

A Discourse on the Use of Social Media by Journalists in Nigeria

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Abstract

The social media, which is the product of new media technology, has incontrovertibly charted new frontiers for conventional journalists. Practitioners in most developed countries of the world now rely heavily on the social media to generate contents. Expectedly, the concept of collaborative journalism has emerged. Emphasis has shifted from mere social interactions among folks to more sophisticated collaboration. While there this is wide spread practice in the developed societies, available statistics indicate that journalists in Africa are still grasping to acquire the needed knowledge to utilize social media platforms. Thus, this study amongst other things is aimed at assessing the use of social media by journalists in Nigeria and how such usage affects the performance of their duties. The research design used was survey; purposive sampling technique was used in studying 399 registered journalists in South East Nigeria. The findings of this study indicated that Nigerian journalists do not make adequate use of the social media; social media enhance news gathering and dissemination; social media has remarkably affected the performance of journalists in Nigeria; social media has negative effect on journalists in Nigeria. The study recommends amongst others for the provision of adequate infrastructure and access; constant verification of the authenticity of stories through crowd sampling, financial support from both government and private sector and the adoption of necessary digital media skills by journalists to reinvent the media and remain relevant in this digital age.

INTRODUCTION

For almost two decades, the new media has revolutionized how information is searched, processed, published, stored, and consumed. The growing sophistication of media business, undoubtedly, engineered stiffer competition in the media circle. Therefore, the struggle by practitioners to stay ahead in the business has increased the need for heavy deployment of new media technologies. These technologies, experts maintain, give a journalist the desired edge over a dynamic and interactive mass media audience who is not just a consumer but a contributor to mass media messages. This growing contribution between journalists and audience members has brought to the fore the concepts of *prosumers* and User Generated Contents (UGC).

Internet is now a new way of news gathering, which gives the greatest amount of advantage to Nigerian journalists. It has become an encyclopedia of virtually all the information in the world and most of the information is gathered free unlike that of news agencies and wire service which requires media stations to pay for every story.

The internet offers an endless number of niche to social communities where members can gather around a common topic. Both general and specific topics now have living homes on the internet; anything from colon and digestive health to security and compliance can and do have active social media communities.

Social media are media for social interaction using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. It is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue (Joseph, 2013).

Social media is the future of communication; a countless collection of internet based tools and platforms that increase and enhance information sharing (Belch, 2009). This new form of media makes the transfer of text, photos, audio, video and information in general increasingly flowing among internet users. Some platforms have created online communities where people share as much or as little personal information as they wish with other members. Such platforms are Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. The result is an immense amount of information that can be shared, searched, promoted, disputed, and created easily.

Social book marking tools and news sites such as Digg, Delicious, Reddit and countless others make finding specific information, images, or websites increasingly simple by giving responsibility (assigning) or tagging individual sites with searchable key words (Dominick, 2013).

There are endless number and functionality of applications that have developed within and around these platforms, websites and tools, but all make online sharing and searching easier in some way, regardless of their opportunity.

The vital question now being looked into by an ever growing number of social media ‘experts’ is how to best utilize the unlimited amount of information available from social media sites for business advertising, social good, and who knows what else (www.socialmediadefined.com). Social media according to investopedia, originated as strictly with friends and family.

Through social media, anyone with internet access can interact with millions of people online. It is not necessary for only a journalist, a politician, or a CEO. It is for anyone that considers its usage important (www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social).

Social media is the collection of online communications channels dedicated to community-base input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social book marking, social curation, and Wikis are among the different types of social media.

Interesting, the social media which refers to web-based platforms housed on the internet, is the main driver of this collaboration. Journalists, especially those in developed climes, are continuously using social media platforms to solicit for new information or confirm reports. There are many social media platforms but the most commonly used are: Facebook (with 900,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors); Twitter (with 310,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors); YouTube (with 410,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors); LinkedIn (with 255,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors); Pinterest: (with 250,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors); Google Plus (with 120,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors) Quantcast (with 110,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors); Instagram (with 100,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors); VK (with 80,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors); Flickr (with 65,000,000 - Estimated Unique Monthly Visitors); Vine Rank (with 42,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors); Meetup (40,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors); Tagged (with 38,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors); Ask.fm (with 37,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors) and ClassMates (with 15,000,000 - estimated unique monthly visitors) (Tomno, 2012).

