

# **Social Media and Information Flow across Borders: New Twists to the International Debate**



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## **Abstract**

This critical discourse examined social media communication and its twist in assertion on information flow across borders. The rationale here is that the international communication scene, especially in the area of information flow, has undergone dramatic changes in the later part of this century because of the unpredictable consequences of social media on the processes and procedures of communication. The discourse further posited that the future of international communication remains fluid because of the further sophistication in new media technology envisaged. Using a recent profile of news coverage by the traditional media in comparison to social media coverage as a prototype of a typical situation in developed and developing societies, this discourse established that social media have altered the international communication arena substantially leading to people journalism. The discourse also maintained that the traditional debates of who sets the public agenda and the information flow pattern amongst the developed and developing world, government, the media (international and national), and the people as well as the gatekeeping notion have all been rearticulated with the current realities posed by social media.

**Keywords:** *International communication, Information Flow, Social Media, Agenda Setting*

## **Introduction**

The pattern of news flow and information globally has attracted scholarly attention and research in this decade following the emergence of social media like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Blackberry Messenger, Blogging, Wikis etc. These social media have revolutionized international news flow and communication in ways unimaginable. No study or literature seems to suggest that any international communication scholar or study ever predicted the very outcome and nature of the emergence of social media in the sourcing and dissemination of news globally or within countries. However, Marshall McLuhan's concept of a Global Village was very close to what now exists in the international communication scene. The concept, which saw

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possibilities in the way new communication technologies will define communities and relationships, is now more real than ever before. McLuhan was obviously on point to imagine such possibilities. However, he was particularly interested in the potentials and threats posed by the continued sophistication of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) rather than how the content will define or redefine international information flow patterns. So, the discourse supports the notion that social media have revolutionized or brought a twist on information flow across borders or the international communication scene in the 21st Century is corroborated.

This discourse, therefore, examines the current trends and patterns in international news flow and communication, which have emerged because of the impact of social media on international communication (information flow). The inference here is that the international communication scene, especially in areas highlighted in this discourse, has undergone dramatic changes in the later part of this Century because of the unpredictable consequences of social media on the processes and procedures of communication. The discourse further argues that the future of international communication (information flow) remains fluid because of the further sophistication in social media technology. To support the above claims further, the discourse used a recent profile of news coverage by the traditional media and compared this to social media coverage to determine if a relationship exists between what the conventional media are focusing on and what social media are focusing on. In essence, are there changes because of the emergence of social media in the international communication scene? In the traditional debates of who sets public and media agenda amongst the developed and developing world, government, the media, and the people, are changes noticeable and impactful? Is the gatekeeping notion undergoing reassessment following the current realities posed by social media? Are there other perceived social media influences on international information flow and communication beyond content and setting agenda? Will social media finally nail the coffin of the global news flow debates? The nub of this discourse lies in these posers and the attempt to find answers to them. To do this effectively, the discourse again evaluated the now comatose debate on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) but with emphasis on the identified flaws in the international flow of news. Following this important evaluation, we considered the literature along the lines of a new debate provoked by the emergence of social media. This analysis will bring out the impact of social media on international news flow and communication, generally.

### **The Old Debate: NWICO and the Flaws in Global Information Flow**

The New World Information and Communication Order, popularly referred to as NWICO, is a conceptual framework that attempted to spur the debate which was provoked by the cries of marginalization by developing and third-world nations on how global communication resources are being managed and distributed. According to Ekeanyanwu, *et al.*, (2012), Ekeanyanwu (2006 & 2008) and de Beer (2010); the News Flow Debate (NFD) referred to the way developing nations demanded change in the early 1980s in the pattern of news flow between them and the Western industrialized nations. This debate was a core issue in the now-stalled New World Information and Communication Order discourse. The debate was about the free flow or free and balanced flow of information between the Western developed nations and the

developing societies in the Southern part of the world, popularly referred to as the Third World nations.

Okigbo (1996) argued that, though the world is a free marketplace of ideas where information flow should not be hindered, the West's reluctance to recognize that the saturation of the underdeveloped African nations with news reports and cultural artefacts from the West was a concern to the stability of the Third World's cultural heritage and progress. The argument was that whatever the West called the global free flow of information and news was, in fact, a euphemism for the economic, political and cultural domination of developing nations. This is made possible by the independent and well-established international news agencies in industrialized Western nations.

