

Broadcasting Through the Social Media: Evaluating the Use of Social Media in News Broadcasting

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Abstract

The paper sets out to evaluate the use of social media in news broadcasting in Nigeria. Various scientific advancements in media technology have had tremendous impact on the art of broadcasting, which itself is guided by technological interface – making the wholesale delivery of communication to an anonymous audience possible. Through online social platforms, news gathering, production and dissemination are today viral. Indeed the internet has engendered uncommon revolution in communication, making user-generated contents possible. The study was conducted in three local government areas of Oredo, Egor and Ikpoba-Okah in Edo State, Nigeria. The study used the explanatory mixed method which allowed the researchers to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to empirical study. Using a 10-item questionnaire, 184 journalists in five broadcast stations were investigated. Data were analyzed using percentages and statistical tables. Findings reveal that journalists are knowledgeable on the use of the social media, however, majority of them (76.6%) only use it to a moderate extent for news broadcasting. Periodic training is recommended to enable journalists gain more knowledge and skill on how best to use the social media for news broadcasting. An upward review of funding and operational grants is imperative.

Keywords: .Social media .Usage .News .Journalism .Broadcast Stations.

INTRODUCTION

Mass communication is technologically determined and driven. What this means is that there is a symmetric relationship between communication development and technological evolutions. For this reason, the history and content of mass communication cannot be discussed in isolation of the mass media powered by technologies. Likewise, advancements in digital technologies have also had implications on the mass media. Part of this is the creation of an almost parallel media (social media) which is fast revolutionizing the mass media landscape.

Apart from helping to contain to an extent the bureaucratic bottlenecks experienced in media practice over public information, the use of social media has also enhanced the processes of information gathering, production and dissemination by users.

News reportage, for instance, used to follow various procedures and considerations before it gets to the audience, but with information and communication technology, news sourcing, editing, production and transfer to the audience can be done within a few seconds through the artificial manipulation of a digital gadget with online connectivity (Anim, 2013; Ani, Ugwuanyi, Chiaha and Eyibe, 2015).

The social media can best be described as a new form of media. This is so because it is media no doubt and shares similar attributes with the traditional mainstream media – print and electronic. The defining difference, however, lies in the ability of the social media to converge the features of both the electronic and print media.

What this means is that social media can only be found online and are adopted by people who share common interests. Arens, Weigold, and Arens (2011, p.552), aver that

"these are called social, primarily for their ability to connect like-individuals in a manner that have never been seen before."

This no doubt is the greatest advantage the social media have over all other media forms. The ability to network across many strata and communities around the globe marks the platform out as a unique media for trans-cultural, trans-gender and trans-national relationships. Social binding is just one aspect of the roles the social media perform to individuals and the society. Other roles include those of surveillance, agenda setting, status conferral, mobilization and entertainment etc. Dissemination of news worthy information is central to these roles. The application/adoption of one social media platform/network or the other in the gathering, production and transmission of news is fast becoming the trend not only by citizen journalists, but also among the mainstream media. Some of the well known sites used for news broadcasting include: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, WordPress, Blogs, LiveJournal, Wikipedia, Wikidot, etc. (Abdulrauf- Salau, 2013; Haruna and Danladi, 2013; Nwafor, Odoemelam, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo and Nweze, 2013).

News broadcasting is viewed from a broad perspective to accommodate all the steps involved in gathering, processing and transmitting current information to members of the audience from whom feedback is expected. News is seen here as documented account of an event. Going by McDougall's definition news can only be worth its name when the purveyor of news (reporter) renders an account of it. It is the main form in which current information about public events are carried by media of all kinds (McQuail, 2005). Corroboratively, Owuamalam (2007, p.221) notes that, "News is the satisfaction of the information need of society. It is this that makes news desirable, relevant and significant as a broadcast programme for radio or television." Central to any definition of news is that it is one of the perishable commodities which the media is usually in a hurry to dispense with.