Social media is becoming an essential part of life online as social websites and applications multiply. Most traditional online media include social components such as comment fields of users. The term ‘social media’ is likely to lose meaning as the social aspect of the web becomes increasingly taken for granted.

Internet creates many challenges on mass media because mass media is carefully thought of as a “spoon-fed” sources of information, a one-way conversation where some media outlets or publishers say “here you go”, this is it.” Where as, with the computer technology, the power moved to the people and the multiplication of the users of information and audience generated content. It is now a two-way conversation. The new media which the internet is one, has gone a long way in bringing information to one’s doorstep.

It is very obvious that journalists in the country who want to give adequate information about the widest topical issues will benefit from the service of the internet as source of gathering information and serving as a platform for journalists to exchange information.

Nigerian journalists through the internet can reach into the daily affairs of the public without being present physically; this reduces traveling, cost and stress. More so, the internet serves as an essential source where journalists get information at anytime.

Statement of the Problem:

While there this is wide spread use of social media by journalists in developed societies, available statistics indicate that journalists in Africa are still grasping to acquire the needed knowledge to utilize social media platforms. Apart from this, there is also an ethical issue to the pocket of usage now obtainable in Nigeria. Unfortunately, there are limited studies suggesting the knowledge and utilization of social media among journalists. With the increasing need for enriched media content in the face of analogue to digital migration, there is need to establish the degree to which broadcast journalists utilize the social media in their daily media operations.

Hence this study will among other things investigate the knowledge and utilization of social media among journalists in Nigeria.

Objectives

Hence, the objectives of this study are thus:

- 1) To ascertain if Nigerian journalists make adequate use of the social media
- 2) To examine whether social media enhance news gathering and dissemination
- 3) To determine the extent social media has affected the performance of journalists in Nigeria
- 4) To find out if there is any negative effect of social media on journalists in Nigeria.
- 5) To ascertain how to improve the use of social media by Nigerian journalists

Research Questions:

- 1) Do Nigeria journalists make adequate use of the social media?
- 2) Do the social media enhance news gathering and dissemination?
- 3) To what extent has social media affected the performance of journalists in Nigeria?
- 4) Is there any negative effect of social media on journalists in Nigeria?
- 5) How can the use of social media by Nigerian journalists be improved?

Literature Review:

Communicating with family and friends across far places has always been a concern of humans for several years. As social beings, humans have always depended on communication to make their relationships wax stronger. Humans have always wished of plenty of creative solutions when face-to-face discussions are impossible or inconvenient (Drew 2013).

Social media can be traced as far back as the 1900s, although it appears like a new trend, sites like Twitter, Facebook, are naturally the outcome of the development of social media of many centuries (several years).

The telegraph was invented in 1792, thus, allowing messages to be delivered over long distance fast. Telegraphs were a new way to convey news and information, although their messages were short. The discoveries of the telephone in 1890 and the radio in 1891 enabled people to communicate across great distances instantaneously.

In the 20th century, technology began to change very rapidly. After the creation of the first super computers in 1940s, scientists and engineers started to develop ways to create networks between those computers. Thus, later led to the birth of the internet.

In 1960s, the earliest forms of the internet such as CompuServe were developed alongside the crude (primitive) forms of email. Networking technology improved by the 70s and users UseNet allowed users to communicate through a virtual newsletter in 1979's.

Home computers were becoming more common in the 1980s, leading to social media becoming more sophisticated. In 1988, the Internet Relay Chats (IRCs) were used for the first time and this continued to be well known by a large number of people through the 1990's (Hendricks, 2013).

