

## **INFLUENCE OF THE INTERNET ON NIGERIAN JOURNALISM**

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### **Abstract**

*The internet has played a very vital role in every aspect of journalism. It has been a medium of publication in terms of news reporting and direction for journalism education, as well as it has been used to find out new facts about the social and economic responsibilities of journalists in terms of the ethical practice of journalism. Traditional media has been under threat since the evolution and existence of the internet. Some Nigerian media organisations have an already established presence in cyberspace, and these media houses have continued to be veritable sources of news and information to both Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. Since the inception of the internet, the rate of the performance of the press and printing industry has been declining steadily. The movement of readers, viewers and advertisers from the print and broadcast media to the web is not limited to only the Western world but has also become a visible trend in developing countries, including Nigeria, and some changes have occurred in the various file of the profession since the advent of the internet. As a result of this, the paper is aimed at identifying the influence of the internet on Nigerian journalism and looking at the changes that online journalism has brought to the media landscape in Nigerian as the traditional media mainly feel its presence. The study adopts the technological determinism theory by McLuhan and the media morphosis theory. While technological determinists hold that technology is the primary determinant of change in society, Media morphosis theory supports the unification of already existing media institutions with the changes brought about by technology. It, however, concluded that the traditional media, instead of being displaced by online journalism, should try to converge with the new media to enhance its operation. Secondary data was obtained through library research, and it was recommended that both the federal government and the state government, as well as privately owned media houses, should strive to train their staff on online journalism and also equip the media houses with the needed infrastructure to assist them to stay relevant in their field in this digital era of online journalism.*

**Keywords:** *Internet, Journalism, Traditional media, metamorphosis, technological determinism*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The technology, in a way, has brought forth a set of opportunities and challenges for conventional media (Garrison, 1996). In the last couple of years, many inventions have significantly affected how people access and consume news. Audiences have also "developed more sophisticated and specific demands and taste for news delivery, thanks to social media and mobile technology" (Kolodzy, 2013). Today's audience has been considered non-captive and yet far more empowered. This comes with challenges and also opportunities. The challenge that it comes with is that those who stick to a speciality area like radio or television risk the opportunity of being redundant to a particular medium. So, "rather than undermining the traditional narrative, the internet is an opportunity to experiment with multi-dimensional storytelling and new narrative approaches that provide context and depth and are more compelling and engaging" (Grabowicz, 2014). New media such as Twitter, Facebook and others are all regarded as platforms in which news is broken and content is shared.

The internet, which is the alternate source of news and information, is not only free but also very fast. A large amount of information and news provided by the internet, which is updated every few minutes, has not been enjoyed by the newspaper which receives its information once a day. It is much easier to get back to the same news or any piece of information without the need to store the newspaper on a rack which could be tiring. Also, the internet could be used at any time of the day and anywhere without taking a long time to search for any piece of information.

Traditional media organisations are recently feeling the impact of two distinct and powerful trends: the internet news has arrived and is also attracting critical segments of the news audience. According to Pew Research Centre (1999), the internet has made the most significant inroads among younger and better-educated people. The digital tide has less of a direct negative impact on radio and print outlets. The Pew survey finds no evidence that internet use drives down the regular reading of daily newspapers or listening to radio news. However, all news outlets are being affected by the public's slowly declining appetite for news.

According to the English dictionary, the Internet is a network of computers consisting of a worldwide network that enables Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) that facilitates data transmission and exchange. On the other hand, journalism can be defined as disseminating information involving news gathering, reporting, editing, and production of print media of mass communication such as newspapers, magazines, and others.

To now discuss the concept of journalism in an internet-enabled world means that one would need to trace the history or evolution of journalism before and during the internet era while at the same time considering the fusion of the internet into mass communication. The emergence of the internet, which birthed social media and online journalism platforms, could have resulted in the emergence of a new set of content creators and distributors who see the opportunity provided by the internet to communicate to the world at the shortest possible time a very relatively low cost.

The seeming insatiable information needs of the people who always want to know what happened between the moment they went to bed and the time they woke up in the morning also forced journalists to key into the application of the internet in their journalistic practice. Because of this, people read up posts from social media when they wake up to keep themselves abreast of development apart from listening to the radio and watching television.

The Advent of Technology, according to journalism experts, has revolutionised news gathering and dissemination, with many internet-savvy turning themselves into journalists overnight. However, the adverse development that made journalism become an all-comers affair eroded the dignity of the journalism profession due to fake news, misinformation, and subjugation of the sacredness of facts, which were hitherto held in high regard by media practitioners.