In the transactional orientation of media operation, news is treated as a commodity because it forms an essential part of the media product which are priced based on the value the audience attach to it. If the value wanes, so shall the product price, vice versa. In journalism, it is said that nothing is as useless as yesterday's news. That is to say that such news may have depreciated in value, become stale and lacking the basic attributes that qualify news-currency and timeliness. Apart from these, competition accounts for another reason why journalists are in a hurry to relay news events as they occur. Therefore, in order to ensure that they get information on issues and events as soon as they happen, reporters device ways and means including having informants and making friends on the beat. However, the introduction of the social media has opened other avenues for the media not only to gather news but to also facilitate its production and speedy transmission to the audience.

Statement of Research Problem

News is considered as a perishable commodity which should be disposed off or consumed immediately it arrives. For this reason, journalists and media organizations adopt various mechanisms to obtain news and ensure its speedy transmission to the audience. How fast this is done makes the critical difference among competing media.

Hitherto, the approaches adopted to obtain and transmit news events depend on the number of quality staff a medium has and the staff's interaction with analogue technology. However, with recent innovations in new media technologies and its attendant implications on the way we communicate, media houses are fast embracing the social media in virtually all spheres of their operations. Conversely, experience has shown that availability may not imply knowledge of and capacity for usage. The problem therefore, is to evaluate whether or not journalists have access to social media and the extent to which they use social media in news broadcasting in the digital newsroom.

Research Questions

- What is the level of access to the social media among broadcast journalists in Edo State, Nigeria?
- What is the knowledge level of broadcast journalists regarding the use of the social media in news broadcasting?
- To what extent do broadcast journalists in Edo State use the social media in news broadcasting?

Review of Literature

ICT, New Media and the Changing Face of Journalism in Nigeria.

Globally, the introduction of miniaturized ICT devices (digital devices) has shaped and continues to refine the way audiences view news and how they assess it. This has led Abdulrauf-Salau (2013) to question how the flow of information will interact in the years ahead. The mainstream media is fast being overrun by the new media because of its easy accessibility which is a factor in the presentation of fresh news. The mainstream media, on the other hand, is too elitist and not only does it guaranty access to a few but also allow these few to determine the quantum of information available to the public and how they are interpreted. It's for reasons like this that scholars like McQuail, Enzensberger, etc. question the institutional basis of the public media and suggests media democratization in its place.

No doubt, the mainstream media despite its perceived inadequacies is not without benefits. In the words of Ekwuazi (2014, p.23) "after all before the coming of the locusts, no one ate the dragon fly". However, the merits of the mass media as enunciated by Abdulrauf-Salau (2013, p.191) may not be truly representative.

These attributes are not adequately represented in the Nigerian mass media environment. In fact, the ubiquity of the new media has made it the media for the masses other than the mass media. It is the new media that holds the benefits noted above. Ocampo's argument becomes relevant when it is noted that the evolution and use of new media technologies in mass media practices has ensured standardized media practices especially as we are witnessing a kind of collaboration between the two. Active participation of audience in news reportage was alien to media culture prior to evolutions in new media, which in turn has led to revolution in media and audience dynamics. However, one major merit of the traditional mass media over the new media is controlled information (gate keeping) and expertise. Two schools of thoughts have emerged as to how much information should be allowed to circulate in society.

Scholars like Anim (2013), McQuail (2005), Enzensberger (1970), etc. belong to the school of thought that upholds free market approach to information dissemination. For instance, Enzensberger criticized the domineering influence of gate-keeping on information dissemination and supports media democratization and the horizontality of communication links at all levels of society. However, another school of thought believes that information dissemination is too professional to be left in the hands of amateurs and common citizens who lack basic knowledge of journalistic ethos. Scott (2005, p.111) views the promises of participatory journalism as "false prophecy, premature and a step too far". Judging from the later school of thought, the mass media not only present up to date account of events, but also ensure that media stimuli are packaged professionally to avoid abuse.