In 1997, the first known social media site, Six degrees, was created, which enabled users to upload profiles and make friends with other users. The first blogging sites became popular in 1999, producing a social media sensation that is still well known today.

After the invention of blogging, social media began to explode in popularity. Sites like Myspace and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s, and sites like Photobucket and Flickr facilitated online photo sharing. YouTube came out in 2005, creating an entirely new way for people to communicate and share with each other across great distances (Hendricks, 2013).

Facebook and Twitter, both became available to users worldwide by 2006. These sites are still some of the most popular social networks on the internet. Other sites started coming up to fill specific social networking opportunities, sites like Tumblr, Spotify, Foursquare and Pinterest.

Nowadays, there is a huge variety of social networking sites, and many of them can be linked to make cross posting possible. Thus, creating an environment where users can reach a large number of people without giving up the closeness of person-to-person communication. Social networking of no doubt will exist in some form (higher than this) for as long as humans are alive.

The use of social media and other electronic communication is expanding exponentially. People use blogs, social networking sites, and video sites to communicate both personally and professionally with others. It is an exciting and valuable tool when used wisely. However, it can pose a risk as it offers instantaneous posting opportunities that allow little time for reflective thought.

The internet has created the ability for journalists to communicate and share information quickly and to reach millions of people easily. Social networking and other similar internet opportunities support personal expression and enable individuals to have a professional presence online and foster camaraderie within the profession, provide opportunity to widely disseminate messages (Joseph, 2013).

For journalists and news organizations, social networks provide an opportunity for connecting with people, distributing news stories and complementing news coverage with feeds from social media.

Reporters can join the networks, converse with people and showcase their stories. It's yet another way for reporters to develop personal brands for their work. News organizations can create their own pages on social networks such as a fan page on Facebook, and use that to alert people to important news stories the news organization has published or post other items of interest to its audience/followers. Or they can set up their own social networks, using third party software like wing or their own homegrown platforms.

Social networks are fantastic for generating conversations among people about stories. Many news media have found that the volume of readers' comments on a story posted on Facebook can exceed comments posted on the news organization's website.

News organizations can develop devices (widgets) that provide feeds of news stories that can be shown on the personal pages of social network members. For instance, the Channel TV widgets page that people can use to fix news feeds from the Channel on their personal profile pages or on blogs or other websites.

News sites can use an application like storify to pull together postings to Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites on a particular topic in the news, especially a breaking news story.

News media can tell first-person stories using Facebook postings, such as someone publishing online his experience in life. Journalists also can use social networks like Facebook, Twitter to find sources for stories. For instance, Facebook's Graph Search which can be used to locate people who work at particular companies or organizations, live in specific towns or cities or have particular interests. Interest lists can also be created on Facebook to create a custom feed of postings by people around specific topics. Drew (2013).

People are increasingly learning about news stories via social networks, but the percentage is still small. News organizations need to do more than just post links to stories on Facebook or services like Twitter. Instead, the postings need to be more informal and conversational; provide commentary or analysis on the news and invite people to participate, such as asking them to answer a question or provide suggestions for stories or story angles to pursue.

Adding a quality photo to a posting also increases significantly readers' responses, such as likes or comments.

According to Liz Heron, who manages the team of social media editors at the Wall Street Journal, whenever possible, uses images to tell a story. We often put photos and charts directly into tweets, and almost everything we post on Facebook has an image. Really, putting a priority on being able to tell a story in a visual way has been one of the biggest shifts for us and the most important shifts in terms of growing our community (Source: Five social media tips from the Wall Street Journal-Journalism.co.uk, vol 2, p 4.2014).

Based on studies of the kind of content people are most likely to share with others, stories that are fun or cute or made people happy are most effective, followed by stories that put in mind anger or disgust. Least effective would be stories that cause little emotion.

Postings need to be regular, but not overwhelming. Maybe 5-10 posts a day. There is no ideal length and both short and long posts can engage people depending on the subject matter. According to Liz Heron, (2014), "405 line posts seem to work best (How journalists are using Facebook subscribe)".

