new media, people can on their own for instance sitting in their rooms send out false or damaging information to the world. It is easy through the new media to pass on terrorist messages, commit cybercrimes and perpetuate sexual crimes such as child pornography and so forth. These and many others make the new media very challenging. Yet the new media is here to stay. Humans should not retreat from the forces of the new media. But the new media need to be informed and influenced by moral and positive values that will help to make it healthier for social and human flourishing.

The above is what informs this piece. The central thesis of this piece is that a cardinal value and virtue that can inform the user of the new media to make it healthier for human flourishing is the African value of hospitality. It is argued here that hospitality is a form of orality and has a place to play in the new media. Written from a philosophical ethical perspective the work will discuss and argue for the value of African hospitality. Viewpoints from other philosophical perspectives will also be used to buttress this value of hospitality. The terminologies that inform this work are examined first and foremost. Thereafter the ethical challenges of the new media are examined. It should be noted that there are many aspects of the new media such as characteristics of the new media, the function of the new media, and so forth that will not be examined in this work as they are not the focus of this work. The African value of hospitality and how it can be used to inform the new media is the concern.

Terminologies

The new media refers to contemporary means of communication that arose especially with the advent of the internet and computer and these means include Facebook Twitter, Youtube, blogs, podcasts, PDAs, etc. The Free Dictionary (2016) defines it simply as: "The internet and other postindustrial forms of telecommunication." Iowa State University (2016) writes that:

It's difficult to define 'new media' well. The term has actually been used since the 1970s by researchers conducting social, psychological, economic, political and cultural studies of information and communication technologies.... But as the field met with enormous growth in the 1990s - as CD-ROM and Internet technologies became popular - its meanings changed significantly.

The just mentioned university state that listing the new media as DVD-video, steaming media, DV editing, HTML, web applications, and CD-ROM does not even resolve the issue as technologies are constantly changing (2016). One

characteristic of the new media is that it is very interactive and easily brings information on-demand. In today's world, you can immediately get news and information through online newspapers and sources and smartphones as the events are taking place. Davis (2016) states that new media means: "The forms of communicating in the digital world, which is primarily online via the Internet but also publishing on CDs and DVDs. It implies that the user obtains the material via desktop and laptop computers, smartphones, and tablets. Every company in the developed world is involved with new media."

While it is true that the new media is different from traditional media and the mass media, the fact remains that today whatever content that is available through the mass media and traditional media is often available on-demand and immediately through new media forms because of the spread of the internet and ICT. Some of the challenges posed by the mass media are equally challenges that are coming from the new media as will be noted later. The new media is often contrasted with the traditional media which includes radio, television, film, and other forms of communication before the advent of the internet.

Another important concept to define is African hospitality. The adjective African is used here to show that this is a predominant value and practice among Africans and even Africans in the Diaspora. The hospitality shown in ways of life such as communal living, solidarity, the extended family system, Ubuntu, Ujaama, and humanism pervades African life. It is not used to show that it is present only among Africans. Every culture and people has its forms of hospitality. The basic dictionary definition of hospitality as defined by Chambers (1994) means: "friendly welcome and entertainment of guests" (p.808). The dictionary reveals that it comes from the root Old French word, *hospital* which comes from Late Latin (*hospitale*), which in turn comes from *hospes*, a guest. Hospitality can come in the form of recognizing the value and dignity of other humans and showing them kindness, welcome, generosity, friendliness, love, and help. As Olikenyi (2001) indicates it involves a mutual and reciprocal relationship that involves mutual giving and receiving. Olikenyi (2001) argues further that: "It should be emphasized...that the goal of hospitality is not the fulfillment of social obligations that go with it, but rather the establishment and maintenance of a cordial relationship-a relationship that promotes human welfare" (p. 85).

To speak of African hospitality is to infer that this value is predominant amongst Africans and pervades their lives and culture. Africans have their unique ways of showing hospitality such as the presentation of kola nuts to the guests and the receiving of the kola nuts by the guests, exchange of greetings, sharing of a meal,

the warm welcome of strangers to the community, communal life of sharing and the affirmation of the humanity of others.

Ethics is concerned with the critical study of right and wrong behaviour. Asogwa (2012) thinks and rightly that ethics examines human conduct in the light of right and wrong from the perspective of natural reason. Fieser (n.d) says: "The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. Philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics" (par. 1). It examines the fundamental basis of why humans behave the way they do and what should be acceptable behaviour. Not every form of behaviour is acceptable in society. Ethics is a major branch of philosophy. It is also called moral philosophy. The ethical perspective taken in the paper is to ascertain whether all behaviours in the new media are acceptable. It is not possible within a short paper like this to examine all the behaviours that take place through the new media. But some few ones will be mentioned and examined.