The major focus of the developing nations' grievance was that there was a deliberate attempt by the developed countries to establish and perpetuate domination in mass media systems over the developing nations both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative imbalance is about the amount of news flowing from industrialized nations to developing nations and vice versa. Ekeanyanwu (2007) and Ochogwu (1987) argued that developing nations are covered in the Western media only when some bizarre incident or disaster/crisis-oriented event occurs. In a similar study, Ekeanyanwu (2005) also noted that of the ten per cent of news stories that the non-industrialized nations get from coverage in the global news media, 90 per cent of those stories are about events that negatively depict these countries. This is a qualitative imbalance (Ekeanyanwu, *et al*, 2012).

The implication of this is that news about the Third World's poverty, hunger, political struggles, diseases, wars, coup d'états, disasters and other forms of crises are heavily reported in the Western media to the annoying neglect of other good or positively oriented news stories. This qualitative imbalance in the coverage of the developing nations is what Chimamanda Adichie called "*The Danger of a Single Story*", noting that the problem with single stories is that they may not be false but at the same time, they are not the entire story. A certain part has been selfishly left out to support the propaganda intentions of the storytellers. Egwu (2001) highlighted the developing nation's predicament by juxtaposing its situation to the media saturation in the United States: The United States has over 25,000 periodicals; over 1,200 book publishers; over 10,000 radio stations (AM&FM); over 1,000 television stations; and some 26 million other types of (e.g. citizens band) radios. There is, therefore, a situation of media monopoly by the North, not only in hardware but also in software. News Agencies also abound in the North... to the annoying neglect and marginalization of the South, especially Africa.

Despite the establishment of national and regional news agencies, this situation did not change in the 1990s and 2000s as much as it was necessary. In Africa, for instance, there is still increasing concern among African countries that the news coverage of their affairs by foreign news agencies is grossly inadequate (Golan, 2008; de Beer, 2010). While most media houses in Africa have regular slots and spaces for news originating from the developed world, Ekeanyanwu *et al.*, (2012) argued that African countries were neither quantitatively covered in the traditional media of the Western world nor qualitatively covered in the traditional media with predominantly positive developmental news. The MacBride Commission, which was set up in December 1977 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to study communication problems globally states in its final report that while there is a flood of news on the East/West Axis between North America and Europe, as well as, although on a lower

level, between socialist and Western countries, the much lesser one-way flow between North and South can hardly be called an exchange due to the excessive imbalance (MacBride *et al*, 1981).

This leads us to one of the major issues that was critically analysed in the NWICO debate. This issue is the existence of flaws in the global flow of world news and communication messages. This flaw according to Masmoudi (1979) is created by the disparity between the volume of news and information emanating from the developed world and intended for the developing countries and the volume of the flow in the opposite direction.. almost 80 per cent of the world news flow emanates from the major transactional agencies. However, these devote only 20 to 30 per cent of news coverage to developing countries although the latter account for almost three-quarters of mankind. Generally, it has been discovered that Western media treasure oddity as a news value. This influences their reports on Africa. As a result, only the bizarre is said about Africa.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study was anchored on the Technological Determinism (TD) Theory of Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's theory postulates that advancements in communication technologies largely determine the course of history in the ways and modes we adopt for communication. McLuhan examined the causal relationship between media technology and culture. The essence of the TD in McLuhan's postulation was to draw the attention of media operators and audiences to the hidden effects of communication technologies on communication approaches. This theory regards our present cultural changes as a direct result of the information explosion fostered by television and the computer (Griffins 1991). It linked the historical, economic and cultural changes occurring in the world to the invention of new technologies in communication. Powered by the observations of the influence of communication technologies on the way and manner the world communicates, McLuhan was able to predict his famous Global Village vision which the world is experiencing today. Powered by advancements in communication technologies, the world hitherto divided and far apart from each other by physical borders has turned into a global village without very visible boundaries.