According to Ismail Adebayo, reporter of Sunday Trust Newspaper, in his publication on "how we use social media to source stories by Nigerian journalists" pointed out that except for few who have their reservations on the social media, journalists in Nigeria are excited with the opportunities the social networks offer them. It has aided them in carrying out their tasks of news monitoring and gathering.

Journalists explore various sites on regular basis daily to monitor what citizen journalists and newsmakers post on their Twitters, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Blogs, etc. The modern journalists today will need to make use of these new tools so as to gather information, produce material and get their audiences engaged in new ways. This has changed completely the way journalists deliver their stories, thus, transforming the way journalists break news.

Citing Sunday Trust newspaper of Sunday 9th September 2012, many journalists claimed they can reach their news sources, gather stories and make verifications on the authenticity of the stories with less difficulty through the social networks.

Some information that would have been difficult is gotten with less difficulty from the social networks and some people in position of information can as well be reached. Social media breaks geographical boundaries and get instantaneous answers to questions.

The discuss on the importance of the social media to the practice of journalism had railed for some years now, social media tools from early 2011 have finally attained the status of importance for journalists. The web has drastically changed everything such that with a blog, anyone can be a reporter, anyone with a cell phone can be a videographer and anyone on Facebook, Twitter or other platform can be a news editor.

Presently, people are using Twitter, Facebook and other social media sources to learn about what happening in the world as traditional news outlets become increasingly less relevant to the digital generation.

The news cycle has moved from a passive news cycle (in which the journalists finds news, reports it and the audience consumes it) to interactive applications of news. Initially, when the story went live, that was the end. But now, it's the beginning. The audience can comment, share, add or even change information. The period of I write, you read, you're welcome is long gone.

When stories are moved to open space like Twitter, Facebook, it means interesting stories will be read more often than they would have been if they were published in the middle of a newspaper.

Technology Determination Theory:

This study is based on technology determination theory. Technological determination states that media technology shapes how we as individuals in a society think, feel, act, and how society operates as we move from one technological age to another (Tribal-Literature-Print-Electronic).

The theory explains that when new systems of technology are developed, the culture or society is immediately changed to reflect the senses needed to use the new technology. Society will always change and adapt to the new system of media technology.

This theory for the above reasons is very relevant to this study since it describes human nature in its society in the digital era. Wherever the media exert forceful influence, they also cause change (Anderson, R., and Ross, V 1998)

METHODOLOGY:

Survey research design was used for the study. The population of study was registered journalists in South East Nigeria with population of 665 from where a sample size of 399 was drawn using Taro Yamane formula, which states thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e)^2}$$

- Where n= desired sample size
- N= Population size under study
- e= level of significance of error of limit of tolerable error assumed to be 5% or 0.05
- 1= unity (always constant) in value.

Table 1: Registered Journalists

State	No of Registered Journalists	No of Journalists Studied
Abia	160	93
Anambra	150	88
Ebonyi	145	84
Enugu	90	57
Imo	29	77
Total	665	399

The researchers employed purposive sampling technique in selecting registered active Journalists from the different South East state chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalists. The instrument used for collecting data was questionnaire, which 399 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and same number of copies was also returned. The responses were presented in table form, frequencies and percentages and were interpreted and analyzed.

Table 2: Personal Data of Respondents

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER DISTRIBUTION		
Male	271	67.91%
Female	128	32.08%
AGE DISTRIBUTION		
18-25	64	16.04%
26-35	123	30.83%
36-45	132	33.08%
46 and above	80	20%
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION		
WAEC/SSCE	12	3%
Tertiary	387	96.99%
Total	399	100

Table 3: Research question one:

Do Nigerian journalists make adequate use of the social media?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	163	40.85
No	192	48.12
Can't say	44	11.03
Total	399	100

The above table indicated that 173 (40.85%) respondents concord that Nigerian journalists make adequate use of the social media while 182 (48.62%) do not agree and 44 (11.03%) can't say.

This implies that Nigerian journalists do not really make adequate use of the social media since the number of respondents who said No outweighed the number who said yes and can't say.

