

Imperatives of Internet and Social Media on Broadcast Journalism in Nigeria

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Abstract

The development of radio and later television brought a new dimension to news and events coverage in Nigeria. In 1993 the monopoly of government was broken to allow private participation. This gave the broadcast audience multiple choices of media. The advanced technology in the broadcast media and the development of internet and social media networks further exposed the society to alternative mediums of information. The pervasiveness of these websites in our everyday lives is today changing the face of broadcasting globally and in particular the Nigerian broadcast industry. This paper therefore examines the implication of Internet and social media on broadcast journalism in Nigeria.

Keywords: Imperative, Internet, social media, broadcast Journalism, Nigeria

1. Introduction

For a society to exist and function there must be a functioning media. This fact has already been established in the different earliest societies that make up the entity Nigeria. The various traditional communication channels like the *Town crier*, the *aroko* and the *drum beat* emphasize the role of information and communication between and among the people. The Media are therefore shaping people's everyday lives, politics and cultural activities to a greater extent than ever before. We live in a society that depends on the media for information and communication that guides our daily activities like work, entertainment, health care, education, personal relationships, travelling and anything else that we have to do.

Extolling the role of the mass media in the society Dominick (2002:32) writes that:

May be the best way to appreciate the role the mass communication plays in our society would be to imagine what it would be like if, all of a sudden, the whole system never existed. How would we find out what was on sale at the local supermarket? How would we know Britney Spear's current love interest? How could we find out what was happening in the Middle East? How could we avoid the traffic jams during rush hour? How would we spend our evenings? Obviously, the mass media are a pervasive part of our live.

A very important area in today's broadcasting world over is the technology and equipment for the transmission of media messages. Modern technology has transformed the shape and dimension of broadcasting. Broadcasting media technology has undergone rapid changes and continued until the early 20th century. Modern technologies are today enhancing and facilitating the communication process activities, as well as help the generation and dissemination of information more efficiently to highly dispersed audience in the world. Olorede and Oyewole (2013) claim that :

The catalyst for the transformation of media newsrooms is modern technology. These technologies have further enhanced media credibility, reliability and even affordability and accessibility, as events can be reported as simultaneously as they unfold, with little or no interference and audience's access at a relatively affordable cost. These technologies have also refurbished the obsolete face of media newsrooms; the new sophisticated computers have replaced the old, time-consuming and outdated typewriters, and so on.

In the same vein, Dimoudi (2002:97) said, “The new media technologies are perceived to empower people and democratize the relationships between consumers and producers of content (which could be news or information). It also connects to on-line media logic as a concept which includes the notions of the audience as an active agent in redefining the workings of journalism.” Thus, the emergence of new technologies particularly the internet and social media have created a variety of opportunities of reaching international audiences. Although, social media started out as a platform where friends and families can connect and socialize, today, sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, MySpace, Flickr, Netlog, and Slideshare, are connecting broadcast audiences to the newsroom in new and exciting ways that will not only boost the news and event coverage of both local and international broadcast stations, but also impact positively on the society. The scope of this paper therefore, is to establish ways through which social networks have been incorporated into broadcasting with particularly emphasis on its implications on audience participation in the generation and transmission of information.

2. Theoretical Framework.

The paper is anchored on Technological determinism theory. Marshall McLuhan propounded the technological determinism theory, also known as the medium theory in 1962. The basic assumption of the theory is that technology shapes how individual communicate, relate and interact in the society. It assumes media technology plays a dominant role in the assignment of meaning in the society.

Technological Determinism 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. Technological determinists interpret technology in general and communication technologies in particular as the basis of society in the past, present and even the future.

Most interpretations of technological determinism share two general ideas:

- That the development of technology itself follows a predictable, traceable path largely beyond cultural or political influence, and
- That technology in turn has “effects” on societies that are inherent, rather than socially conditioned or produced, that society organizes itself to support and further develop a technology once it has been introduced.

According to McLuhan (1960) “...communication technology plays such a critical role in the emergence of new social orders and new forms of culture”. Explaining the centrality of the theory to this study, Baran and Davis (2012:274) in their discourse of the medium theory said that McLuhan proclaimed that the medium is the message. In other words, new forms of media transform (message) our experience of ourselves and our society, and this influence is ultimately more important than the content that is transmitted in its specific messages-technology determines experience.

They asked pertinent questions, which we believe resonates with the core of our discourse in this paper. They queried:

What has been your experience with the Internet, in general, and social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter in particular? Have these sites changed the social world of college students for better or worse? Has the internet transformed the political process into a big, robust conversation, or has the screaming match only become more global and more unwieldy? (Baran and Davis, 2012).