It is noteworthy that Journalism in Nigeria began to undergo a revolution in the early 2000s when according to Kperogi (2012), major Nigerian newspapers started migrating to the internet while actively sustaining their print editions. He submitted that citizen journalists and Nigerians in the diaspora who were regarded as elites and exposed became the dissatisfaction with the world's traditional home-based media either gagged to report events from the government's side or slanted their report to suit their employers. In their bid to promote transparency and bring accountability to governance, these Nigerians constitute themselves into Vanguard for online donating, which is internet dependent. According to Kperogi (2011), the default *Post Express* owned by Dr Stanley Macebuh was the first Nigerian newspaper widely acknowledged to migrate its content to the internet in the year 1996, while many others followed suits by the mid-2000s. The popularity of internet services, especially the introduction of mobile devices that allow people to share information from the comforts of their homes, was a significant turning point when the accuracy of news content or information sourced online became jeopardised.

Rich (2010), in his book, "Evaluating The Accuracy of Social Media News Reports," said print and broadcast journalists and public relations professionals have codes of ethics that govern the media. However, codes do not resolve ethical dilemmas; they can only serve as guides, but who tells bloggers and citizen journalists what ethical principles to follow? The blogosphere is like unruly Wild West with no sheriff to enforce law and order. The development, as well as the broad application of the internet, has been imposed.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose for which the paper is written is to evaluate the influence that the internet has on journalism practice in Nigeria, to bring to the public eye the changes it has brought to the journalism profession and the under-utilisation of the new communication technology in the journalism profession in Nigeria.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Library research was utilised to obtain secondary data for this paper.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The technological determinism theory and the metamorphosis theory of mass communication are the two theories upon which this study is based. Accordingly, technological determinists believe that technical developments, communications technologies or media, or most broadly, technology are the prime antecedent causes of change in society, and technology is seen as the fundamental condition underlying the pattern of social organisation (Chandler, 1995).

The theory states that media technologies shape the way we feel, think, act as individuals in a society and how a society operates as it moves from the technological age to another (i.e. Tribal – literate – print-electronic). Griffin (2000, pp. 313-325) elaborates McLuhan's theory of 1963 that we think, learn and feel in a certain way because of the messages we receive through the available new technology. McLuhan (1962), *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the making of typographic man*, explained that the radio required people only to listen and develop their sense of hearing. On the contrary, television engages both our hearing and visual senses, and we then transfer those developed senses into our everyday lives and want to use them again. Our message is then the medium.

The second theory which drives this study is the mediamorphosis theory. Fidler (1997) states that mediamorphosis is a unified way of thinking about the technology evolution of communication media ([www.amazon.com/ media-morphosis](http://www.amazon.com/media-morphosis)). Fidler derives his mediamorphosis tenet from the concept of co-evolution, convergence and complexity. The primary goal of his position is that as new media forms evolve and develop, they influence over time and, to different degrees, the advancement of other existing media such that rather than the emergent media substituting the existing one, the existing one converges with it to enhance its operations. The essence of mediamorphosis is that the media are complex adaptive systems. The media, like other systems, respond to external pressures with a spontaneous process of self-organisation, (Anaeto, et al, 2008,p.191). The two theories are appropriate for this work because they both explained how online journalism had altered the daily activities of the traditional media.

With the invention of technology, the journalism profession has explored its potential to reach its audience. Nowadays, the internet has become the latest technology, making journalism thrive.

### **NIGERIA AND THE PRESENT-DAY JOURNALISM**

Talabi (2011) said that "The internet is the fastest growing medium in history, while the digitalisation, convergence of computers and telephony technologies - which are essential to the internet, have severely affected how information is produced and disseminated". Records are placed on the ability of the media to harness the potentials of the world wide web, among other services provided by the net could be regarded as another turning point in the era of internet journalism.

It is now evident that the presence of the internet has made everybody become a journalist, just as everybody was made a printer by Gutenberg with the invention of the printing press, and Marconi made everyone a broadcaster by giving the world radio (Ezeibe and Nwagwu 2009 pp.65-66). Talabi (2011) added that 'desktop publishing, which uses a computer and

specialised software to combine text and graphics to create a document printed on either a laser printer or typesetting machine, has lessened the burden of typesetting on the old manual typewriter.

The use of computer in layout and printing enhances accuracy helping to control newspaper/magazine costs electronic editing, proofreading, formatting, spell checking tools, calculator and other software tools now facilitate the speed and ease news gathering and dissemination". According to the conventional definition of being information or report about events that happened recently or ongoing has become more current because the internet enables technology now transport the audience virtually to the scene of the events.