Table 4: Research Question two
Do the social media enhance news gathering and dissemination?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	381	95.49
No	12	3
Can't say	6	1.5
Total	399	100

The data presented in the table above show that 381 (95.49%) respondents accepted that social media enhance news gathering and dissemination, while 12 (3%) said no and 6 (1.5%) can't say. This means that the social media enhance news gathering and dissemination, thus, the number of people who said yes is overwhelming and far above those that said no and can't say.

Table 5: Research question three:
To what extent has social media affected the performance of journalists in Nigeria?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
High	352	88.22%
Moderate	34	8.52
LOW	11	2.76
Can't say	2	0.5
Total	399	100%

The table above show that 352 (88.22%) respondents rated the effect of social media on the performance of journalists in Nigeria high, 34 (8.52%) respondents said the extent social media affect journalists performance in Nigeria is moderate, 11 (2.76) respondents said low while 2 (0.5%) respondents can't say.

This means that social media has highly affected the performance of journalists in Nigeria, since the number of respondents who rated the extent to which social media affected journalists performance high is more than the rating of moderate, low and can't say.

Table 6: Research Question four:
Is there any negative effect of the social media on journalists in Nigeria?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	251	62.91
No	141	35.34
Can't say	7	1.75%
Total	399	100

Data presented in the above table indicate that 251 (62.91%) agreed that social media has negative effect on journalists in Nigeria, 141 (35.34%) respondents said no while 7 (1.75%) can't say.

This implies that the social media pose negative effect on journalists in Nigeria, since the number of respondents who agreed (who said yes) outweighed those who said No and can't say.

Research Question 5:

How can the use for social media by Nigerian journalists be improved? The respondents suggested thus:

- 1) Provision of adequate infrastructure and more access
- 2) Always verify the authenticity of stories through crowd sampling (many people at a particular place reporting the same thing)
- 3) Financial support from both government and private sector
- 4) Journalists adopting necessary digital media skills to reinvent the media so as to remain relevant and succeed in this digital age.
- 5) Rapid intervention force to tackle ethical problems.

Discussion of findings:

From the findings in this study, it is astonishing that journalists in Nigeria do not make adequate use of the social media. In table 3 as shown in the study, 192 (48.12%) no of respondents said Nigerian journalists do not make adequate use of the social media, 163 (40.85%) respondents said Nigerian journalists make adequate use of the social media while 44 (11.03%) respondent can't say.

This implies that greater number of journalists agree that Nigerian journalists do not really make adequate use of the social media.

The data in table 4 showed that social media enhance news gathering and dissemination. Thus the use of social media should be encouraged even amongst journalists.

More so, findings of this study as shown in tables 5 and 6 means that social media has highly affected the performance of journalists in Nigeria, and that social media pose negative effect on journalists in Nigeria.

The findings further suggested for provision of adequate infrastructures and access; verification of the authenticity of stories through crowd sampling (many people at a particular place reporting the same thing); financial support from both government and private sector; adoption of necessary digital media skills by journalists to reinvent the media so as to remain relevant and succeed in this digital age and finally, rapid intervention force to tackle ethical problems.

Conclusion:

The study assessed the use of social media by journalists in Nigeria. Three hundred and ninety nine registered journalists in South East Nigeria were used as respondents in the study and findings showed that Nigerian journalists make adequate use of the social media. The findings also showed that journalists do not make adequate use of the social media and that social media enhances news gathering and dissemination. The study pointed out that social media has negative effects and suggested ways to improve the use of social media by journalists in Nigeria.

Recommendations:

To improve the use of social media by journalists in Nigeria, this study suggested that the followings be put in place.

- 1) Provision of adequate infrastructure and more access
- 2) Constant verification of authenticity of stories through crowd sampling (many people at a particular place reporting the same thing).
- 3) Financial support from both government and private sector
- 4) Adoption of necessary digital media skills by journalists to reinvent the media so as to remain relevant and succeed in this digital age.
- 5) Rapid intervention force to tackle ethical problems

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