The Social Media and Broadcasting in Nigeria: A Call for Collaboration.

Social media as a news source and platform for the dissemination of information have continued to dominate scholarly discourses in Nigeria. The source of concern however, is to properly situate the implication of the new media on the traditional mainstream media. Ekeli and Enobakhare (2013, p.123) for instance note that "the social media display the changes that affect the conduct of the mainstream media".

Notwithstanding the reluctance among Nigerian journalists in accepting the social media as an important addition to the mass communication process, the social media has continued to grow more and more relevant to the audience.

In his study, *"The relationship between successful journalism and the integration of audience participation in an era of growing technology"* Newman (2010) explains that "if journalists continue

to embrace new media and use them to our advantage rather than trying to resist the changes, we may be able to get healthy working balance going with the audience to improve news contents".

Although Okafor, *et al* (2013, p.87) argues that "the objectivity of the press - both conventional and citizen journalism is nothing but a legacy in antiquity which might never be achieved after all", McNair (2005) argues that "the objectivity-based journalism that dominated the 20th century has given way to a 'chaos paradigm.' From that chaos, order has begun to emerge." Possibly the best description of the collision of new and old media is 'convergence culture' (Jenkins, 2006). Convergence culture has far-reaching implications, affecting both the production and the consumption of media (Deuze, 2009).

Convergence as it affect our discourse recognizes changes in the day-to-day reality of journalism, yet recognize that journalists maintain their fundamental role in the process of creating and deciding what is news. Citizen journalists have not yet wrested power from institutional journalism; indeed there is little evidence to suggest that power is this changeable group's aim. Other scholars however caution that journalistic authority will never really shift, as corporations find ways to co-opt participatory online spaces (Mansell, 2004 & McChesney, 2000).

There might not be evidence to support claims that the mainstream media is losing relevance in the sight of the social media. On the contrary, what is experienced is the more and more active participation of common citizens in information sourcing and distribution. These citizens may have been shut out of the traditional mainstream media because of the restrictions occasioned by illiteracy, poverty and space considerations. The journalist and the mass media can key into the promises associated with the social media. In fact, research has shown that the space between the mass media and the social media is increasingly blurred as more journalists own *Facebook*, *Blogs* and *Twitter* accounts and more non-journalist bloggers and *Twitterati* become increasingly professional in their news reporting and commentary. Journalism's ethical norms differentiate it from social commentary where advocacy and activism is to be expected, but the increasing use of interactive social media is creating a shift to partisan journalism with more journalists beginning to express personal opinions in their reports (Folorunso, Vincent, Adekoya, & Adewale, 2010 & *Africappractice*, 2014).

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical perspectives on which the study is based include the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Technological Acceptance Model (TAM).

- ***Uses and Gratification Theory***

Communication media perform certain roles to both the individual and by extension to the society. How these roles are carried out and its ability to respond to audience needs determines the attitude of the audience towards the media. Uses and gratifications theory according to Abdulrauf- Salau (2013,p.200) is therefore "an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs." The theory was formulated by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 (Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso, 2008).

Unlike media effect theories that hinge on what the media do to people, the uses and gratification theory is concerned with what people do with media contents.

The theory is relevant to the study because it helps to provide the basis for understanding the reasons behind the adoption of a particular media technology in news broadcasting and the benefits derivable there from.

- ***The Technological Acceptance Model (TAM)***

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was developed by Fred Davis and Richard Bagozzi in 1989. The theory postulates that the acceptance and use of a particular technology by an individual depends on how the individual perceives that technology to be useful to him.

Bagozzi (2007,p.248) cited in Olorede and Oyewole, (2013,p.4) explain that "people could be reluctant to accept new technologies because of the technologies' complexity and element of uncertainty which exist in the minds of decision makers with respect to the successful adoption of the technology". It follows therefore, that apart from perceived usefulness, ignorance, cost, and flexibility are key factors to the acceptance or non acceptance of any technological innovation.