The Ethical Challenge of the New Media

Having described the way that the basic terminologies in this paper are understood here, it is now imperative to discuss the ethical challenge of the new media. One new form of the new media is home videos that have pervaded Nigerian streets and homes. At every corner you go in Nigeria you see a home video store or viewing center. Almost every cable network now offers Nigerian home video movies twenty-four hours every day. Nigerian home videos are ethically troubling. They seriously and negatively impact the character of young people and this damage is more dangerous than those caused by drugs (Eboh 2006). Citing Justice Oputa, Eboh (2006) notes that: "...home video is the architect of several ills and bad habits we experience in our society today. They often mirror and reflect certain debased character and acts which invariably inform the consumers to be participants-most victimized beings our children and adolescent" (p. 160). As Eboh (2006) avers further some Nigerian home videos uncritically and unethically promote occultism, prostitution, bribery, corruption, and glamorise wealth.

Home videos can now be gotten on-demand in many places in Nigeria. You sit in your house and you are watching the home video on your Smartphone or laptop. Some indecent and unethical values promoted through the home video pervade other forms of the new media in Nigeria. While it is true that radio, television, film,

tape records, and cassettes are part of the traditional media, the fact is that most of these have been enhanced by the new media forms. Whatever is broadcast on radio, television, and films can now reach you today instantly and immediately through the new media. The power that the traditional media once carried, the new media carries double if not more.

As it is, much of the new media has no restraint and control. You can sit in your house and upload content to the internet without any moderating authority. This is quite different from what used to obtain in the traditional media. The new media is inundated with terrorist and violent propaganda. Terrorist groups such as Islamic State (ISIS), Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, and many others send and pass their messages through the new media. This has become a serious threat to peace, law, and order in society. Many people especially the weak and vulnerable have been influenced by the propaganda of some of these terrorist groups and committed acts of violence. Innocent lives and properties have been destroyed in the process. In places like Iraq, Syria, the USA, France, and Belgium people have committed terrorist acts as a result of the influence and manipulation that they received from the internet. There are sites on the internet that teaches you how to make a bomb, explosives, and other dangerous weapons. Many if not all who are influenced by terrorist propaganda online don't see anything wrong in terrorism. Some suicide bombers and others see it as a means to get to paradise. Ward (2006) describes what he calls a phenomenon of anonymity in the new media and this phenomenon is very dangerous as people can create irresponsible and harmful content, especially news, and send it through Twitter, YouTube, blogs, Facebook, and email. As Mitchell (2002) writes, in the traditional media it was easy to set guidelines for broadcast and print, today the demarcation between advertising and editorial content can be blurred and it can be difficult to correct errors once they have been sent. Even when they are corrected some people still go by the old errors that they have received.

A lot of social ills and evils are propagated and committed through the new media. The morality of many has been endangered by content coming from the new media forms. Through the new media forms, pornography and other sexual perversions have been propagated. There are a lot of songs without edifying moral content that is promoted through the new media. Nudity, strong language, and violence are prevalent in much of the new media. What about cybercrimes? Some have used the avenue of the new media to commit all sorts of cybercrimes. Many have been defrauded of their hard-earned money by cybercriminals. You turn to your email and even handsets you see all types of unsolicited emails or messages

asking you to provide your financial information. Once you mistakenly do that within a second your account can be wiped empty.

One ethical value and virtue that is imperative for the ordering of human society is that of telling the truth. All kinds of falsehoods and statements are published through the new media and it is often difficult to know the truth. Nigerian politics and politics in other nations are often inundated with falsehoods and lies. Some politicians fabricate falsehoods to get into power. They behave like the prince of Machiavelli. They thrive on falsehood. They make promises even when they know that they will not be able to keep the promises. The new media has become the forum to easily propagate these falsehoods through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, websites, etc. See what is presently taking place in the US presidential election process. Not all that has been said is truthful. CNN often fact-checks the statements of the candidates in the debates and campaigns and has shown that some of the things said by the candidates are false or not true. Yet they have been passed on through the new media as truth.

There is also the ethical challenge of what to do with the software and other products of the new media. The environment is filled with e-waste. Look all around you and you are likely going to see computer waste, discarded handsets, and other appliances and accessories of the new media through into the environment. These have poisoned and degraded the environment.