Today, people obtain information, education, news and other data from electronic and print media. The mass media have upheld an authoritative voice in diverse ways as the storytellers of the Nigerian past. Its documentary style, narratives, detailed exposures, and position make it the prime source for public memory. However, with the presence of the internet and as online sources become more popular among the old and young generation, these sources have gradually played down the traditional voices of news media. This could have resulted in a shift towards reading on emails, smartphones, and other electronic devices rather than print media. The online media, which have become ubiquitously accessible to all and sundry and with its interactive nature, have also, become sources of information and interaction amongst Nigerians and others around the world. This study has necessitated determining how the traditional media can co-exist with the internet in delivering tasks.

As the internet is changing the face of communication, journalists now have a new way of packaging and disseminating news to the public. Apart from sending emails to headquarters and receiving instructions from the internet, new opportunities have opened for journalists to sell stories to other media houses locally and globally. The internet has made the world easier and smaller for journalists to explore. This remarkable technology has also made a research on various subject matters available via chatting and exchanging messages. This, in a way, has created new markets and forms of journalism where journalists work as online journalists, content managers or editors for a particular website. The internet pushes journalists to learn new skills to add content to a website blog and create hypertext links. The internet is also leading journalists to have knowledge of photographic skills. The Internet has made it easy for journalists to research any subject as it is one of the most significant resources, and it has also made it easy to find out what acronyms stand for and research a specific subject matter. Indeed there is no doubt that the internet has also changed the way journalists write for newspapers as they now have to learn how to write for online newspapers strictly.

The rapid adoption of the internet by journalists is a nationwide phenomenon. The process by which computerisation or digitalisation impacted the media of the 21st century has moved on many fronts and at different speeds. The internet also has the ability of the media to harness the potentials of the World Wide Web, among other services provided by it. The www, a system for accessing, manipulating, and downloading a massive set of hypertext-

linked documents and other files located on computers connected through the internet, has afforded both the source and receiver to send and receive messages and advertise goods services (Christiana Chukwu, 2014).

The internet is by far the most noticeable manifestation of media proliferation. Ende and Udende (2011, p.55) believe that "a common feature of our globalised world is the explosion of media options that continually offer a bewildering amount of information on various issues". The internet has also helped spread social media, which are the internet sites where people can communicate, share and discuss information about their lives and other things, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos, and audio. Individuals and groups can create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person conversations by using these sites. Kaplan and Micheal (2010, pp 59 - 68) perceive social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content". These tools are social because they are programmed in ways that enable users to share and communicate with one another.

Nowadays, the advent of these technologies makes everyone who can utilise them a mass communicator. One can stay in the bedroom, sitting room, or even in a moving vehicle and access information, entertainment, and events and enjoy the whole relationship with the world just by pressing a button. Just a click on the buttons and the world can become aware of recent developments instantaneously.

### **THE NEWS VALUE**

The internet has been able to redefine the news value. Journalists at some time were able to attach news to more political, public affairs and government operations and consider these as topics required to keep the audience informed about democracy which was perceived to be the best system of government because it is a participatory form of government. People, however, define news differently; to a business person, it may be financial information while team scores maybe for sports lovers, but one thing is sure; news is about timely information, which is of great importance and very interesting to its audience. All these have altered the definition of news as it goes online. The news is now immediate with the latest technology, and the audience begins to expect it every minute. In Nigeria, it is now a habit that audiences go to the internet to post and read the latest whenever there is a crucial or essential issue, but only those with fewer media literacy are left to wait for traditional news.

### **UBIQUITOUS NATURE OF THE NEW MEDIA JOURNALISM**

The way the internet and journalism influence each other shows that the new media journalism is ubiquitous in structure. Although not everybody in society has access to the internet in order to assess the news (because of the digital divide), the presence of mobile phones has, however, made it possible for journalists to gather news everywhere, most especially those who use their phones as mobile internet and send stories which in turn give readers to access. Today's journalism finds itself at an uncommon moment in history where, for the first time, its dominance as the gatekeeper of the news is threatened by new

technology, competitors and potentially by the target audience. With the advent of easy-to-use web publishing tools, always-on connections and powerful mobile gadgets, the online audience has the opportunity to become active participants in the gathering and dissemination of news and information on the internet. The internet matures with every major news event as a medium for news. While news sites are becoming more responsive and able to handle, the uprising demands from audiences and personal news sites are particularly becoming increasingly diverse and playing a crucial role that, until recently, has operated without crucial notice from the traditional media. An excellent thing about new media journalism is that it introduces fresh voices into the national discourse on various topics.