The model is used as a framework for the study based on the fact that journalists may choose to use particular new media model because of the values it holds for them or choose not to because of either perceived inadequacies or credibility to service desired needs.

Methodology

The Explanatory Mixed Method Design was used in this study. The explanatory mixed method design allows a research to produce both quantitative and qualitative data for a given study. The design consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results. Creswell (2002,p.565) asserts that “one data collection form supplies strengths to offset the weakness of the other form.” Based on the above, the research generated more of quantitative data and used a little of qualitative data to support the quantitative data. The survey method admits of the questionnaire as instrument used to generate quantitative data, while the interview guide was deployed to generate qualitative data.

The study population consists of 184 journalists engaged in broadcast stations located in the three local government areas of Edo State where the study was conducted.

Presentation of Data

The responses collected from the quantitative data were computed in simple percentages and presented in tables. The computation of quantitative data was based on the 184 copies of the questionnaire that was returned in usable state. Responses to the interview questions were used as qualitative data to support the quantitative data. The adoption of both designs as instruments for data collection and analysis is to ensure that the researcher gathers data that are reliable.

Research Question 1: *What is the level of access to the social media among Journalists in Edo State, Nigeria.*

Table 1: *Respondents' level of access to the social media.*

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Regularly	2	1.1	1.1
Occasionally	173	94.0	94.0
Very Rarely	5	2.7	2.7
No access	1	0.5	0.5
Undecided	3	1.6	1.6
Total	184	100.0	100.0

Source: *Field Survey, 2015.*

Data in Table 1 above shows that out of the 184 respondents, 2 respondents representing 1.1% indicated that they have access to the social media on a regular basis. Another 173 (94%) respondents have access to the social media occasionally and 5 respondents (2.7%) opted for very rarely. While 1 respondent (0.5%) opt for no access to the social media at all, another 3 respondents (1.6%) are undecided.

The implication therefore, is that the level of access to the social media is not regular and common place. Alternatively, broadcast journalists do not consider access to social media useful or advantageous enough in the performance of their duties as professional communicators. Responses from the interview did not yield a different result as respondents claimed to use the social media more as pass time or for engagements other than news reporting. They however claimed that the quest to beat deadlines make many journalists consider access to social media a distraction, which should not have a place in the busy schedule of the broadcast communicator. This finding lends credence to the conclusion of Onyebuchi and Obayi (2014, p.108) that “the professional journalists in Nigeria appear not to be bothered about new developments in their field, even though they go about their duties on daily basis.”

Research Question 2: *What is the knowledge level of broadcast Journalists regarding the use of the social media in news broadcasting?*

Table 2: *Knowledge level of respondents on the use of social media in news broadcasting.*

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
High	11	6.0	6.0
Moderate	159	86.4	86.4
Low	9	4.9	4.9
No knowledge	1	0.5	0.5
Undecided	4	2.2	2.2
Total	184	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2015)

The data in Table 2 shows that journalists in broadcast stations in Edo State are knowledgeable on the use of the social media in news broadcasting. However, only 6% of the respondents showed that they have high knowledge level, while 86.4% indicated that they have a moderate knowledge level on the use of the social media in news broadcasting. Data also shows that 4.9% have low level knowledge on the use of social media in news broadcasting, while a negligible 2.7% are undecided.

The analysis indicates that the social media is yet to be fully integrated as part of the operating system of broadcast stations, placing a question mark on their readiness for digital broadcasting. This may have been engendered by the nature or caliber of journalists employed in most media stations. An interview conducted in a study by Onyike (2015, p.15) revealed that many broadcast journalists were former civil servants from the State Ministry of Information who were seconded to broadcast stations. Some had certificates in English language, Linguistics, Law etc. with little skill in journalism.