Whether you agree with McLuhan’s assertions or not, the basic assumption of the theory is relevant and applicable to impact of technology (Internet and social media) on the media, and in particular, the broadcast media. These technological innovations have changed the landscape of not only local broadcasting but also international broadcasting.

3. Literature Review

3.1 THE NIGERIAN BROADCAST MEDIA

The earliest form of broadcasting in Nigeria was recorded in 1932 when the British colonial government experimented with re-diffusion – relaying British Broadcasting Service programmes from Daventry, England to the Nigerian audience (1989:36). The broadcast system became the only channel of information in the entire country. Uche, citing Milton (1955) describe how the redistribution services worked:

The programmes in the system are distributed by land lines from the studio to the various listening boxes for which the subscribers pay a small fee. Amplification is needed at some locations and was provided... by a

makeshift and homebuilt apparatus. This system caught the interest of Nigeria and was expanded to include stations at Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu Ode, Calabar, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kano, Kaduna, Jos and Zaria.

Another experiment that the colonial masters toyed with was the dream to establish a common West African broadcasting system that would take care of all the colonies under British rule. To bring this into fruition, the firms of F.A.W. Byron and L.W. Turner were commissioned to look at the possibility of bringing this dream to reality. However, the Turner-Byron report indicated that the idea of bringing these African countries together was not possible as a result of the multiplicity of language (Uche, 1989).

Following the recommendation of the committee, the colonial masters established the Nigerian Broadcasting Service on April 1, 1951 and all the existing re-diffusion stations were converted to fully operational radio stations. And on April 1, 1957, the Nigerian Broadcasting Service was converted into a statutory corporation by an Act of Parliament. The service became known as the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (Uche, 1989).

After 26 years of existence of radio broadcasting, the first television signal was sent from the then former Western region on October 31, 1959. The region followed the television transmission with a radio station known as the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service (WNBC). The Eastern and Northern Nigerian regions followed suit on October 1, 1960 and in 1962 respectively. The Federal government started its own television service, Nigerian Television Service (NTS), on April 1960 (Uche, 1989).

Incidentally, the monopoly the colonial government had on the media continued even after the country gained its independence in 1960. This was the situation until 1992, when the then military Head of state, retired General Ibrahim Babangida through the national Broadcasting Commission (NBC) opened the airwaves for private participation in the broadcast industry (Asemah, 2009: 59). The opening up of the airwaves for private ownership meant that Nigerians now had other sources of information other than the federal and state-owned stations which were believed to be too pro-government than fulfilling audience expectations. Interestingly, the Internet has created what is today described as media convergence. According to Krotoski (2011) the Internet is the clearest evidence that this is a revolutionary technology on journalism.

Social Media: social media are believed to be media that are used for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Heinlein (2010:61) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media are becoming ever-more viable platforms for communication and media services.

The main idea associated with the web 2.0 applications is that it facilitates participatory information sharing, collaboration, and user-centered design. By implication, a user on the site does not only consume what he/she sees, he also actively participates in the creation and dissemination of information.

Characteristically, social media sites can afford users:

- The opportunity to add value to the application as they use it through the edit box interface.
- An opportunity to exercise control on the data
- To interact on a more advanced software level.
- Create the Web by socializing and gradually moving members from the physical world to the online world.

By looking at the features presented above, one may then agree with Ron Jone's definition of social media which he described as a "category of online media where people are talking, participating, sharing, networking, and bookmarking online. In other words, social media are social instrument of communication where users seek information, and also interact. The interaction being referred to here is the ability to provide instant feedback in term of reaction to the subject under discussion, which the traditional/mainstream media – radio, television, newspaper and magazine - cannot provide". Owing to this special ability, social media have come to be regarded as a two-way communication channel as against the one-way communication channel of the traditional /mainstream media. These channels, of course, are usually social networking sites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn etc., which Boyd and Ellison (2007) described as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Naturally, because some of these sites incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing, they have come to be referred to as web-based and mobile technologies that allow interactive dialogue among users within a network that transcends space and time.

Although there are different social media, ranging from those that provide social sharing, to those that provide social networks for professionals within the same field, or to interact with other professionals in other fields, but generally speaking, the network provides for users to sign up, create a profile, and begin sending short messages about what they are doing and thinking. In effect therefore, social media enables users to send and receive updates through e-mails, Instant Messages, and in the case of mobile cell phones, pings. The bottom line here is that users can access information wherever, however and whenever they want it and at a time they need it without missing out on conversation.

In the first instance, the word social media suggest there is a process of interaction between two or more persons. The basic idea behind social media is to create mutual relationship among users. On the other hand, the term media suggest a channel through which information is passed to a large diverse audience that may not be within the same geographical area. Together, the two suggest a medium for social interaction among various people that are connected on the same subscribed social network from different locations.