McLuhan's theory was criticized by some scholars, such as Gordon (1982) for lack of scientific evidence and empiricism. The course of history and present trends in the communication world have proved this theory true. As Nwodu (2004) has noted, "the theory has shown not only that the medium rather than the content of communication impacts more on the audience of mass communication (and its operators) but also communication technologies are turning the world into a global village" (p.74). Similarly, Ekeanyanwu and Edewor (2009) support Barran's (2002) view that technology shapes economic and cultural change. Thus technology's influence is ultimately determined by how much power it is given by the people and cultures that use it. The idea of 'power' above implies the utilization and exploitation of ICTs' potential. This then presupposes that communication technologies availability such as the evolving social media platforms should be an ancillary to the way information is generated, disseminated and consumed across borders.

### **Influence of Social Media Communication on Information Flow**

Social media could be classified as the ninth wonder of the world because such media platforms are becoming increasingly connected, interactive, participatory, integrative,

community-based, ubiquitous, and digital! According to Mitu (2012), social media, such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have attracted millions of users since their introduction. Many of their users have integrated these social networking sites into their daily practices. The social media sites are diverse; some of them support the maintenance of pre-existing social media while others help strangers get in touch based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Mitu (2012) also noted that social media sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Ellison, 2008).

Mitu (2012) attempted to trace the history of social networks: the first social network site was SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997. It was the first site that combined the feature of having a profile and friends list, compared to Classmates.com allowed people to connect with high school or college classmates, but the users could not create profiles or have friends lists. In 2000, SixDegrees.com service closed. During 1997-2001, other social network sites developed, such as Asian Avenue, BlackPlanet, MiGente, LiveJournal, Cyworld (1999), and LunarStorm (2000), all of them followed by Ryze.com (2001), Tribe.net, LinkedIn, and Friendster. From 2003 onward, many new social network sites were launched but not all of them survived. MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004) are still in use.

In an attempt to support the discourse that social media have brought a twist in discussions on information flow across borders and other purposes, Valenzuela et al., (2012) observed that social media sites have several affordances for promoting participation, particularly protest behaviour among youths. They facilitate access to many contacts, thereby enabling social movements to reach critical mass. They further observed that by allowing multiple channels for interpersonal feedback, peer acceptance, and reinforcement of group norms, these sites also promote the construction of personal and group identities that are key antecedents of protest behaviour. Continuing, social media sites function as information hubs that allow users to contact and exchange updates regarding their activities with others who share their interests. Those belonging to social movements and political groups can thus build relationships with one another and receive mobilizing information that they may not obtain elsewhere, thus expanding their opportunities to engage in political activities (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2012; Kobayashi *et al.*, 2006).

Valenzuela, *et al.*, (2012) also opined that social media are effective means of interaction because they help participants and users find a place and a basis for conversation and social communication. They also help users find family, lost and new friends, social groupings and alignment according to certain primordial interests. Concerning how the emergence of social media has changed the debate on international news flow and communication, the following question becomes pertinent. How do the contemporary social media and other online World Information and Communication Order stack up with UNESCO's debate and mantra that was championed in the 1980s as the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)? The emergence of social media into the international news flow controversy added a unique twist to the global News Flow Debate. It may have led to the deconstruction of the structure of what was considered then as a unique domestic newsgathering and dissemination process. de Beer (2010) who argued that informal news institutions, which serve as pervasive agents

of globalization and universal alignment, now tend towards democratization, further supports this. On the other hand, Ekeanyanwu, *et al.*, (2012) also posited that social networking sites support the human need for social interaction at the global level, using Internet and web-based technologies to transform the electronic media monologues into social media dialogues.

Facebook, for example, is one of the most popular social media networks from the West, and one of the most visited social networking sites with more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views per day. The site is tightly integrated into the daily media practices of its users. By 2005, a typical user spent about 20 minutes a day on the site and two-thirds of its users logged in at least once a day (Cassidy, 2006). Current literature seems to suggest that these figures have since doubled. According to Mitu (2012), today, *Facebook* is the most popular social media site, with more than 175 million active users. Therefore, we can state that to exist today people and events have to embrace social media. Social Media have created unique relationships and virtual communities of sorts. According to Ekeanyanwu *et al.*, (2012) the online or virtual community created by social media sites is one of a kind. It is an active community and quite inquisitive in its web surfing habits about issues around them. It thrives on interactivity, open conversations and mass participation. Before their emergence, traditional or formal media channels seemed to have been weighed down by economic, political, and other non-professional considerations in world news coverage. Social media thrive on citizens or civic journalism whereby the liberalization of the new media, accessibility, production of content, and its delivery on the World Wide Web has made a myriad of news and educational information available to more persons at a marginal cost than ever before.