Using the qualitative data obtained from the interview, majority of respondents agree that their broadcast station have social media accounts. However, they seemed to perceive the utility of the social media only as a tool for news gathering and audience feedback. This idea agrees with the findings of Ekeli and Enobhakare (2013, p.118) that: "Journalists view the social media as useful sources of news and information". Moreover, Wiki (2012) reports that: "In the year 2012, social media became one of the most powerful sources for news update through platforms like *Twitter* and *Facebook*". Most respondents agree however that the social media can be used for broadcast news production and dissemination, even though they were unable to demonstrate how this can be achieved. In this regard, knowledge of ICT and the workings of the social media would be a plus for broadcast journalists who are expected to be multi-skilled in the digital era. Navin Singh Khadka of BBC was cited by Imelda (2011, p.184) as noting that: "social media has been very important for reporting and producing his stories as the BBC has been increasingly using new media platforms."

Research Question 3: *To what extent do broadcast journalists in Edo State use the social media in news broadcasting?*

Table 3: *Extent to which respondents use social media in news broadcasting*

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
High extent	23	12.5	12.5
Moderate extent	141	76.6	76.6
Low extent	13	7.1	7.1
Not at all	1	0.5	0.5
Undecided	6	3.3	3.3
Total	184	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2015)

The data displayed in Table 3 above, shows that 23 respondents (12.5%) use the social media in news broadcasting to a high extent; while 141 (76.6%) respondents use it to a moderate extent. Another 13 respondents (7.1%) use social media to a low extent, 1 (0.5%) respondent do not use it at all; while 6 (3.3%) respondents are undecided.

Using the qualitative data obtained from the interview, majority of respondents agree that although they make use of the social media in their news reportage, the extent and pattern of usage is an issue. For instance, it was discovered that all the broadcast stations investigated have *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts. However these are not specifically used for news broadcasting, but are used mainly for audience participation programmes. Respondents argue however, that sometimes the accounts are used to source news especially when the audience make valuable contributions on topical issues. Obviously the interview indicates that social media is used by broadcast stations but more needs to be done as more and more media houses now have online platforms specifically devoted to news broadcasting. Moreover, Ekeli and Enobakhare (2013, p.120) opine that “user-generated contents have replaced old ways of reporting news to a large extent”. If this discovery is anything to go by, then the broadcast journalist and any broadcast medium that refuses to collaboratively engage the social media might find itself out of business.

Conclusion

Developments in communication technologies and industry have remained in a state of flux and so are the uses to which they are put. For the journalism profession, the use of the social media in news broadcasting is currently experienced globally and this does have a far reaching implications for the broadcast professional in a multivariate media environment where survival is dependent not on appearance on the airwaves alone, but also on creativity and niche marketing. The ability to get scoops and serve them to a wider audience is a factor of survival in this era of information super highway where information travels with the speed of light. Unfortunately, the findings indicate that many journalists are evidently not aware of these media-morphosis and the benefits derivable from the use of social media for news broadcasting, or they are reluctant to accept the new media.

Although, many broadcast journalists have social media accounts such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, but many of them lack knowledge of how to use it for news broadcasting. They consider the medium to be too conversational and therefore may not be suitable for something as professional as news reporting.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of the investigation, the study proffers the following recommendations:

- Broadcast stations should review their editorial policies from time to time in order to give room for innovative ideas that can enhance the productivity of journalists, keeping in line with trends in the journalistic profession.
- From observation, government owned broadcast stations still engage in ‘civil service’ as against ‘public service’ journalism, where one does not base his news judgment on what the wishes of those in authority are but rather on public interest.
- Government subventions and grants should be regularly increased, to enable public broadcast stations compete favourably with those in the private sector.
- Since respondents demonstrate inadequate knowledge of the social media, it is recommended that periodic training or workshops be organized for journalists to update them on emerging trends in journalism especially as it affects the use of the social media in news broadcasting.

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