3.2 Differences between Old Media and Social Media

Writing on the differences between social media and the traditional media (radio and television), Wikipedia (2011) notes that:

1. While people obtain information, education, news and other data from electronic media and print media, social media are relatively inexpensive and accessible medium that enables anyone (even private individuals) to publish or access information, compared to industrial media, which generally require significant resources to publish information.
2. Beyond this, social media is said to have served in the same capacity as the traditional media. For instance in the area of reach, social media like the traditional media can reach a global audience
3. While traditional media use a centralized framework for organization, production, and dissemination of information, social media are more decentralized.
4. Again, social media transcend cultures and geographical location. That is, so long as the individual subscribed, culture is not a barrier to connecting to the world.
5. With regards to immediacy, social media messages give room for instantaneous responses, except where participants determine to delay. Also, arising from this is the fact that there is no permanence in message production; in other words, there is room for editing immediately an error is spotted and the editing does not require technical input as those errors committed in radio and TV demands.
6. Another edge that internet and social media have over the traditional media is the fact that it has little or no control over the way users use them. What this means is that audience have freedom to freely express their views regardless of the law of the land. This advantage also gives users some form of protected identity.
7. Social media are today joining radio in breaking the news first. In most cases the news breaks first on social media.

3.3 Implications of social media on broadcast Journalism.

Having differentiated the two media, the question then is, how do people use social media in their daily lives? A research carried out in the United States by The Nielson Company in 2009, showed that time spent on social networking sites increased yearly by 82 percent (The Nielsen Company, 2010). According to The Nielson research;

Globally, social networks and blogs are the most popular online category when ranked by average time spent in December, followed by online games and instant messaging. With 206.9 million unique visitors, Facebook was the No. 1 global social networking destination in December 2009 and 67% of global social media users visited the site during the month. Time on site for Facebook has also been on the rise, with global users spending nearly six hours per month on the site.

Journalists across the world are not left out in the use of internet and social media. According to Krostoski (2011):

The process that happens before a story is published has also been transformed. The web has become the go-to point for the globe when it comes to getting information; it's the same for reporters...more generally, technology has improved the process of identifying stories that are newsworthy. Feeds from social networking services such as facebook and twitter provide a snapshot of events happening around the world from the view point of first-hand witnesses, and blogs and citizen news sources offer analytical perspectives from the ground faster than print or television can

provide.

Writing on the impact of internet on journalism, Adelabu (2014:27) stated that the practice and business of journalism are constantly facing tremendous change and challenges. According to him, the advent of internet with its multi-media capability has given journalism opportunities and challenges to reinvent itself in terms of practice and organization. On the basis of the above summation, the impact of Internet/social media includes:

Internet Telephony: one of the new internet capabilities is internet telephony or PC-to-PC or PC-to-phone which is the term used to describe a category of hardware and software that enables people to use the Internet as the transmission medium for telephone calls. According to a Web Proforum tutorial, Internet telephony refers to: "Communication services – voices, facsimile, and/or voice-messaging applications – that are transported via the Internet, rather than the public switch phones network.

The software compresses the voice signal and translates it into IP packets for transmission over the Internet. The beauty of this is that reporters can call their news station and file in their reports without physically been present in the office. Dizard (2000:39) therefore submits that Internet telephony is expanding rapidly and one of the incentives has been economy. According to Dizard (2000), Internet phone calls can be made anywhere in the world for the price of a local call.

News reporting and editing: news reporting and editing are today activities journalist carry out at the convenience of their hotel room and thereafter send via e- mail to their newsroom so long as they have the software on their computer system.

Sources of news: some social sites provide good news scoop for traditional journalists to develop good stories from. Again, there are new sites, blogs amongst others who break the news even before traditional media. We have seen the emergence of online news platforms such as Sahara reporters, blog shots and other numerous sources of breaking news where broadcast journalists source information from to form part of their story background.

Internet radio: it is also known as web radio, net radio, streaming radio, or e-radio. It is a radio service transmitted via the internet, targeted at online users. It involves the streaming of programmes online - presenting listeners with a continuous stream of sound that cannot be paused or replayed. Internet radio services can be accessed by listeners from anywhere in the world. For example, one could listen to an Australian station in Africa or America.

Webcasting: is a media presentation over the Internet using streaming media technology to distribute a single content source to many simultaneous listeners or viewers. A webcast may either be distributed live or on demand. Essentially, it is enhanced by the use of cheap and accessible technology that allows independent media to flourish.

Podcast: is a non-streamed webcast, which is a series of digital media (audio and visual) files or content that are released periodically. These are often downloaded through web syndication.

Web television, commonly referred to as web TV, is an emerging genre of digital entertainment that is distinct from traditional broadcast television. It is delivered through online platform via broadband and mobile networks, Web television shows, or Web series are short-form in nature, episodic, and produced in seasons.