African Hospitality and the New Media

Amid the ethical challenges that the new media poses, this paper proposes that the African value of hospitality can help in ameliorating the negative effects coming from the new media. It ought to be noted that there are many good and positive benefits coming from the new media, but that is not the concern of this present paper. The new media has provided a means for people to easily interact and at times immediately with one another. Though much of the communication through the new media is mediated without personal physical contact with the other(s), the fact remains that it is still human persons that are communicating. That same hospitality that is expected of one human being when he comes into physical personal contact with another should also be promoted through the new media. The people you meet online are not less human because they are not physically present before you. They still have the same human dignity and human rights. They deserve the same respect that you would accord them in a physical meeting. Cordiality, respect, and honesty should still pervade online

communication. This implies that you desist from whatever will harm the humanity of others in online communication. Many people that you meet online are not physically known to you. The same principles that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should be upheld. The media, including the new media, has a responsibility in a democratic society as Newell (2010) affirms.

African hospitality emphasized the value of the social and the community. Africans were and remain communitarian people. You are because of the existence of others. The African values of Ubuntu, Ukama, humanism, and togetherness pervade African societies. Those who use the new media should always think of society's social interests and values not simply their rugged individualistic values. What will promote the common good of all should moderate what people communicate. Though it has its limitations Jeremy Bentham's principle of utilitarianism could help use the new media. The principle of utilitarianism as Blackburn (2005) notes implies acting for the happiness of the greatest number of people. The Kantian categorical moral imperative supports the African principle of hospitality. You are to treat each human being as an end in themselves and not as a means for profit or other utilitarian purposes. Though it is painful to note that Kant himself never thought of Africans as human and deserving this consideration. This principle applied to the new media implies that those who use the new media should use it to ensure that their messages do not threaten the human good. There should be no place for Machiavellianism in the use of the new media. The individual human person and even a group are not at liberty to use the new media as they like to hurt and harm others.

It would not be out of place to note that principles in Judeo-Christian ethics such as honesty to fellow humans, truthfulness and right speech, love of all humans as neighbours, religious humanism, and Samaritanism all corroborate the value of hospitality. Following Judeo-Christian values, the Good Samaritan was hospitable to the man who was wounded on the road to Jericho. This principle applied to the new media implies that the well-being and welfare of the other should be sought in all interactions and communication. Writing about African hospitality, Ehusani (1991) argues that: "Hospitality, an equally widely acknowledged African virtue, flows from the African spirit of solidarity and inclusiveness" (p. 223). This inclusiveness and solidarity are not simply only with Africans but with all humanity. African hospitality will enable the user of the new media to perceive the other even in a far distant part of the globe as kin and a brother/sister; one that shares in the same humanity as the African. Omonukhua (2014) notes that

hospitality is innate in all Africans and that the spirit of hospitality enables people to shun selfishness, welcome and accommodate strangers and others, and helps people to resist performing terrorist acts against their hosts.

The new media promotes the words and actions of persons and groups. Without the words and actions of humans, the new media cannot function. But as noted previously not all the words that have been propagated through the new media are honest and truthful. Can the African value of hospitality not help in this? It can. It should be said that users of the new media should be hospitable in their words. It is words that are true that should be promoted through the new media. The fundamental need for an ethics of hospitality in the new media is expressed by James (2009) when he speaks of respect and defines ethics. He writes that:

Our principal focus is ethics, but this discussion also considers its close ally, respect. The distinction between the two concepts is worth noting. As we define it, respect involves openness to differences, tolerance of others, and civility toward people, whether or not they are personally known. The respectful person gives others the benefit of the doubt. Respect or disrespect can be observed by and directed toward very young children and will soon be recognized as such. In contrast, ethics presupposes the capacity for thinking in abstract terms about the implications of a given course of action for one's self, group, profession, community, nation, and world. For example, "I am a reporter. What are my rights and responsibilities?" or "I am a citizen of Boston. What are my rights and responsibilities?" Ethical conduct is closely aligned with the responsibilities to and for others that are attached to one's role in a given context. (p.14)

Conclusion

The new media demands the ethical responsibility of its users. The fact is that without ethics of hospitality which include respect for the other, telling the truth, kindness to others, cordiality, recognition of the human rights and dignity of others, and sincerity; all forms of communication will break down. The value of hospitality is necessary for reforming the new media. There is much good that the new media has done but it has also done much harm. The value of hospitality discussed above can help to eradicate ills and foster a more compassionate new media.

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