### **ETHICS IN INTERNET JOURNALISM**

Ethics is crucial and germane to journalism because it enhances the profession's standard, and it is worthy of note that any information disseminated on any media should be of ethical standard. The lines between professional journalists and amateurs have become so thin that the structure of news media has changed, thereby affecting the core traits of the journalism profession and its ethics. The emergence of the new media has given many opportunities to large numbers of people to practice journalism without knowing the ethics guiding it, affecting the dynamics of the profession.

Can professionalism still be achieved in this jet age where internet journalism has become the order of the day? Akinfeleye (1990, p.6) cites an American critic, Dean Rosco Pound, who writes those specific roles govern every profession; hence, if bringing news to the audience is the role of a professional journalist, then citizenry journalism is on the right track. However, it goes beyond the issue of gatekeeping chain, where many other factors (editors, reporters, advertisers) are considered before the news gets to the final consumer. If extended to cover more expansive areas, traditional journalists may have the reason to criticise internet journalism for snatching their role and also debase the profession.

Professionalism cannot stand without ethical codes being attached to it. The nationalists and the early press were not governed by any formal ethics and code of conduct in the case of Nigeria. Regulation of the journalism profession later came with the ethical code of the Nigeria Union of Journalists in 1967. Sulin (1987, p.88), in his study of values of journalism practitioners before and after undergoing various courses and training in media ethics, argues that the media ethics course has a noticeable and ethically positive influence upon the student value system. This implies that the way the traditional journalists balance a story and report it without prejudice is considered ethical and may not be followed in today's era of internet journalism as journalists compete to hit the airwave first.

There are lots of factors that influence the journalism profession. Obscenity, which was once a taboo in traditional journalism, is not absent in online journalism, and society does not perceive it as evil anymore. Therefore, what constitutes ethics of the profession in the era of internet journalism is subject to debate.

### **NEW MEDIA AND ITS INTERACTIVITY**

Based on research conducted on the "history" of interactivity, Jensen defines interactivity as "a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user influence the content and form of the mediated communication". Jensen was able to separate interaction from interactivity, and his definition is mainly a technological one. Also, Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006, p.25) posit that interactivity is a switching pivotal that allows the audience more selectivity in their choices of information sources and interactions with other people. In times past, the audiences were only meant to receive the news with little or no space for interaction (discussion forums), based on the quality of the content authenticity, reliability, anonymity. However, in the present age, the internet has offered space for the audience to be able to drop their comments and views based on news content. It is also used to selectively seek and share content and interact with other individuals and groups.

### **INNOVATION IN JOURNALISM**

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, innovation is defined as introducing something new, a new method of doing thing or a new idea. Innovation presently is perceived as one of the essential tools for any society's social and economic development. Implementation of specific innovations is anchored in many strategic documents, both national and international. In relating innovations to journalism are, on the one hand, the use of the Internet in the sourcing, creating, and disseminating journalistic content; on the other hand, innovation activities also involve organisational measures that are associated with journalistic work, management of human resources and new business models implemented by publishing houses and editors. Innovations 'not only alter journalistic practice as such, but challenge journalism to incorporate cross-platform networks in various stages of the process of news production' says Heinrich (15, p. 2). The multiplatform structure of journalism is evolving. Journalism and the media are in no small measure surrounded by many changes and shifts in media logic determined by technological advancements and economic uncertainty on a global scale. Innovation, according to the author, is the crucial factor influencing the 'vitality' of the media, and it builds upon four basic principles:

- a. Research and development**
- b. Freedom of expression**
- c. Objective and impartial news making**
- d. Complying with ethical codes and normative frameworks.**

As for innovations in terms of journalism, it seems that the shifts are manifesting themselves predominantly within the sector of online journalism, especially mobile applications (e.g. the use of interactive design elements and the responsive Web, thanks to which the content easily adjusts itself to the device that is used to access information). Online news portals are following these trends as well, for instance, by adapting their structure and composition to the technological means of communication to wholly use their advantages and make the content easier to access. Text arrangement in the online issues of the newspaper is very different from the traditional press but also with 'newspapers' designed for mobile phones and tablets.