The authors compared information flows between social media networks and mainstream media in the United States to ascertain that the global news flow pattern has not changed much in terms of social media participation in the news flow process. In essence, both the mainstream media (traditional media in this instance) and the SMNs (New Media in this sense) are talking about the same or similar issues. Furthermore, Ekeanyanwu *et al.*, (2012) also elicited this, in the same thinking, we are inclined to conclude here that traditional media are no longer setting the public or media agenda alone. The emergence of social media networks has reset the calculations, opened up the space and attracted more participation in what people think they should be talking about. Therefore, in our interpretation of the recent results in news flow studies, it would be wrong to still conclude that the traditional news media are the sole agenda setters. Social media networks are in this for real and it does not look like their popularity is about to wane. This leads us to other characteristics of social media, which also leads to these specific influences in the international news flow scene.

First, social media have made international news gathering and dissemination more mass participatory. Everyone feels the process because they are part of it. Social media have encouraged the otherwise hitherto media audience to be part of the newsgathering and dissemination business. You only need to own a smartphone or computer technology with Internet connectivity to become a "journalist" practically.

Second, which follows from the first, is the debate on who is a journalist and if the conception of journalism has changed. Media scholars and commentators are now engaged in controversial debates about redefining the concept of journalism and who is a journalist to accommodate social media users and others like Assange of the infamous

Wikileaks. The troubling situation here is the commentary raised by this valid question: carrying a smartphone and tweeting unconfirmed stories to followers and non-followers alike, make one a journalist? Opinions on this may differ. While acknowledging that smartphones and other supporting technologies have liberalized news dissemination and information sharing across national and international boundaries; professional journalism is still much more than that. For instance, news streams on social media networks still suffer credibility problems which is the hallmark of professional journalism. This is just one case scenario. Issues of feedback and source identification continue to remain problematic for those who rely on social media networks for serious newsbreaks and follow-ups. The stories usually come with different twists that an inexperienced consumer could be frenzied in the midst of it all.

Third, social media have made news more interactive, leading to open conversations. Newsmakers and news-watchers alike can use social media platforms to engage in open conversations about themes of common interests and by so doing further engage the audience. The interactive nature of such social media platforms also stretches the news a bit so that credibility challenges may be reduced as many different sources could confirm or refute an angle of the twist to the news. In other words, the open and interactive nature of international news streaming on social media networks could be a good source for credibility as persons who are familiar with the correct version also have that platform to engage.

Fourth, social media have also liberalized the sourcing, dissemination, and gatekeeping of news and news sources. This is perhaps where the idea to redefine journalism and who a journalist is comes from. The liberalizing process makes it possible for all manner of persons and sources to be involved in the news production business. We will not be surprised to hear bloggers call themselves media owners or news publishers soon.

However, as the discourse has maintained earlier, professional journalism remains a serious business. There is also the question of credibility, which comes from having multiple newsgathering and dissemination sources and platforms. Anyone can take advantage to circulate falsehood and damage journalistic reputation, which is the bedrock of sound journalism. Multiple sources could also lead news consumers to have unusual opportunities to check and crosscheck the facts of a story from different platforms. So, it has both disadvantages and advantages.

Social media have enhanced citizen/civic/people journalism. People are very conscious that they can be their newsmakers and creators. The 21st Century media audience is more alert to this responsibility and so we have more persons actively engaged in the news production business. People now see the need to add their voices, help clarify issues, as well as share their views and positions just to enrich the process. Beyond the one-off purchase of required apps and computer/mobile technology tools, news gathering and sharing in social media are relatively cheap when compared to the now "traditional" forms and platforms like subscribing to pay TV. In essence, one only needs a smartphone and Internet access to be actively engaged in the production and distribution of news even at the international level. No taxes and no license fees to increase one's operational costs. This again makes the social media platforms very attractive.

One core creation of social media is the emergence of virtual communities with solid social relationships and a network of other news relationships. Online communities are

now looking stronger than we have ever imagined. The invisibility that is credited to the Obama Campaign in 2008 and 2012 is associated with a strong virtual presence. It is said that Obama built a solid virtual community of voters and volunteers in US election history. His victories at both elections were credited to such online efforts. So, whether we like it or not, virtual communities have become a closely-knit unit we cannot ignore. Marriages have been enacted over such platforms and people actually have a virtual life.