Implementation of strategic innovation in journalism has severe problems since business activities answerable to journalism often aim to achieve relatively short-term objectives. The present-day print newspapers (and print media in general) emphasise meeting



deadlines and fulfilling strategic plans related to advertising sales. It means that many innovative activities are not carried out for long. On the other hand, some innovative production methods have birthed many changes in editorial practices. These encompass optimisation of work, new publication strategies associated with the internet and mobile devices ('mobile first'), content creation that corresponds with demands of the used media or employment of Snapchat in terms of journalistic work.

### **SOCIAL-POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL ESSENTIALITY OF JOURNALISM**

Most media houses rely on advertisement as revenue because media production is capital intensive. Much money is used in printing and distributing newspapers, so most slums, villages, and small towns do not have newspaper establishment and circulation within their immediate environment. With the uprise of the internet, there is less revenue accrued to media houses because most of them have taken the production and dissemination of news online to stay in business. The political economy of any society asserts that the production of media products are restrained by economic and political factors, especially the private-owned media houses (Williams, 2003, p.26). Murdock and Golding (as cited in Williams, 2003, p.227) are convinced that the mass media is regarded as both an industrial and commercial organisation saddled with the responsibility of producing and distributing media commodities. Media owners are aspiring to support and preserve the tenets of journalism.

### **JOURNALISM PROFESSION AT RISK**

For the first time, the gate-keeping function of journalism has been threatened not only by the emergence of the new technology but also by the audience that it serves. Armed with convenient and not too challenging to use publishing tools, the online audience has become active participants in creating and disseminating news and information. As a medium of news creation and dissemination, the internet grows every day with significant news events. As news sites are becoming increasingly responsive and better and able to handle the growing demands of readers and viewers, online communities and news and information sites are becoming more diversified and are playing important roles that the mainstream media have noticed. One laudable accomplishment of internet journalism is that it has brought new ideas into topics of national interest and has to build and sustain online communities through the nexus of links.

### **CONCLUSION**

The world of journalism has moved away from the Gutenberg age to the new age of the internet enliven era where news production has become less cumbersome and more current with the advantage of internet technology. When people go online, they look for much more information, giving journalists more information on the subject matter. The online version provides more information, video clips and a series of pictures which the print version cannot provide because it has limited space. The internet is more attractive as it offers journalists a multimedia platform where journalism can provide data, video and voice as Gasher (2002:176) believes that online newspaper is meant to capture a broader

audience internationally. As technology enhances, more changes will continue to occur. Williams (2003:227) sums it up:

Early in the following millennium, people's right or left cufflinks or earrings may communicate by low-orbiting satellites and have more computer power than the present computer. Your telephone will not ring indiscriminately; it will receive and respond to your incoming calls like a well-trained English butler. Systems will redefine mass media for transmitting and receiving personalised information and entertainment.

On this note, it is essentially essential to emphasise that the internet, when compared with other media, displays the followings as discussed by McQuail (2005:141)

1. The internet is not only mainly concerned with producing and distributing messages. It is at least equally concerned with the processing, exchanging, and storing of information.
2. The internet is as much as an institution of private as well as of public communication
3. The operation is not typically professional bureaucratically organised to the same degree as mass media.

In their efforts to sanitise the profession and entrench accuracy, journalism experts have made several positions to institutionalise the sacredness of facts and accuracy in online journalism practice. However, the lacking political will among the national leaders must be checked. Governments of most countries do not help matters as they show lackadaisical attitudes towards investing in the public media to make them functional towards serving the people. Consequently, the media audience prefers to go online to get the best they think is better for them. It is a widespread belief that officials of traditional media information are more superior in quality and readability when compared to news reported by a blogger or someone with a shaky camcorder. Traditional media keep on being preached as the source of truth, but what they lack is precisely the essence of truth-validation.

In contrast to traditional media, internet journalism finds its strength in a large community's continuous validation process. In essence, what is emerging now is a new media ecosystem, where online communities discuss and extend the stories created by the traditional media. These communities also help produce participatory journalism, grassroots reporting, commentary, and fact-checking, fed upon and developed as a pool of tips, sources, and story ideas by the traditional media.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Media houses should train their staff if they are yet to do so about the rudiments of the internet as soon as possible.
2. Media houses having online sites should ensure that they keep and sustain it.
3. Enabling infrastructure should be provided in rural areas by the government so that journalists can access such areas to send and get reports in such areas.
4. An online version (i.e. the traditional media houses with an online press) should provide detailed information and, in most cases, provide video clips and a series of pictures, unlike the print version, which has limited pages

5. Media stations should make arrangements for internet facilities in all their offices for the staff members to compete with their counterparts all over the world.

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