### **Concluding Arguments**

The features of social media networks, some of which we have discussed here, have no doubt changed the debate and focus of international communication experts regarding international news flow patterns. Consequently, the old charges of news bias, slanted portrayals and claims that certain places and people are usually misrepresented, under-reported or inaccurately reported are fast becoming moot, as even some research efforts about African technologies (Fuchs & Horak, 2008; Ekeanyanwu, 2008 & 2010; Oyelaran-Oyeyinka & Nyaki, 2004) show innovative ways to engage the rest of the world in international communication. The emergence of social media networks, citizen reporters, and other technological, mass communication innovations have made it possible for most societies to tap into the World Wide Web and other digital or online devices to aggregate, tell and produce their news or personal stories and other pertinent information. We no longer expect any community to watch and do nothing when single unrepresentative stories make the airwaves or print forms. Such communities now have acceptable platforms in social media networks to refute the danger associated with single stories.

Some scholars argued that if news and other pertinent information continued to interest many people, then the global structure of news gathering and dissemination would follow the economic and political centres of the world (Chang *et al.*, 2000; Fuchs, 2005; Van Dijk, 2005). This is not a new phenomenon, even at the beginning of the news flow debate; for instance, Sreberny-Mohammadi *et al.*, (1984) observed that in the emerging socio-political order of that time, international news coverage had often had a very close connection to the prevailing attitudes toward international politics (even in societies with the "freest" media). According to Turan *et al.*, (2009), the small/weak nations only get attention when the "bad" news happens, if the foreign policy attention or priorities and the international market forces dictate as such, support this theory.

The power structures are also not changing. de Beer (2010) elucidated that the concept of global news is under theoretical construction, especially as it relates to news flow studies: "News media content in a globalizing world is becoming increasingly de-territorialized, involving complex relations and flows across national borders and continents. Consequently, it also becomes more difficult to categorize news in the traditional binary fashion as either national or international/domestic and foreign news as was the tradition in news flow studies". de Beer further observed that the globalization of news flows has shown that the concept, "global news," could perhaps transcend the dichotomy between international and local news found in most news flow studies. Borrowing from his earlier views, de Beer (2010) posited that if global news could transcend the dichotomy between international and national, then these concepts need more stringent definitions. For instance, are news reports of the global swine flu pandemic, or "blood diamonds" mined in Africa to pay for foreign armaments from European manufacturers, or the recession starting to bite in African countries as the

West's "Credit Crunch" spreads, national or multi-national news? Are these stories bound to specific African countries, or are they rather part of global news, affecting not only specific countries in Africa but also the world at large (de Beer, 2010, p. 596)?

However, some news flow studies posit that the global flow of news follows culturally narrow and ethnocentric media mappings. For instance, according to Chang et al., (2000), the developed and industrialized Western nations dominated the global news flow in terms of what came in and what went out. A mediated news map should indicate emerging trends in international politics and relations in the new millennium. In other words, international news flow has always been connected to international politics and relations. Such a situation showed geographic regionalism using notions of cultural or religious proximity, such as Christianity or Islam. It seems reasonable to conclude that in some configuration of the new versus the traditional ways of newsgathering, some new news media organizations will emerge to devote some financial and human resources needed to cover global news adequately. This critical study also advances Livingston and Asmolov's (2010) arguments that technological, sociological, and political trends demand a new conceptual landscape to retool our understanding of global journalism and international affairs. It is argued here that the news flow debate should be at the centre of this re-evaluation. de Beer (2010) also argued that the definitions of global vis-à-vis international, transnational, national or foreign are now mired in eccentricity. de Beer's (2010) arguments are preceded by earlier works of other scholars like Reese (2001), Devereaux and Griffin (2006), and Berglez (2009), who noted that such terms assume the nation-state as the basis of analysis of what is national news or international news. Summing up the above arguments, Ekeanyanwu *et al.*, (2012) state:

the argument so far is that national and international definitions are now debatable as they relate to news flow in a globalized world. Whichever one considers these concepts, the centre of the global news flow debate is shifted. Further research should investigate whether the U.S. media systems can maintain their status as the world's news leader within the parameters of the traditional media and the wire services. With the fading global economic decline and the slow-moving U.S. media industry, especially the newspaper industry, the rise of citizen journalism and the inevitable dominance of social media networks are opening up and rapidly expanding the media space for greater mass participation and democratization of the news business. The Western industrialized world may have fewer options in future than to re-evaluate the declining role in the global news flow scenario and perhaps acknowledge the emergence of other nation-state players in the NFD (p.152).

The news flow debate necessitates a re-conceptualization of global journalism because of the rapid growth of independent new media scribes and photographers. Social media channels are rapidly transforming the socio-economic and political public discourse with cultural implications (Oloka-Onyango, 2005), particularly in Africa. Oloka-Onyango (2005) further argued that the cultural influences of globalization, whether presented in the global media or via the increase in consumerism, have profound implications for the protection and promotion of African cultures. When all these factors are taken into account, one can conclude that globalization has brought tremendous benefits by way of scientific and technological progress, enhanced dissemination, and circulation of information, and the increased social mobility of people.

Citizens in the developing world who have access to the Internet through computers or interactive 'smart' cell phones flock to social media networks because of their participatory, interactivity and affordable costs. This does not mean that social media participants now qualify to be called journalists and they are not professionals. Yet, the current discourse about social media's interactive and mass participatory nature refers to this generation of information gathering and dissemination as the New Journalism (Ekeanyanwu *et al.*, 2012). This New Journalism will drive journalism in the last part of this century and even usher us into the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century. New journalism was a literary movement that combined the techniques of fiction writing with a fact-based approach to reporting. The writing sprang from aspiration to literary excellence in journalism. In the New Journalism, the concept of journalism will be redefined, as any attempt to ignore these self-styled journalists, online, and social media platforms will result in doom for the already emasculated media industry. The concern here is that the realignment of content production and delivery by opening it up to the public should be of great interest to the traditional media, which flourished in the past three decades during the news flow debate.

### **Conclusion**

The central questions posed here for critical analysis were: whether the news flow debate is still relevant with the emergence of social media networks that enable interactive mediated messaging, blogging, tweeting, and other electronic outlets, which provide an easy free flow of information. In addition, whether the traditional media are still the dominant disseminators and gatekeepers of news and information earlier branded by the global news flow debaters in this era of social media appeal or popularity.

Our contribution to this debate is that the global news space with particular reference to the emergence of social media has nullified the old conceptualization of the international news flow debate (NFD). Social media have made it easy for anyone to either generate or become a gatekeeper of global news and current affairs and seek information globally from traditional media and peripheral citizen journalism. There are multiple sources for newsgathering and disseminating news with greater access to online media channels and interactive digital platforms.

The news production and distribution business has become saturated with non-professional content generators and contributors. This implies that citizens from developing nations in Africa and elsewhere can realistically mitigate some forms of news flow marginalization or domination in the new millennium, which existed in the 1980s and 1990s and were primarily controlled by the Western cosmopolitan media. With the increased engagement of social media platforms, citizens of the developing world will increasingly control (more than ever before) how they are covered and what information they want to disseminate to the rest of the world. The danger of a single story as Chimamanda Adiche coined it will no longer be the order of the day. This is because social media platforms have liberalized the process, contributed to community organizing, and popularized civic participation and engagement in the news production and distribution business. There is also ample evidence of political mobilization of the masses across Africa, the Arab world, South-East Asia and the Middle East to engage in the democratization process through popular revolutionary uprisings.

The Arab Spring, as this is now popularly referred to, is a typical example of how social media galvanized interest groups to topple repressive governments and tilt

towards popular representation and democratization. In the words of Ekeanyanwu, *et al.*, (2012), the emergence of social media as part of social media in the gathering and dissemination of international news has drastically altered the international news flow debates. It would be wrong, therefore, to conclude that the traditional news media are the sole agenda setters, builders and gatekeepers. Social media networks have secured their place in the sphere of mass communication and social mobilization and their popularity is soaring higher every day due to some of the flexibilities already highlighted in this paper. It is our expectation, therefore, that international communication scholars, media experts, and other concerned parties within civil society should revisit the literature and theoretical arguments that supported earlier positions on the international news flow debate. This could help to redefine its utility to the developing world in the wake of the current phase of democratization and popular revolutionary uprisings especially in the Arab world.

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