Interactive broadcasting: interactive broadcasting or interactive television (ITV)/Interactive radio refers to a two-way communication between the sender of a message and the receiver of the message. According to Ergul (2007), the term interactivity implies "the presence of a return channel in communication system, going from the user to the source of information. The channel is a vehicle for the data bytes that represent the choices or reaction of the user." He explains further how it works:

The channel is a vehicle for the data bytes that represent the choices or reaction of the user. This definition classifies systems according to whether they are diffusive or interactive. Diffusive systems are those where only one channel runs from the information source to the user (referred to as downstream). Interactive systems have a return channel from the user to the information source (referred to as upstream).

There are two fundamental factors determining performance in terms of system interactivity. The convergence of broadcasting and internet technology brought about two way communications. Interactivity can be provided by return channel and a passive user becomes an active user. Return channel (as a back channel) is a kind of feedback from viewer to broadcaster. In this way, digital television system becomes a powerful medium for communication

The exchange of information engenders public participation. Public here not only refers to home audiences but

also to international audiences. According to Jackson (1995), by offering message board and forums, as well as by posting the email addresses of reporters and editors, publications such as Time have started electronic dialogue between journalists and their audience. This type of influence is what Allan (2006:15) described as important effect on the whole profession of journalism.

Citizen Journalism: Citizen Journalism has been called numerous names ranging from Collaborative Citizen Journalism (CCJ), Personal publishing, Grassroots media, Networked journalism, Open source journalism, Citizen media or Participatory journalism (amongst other names). The basic principle of citizen journalism is participatory journalism in which members of the public are encouraged to report news events happening around them. According to technopedia (2013), citizen journalism is simply reportage of facts and news that is largely ignored by large media companies. Accordingly, citizen journalism:

...is easily spread through personal websites, blogs, microblogs, social media and so on. Some types of citizen journalism also act as a check on the reporting of larger news outlets by providing alternative analysis.

The concept is to have the public actively participate in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information which journalists may have missed. Radsch (2011:62-65) defines citizen journalism "as an alternative and activist form of newsgathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions, often as a repose to the shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, that uses similar journalistic practices but is driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism." The idea of citizen journalism revolves around the distribution of information via internet, and as observed by Holbrook (2013), "Citizen Journalists can be a massive help by providing written reports in addition to photographs and videos in real time.

In the words of Bowman and Willis (2003), citizen journalism is:

The act of a citizen, or a group of citizen playing an active role, in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy needs

The fact that the public can participate in news dissemination through social media became a reality in Nigeria on November 5, 2008, when Uzoma Okereke was attacked, dragged, beaten, with clothes ripped off her back by the men of the Nigerian Navy attached to Rear Admiral Harry Olufemi Arogundade for the perceived obstruction she caused for the smooth passage of the admiral in Lagos traffic. The story went viral online and was shown on CNN. The key question is: if a passerby had not recorded the incident, would any of the traditional media have?

With citizen journalism, news production and dissemination is no longer the exclusive preserve of media owners, government officials, journalists, large corporations (public and private) and the elites but also in the hand of the citizens.

Van Den Dam (2010) in the article on how social media is redefining broadcasting, argued that:

With the convergence of broadband, broadcasting and information technology, different networks are now in support all forms of communication and media, such as voice, video, computing and games. Connectivity and communication tools and devices are increasingly available and affordable for a large audience; as a result, control of communication media is shifting away from the domain of the media and communication companies and toward the more open Internet communication platform. All this has placed production of media such as images, words, video and audio in the hands of a significant fraction of the world's population. It's a fundamental shift in human communication behavior toward participating and sharing — the great switch from push to pull.

Public needs to know: the consequence of public participation in the reporting of events is that news or information that ordinarily a local broadcast station or a nation's international broadcasting station would either have suppressed or not given adequate coverage are finding their way into the bulletins of foreign stations. The Uzoma Okereke incidence mentioned above would ordinarily have been suppressed by a local station but the individual who witnessed and recorded the incidence sent it to a foreign station to show the brutality of the military of the Nigerian forces.

Again, the story of the killing of the Port Harcourt four, Ugonna Kelechi Obuzor, Biringa Chiadika Lordson, Mike Lloyd Toku, and Tekena Erikena was another major story that shook the nation. The story went viral even before local stations catch in. However, the result of public participation is ensuring that justice is carried out without fair or favour. In the case of Uzoma the court awarded damages.

Unlimited access to information: international stations are all registering their presence online with a regular update of their website. The implication of this is that the public now have unlimited access to information. Audiences can compare news treatment of the various stations along with local stations and take a stand on issues. Audiences can also catch-up with news they have missed and still drop a comment on the website.

Shared social space: We are increasingly in a landscape where media is global, social, ubiquitous and cheap. The days when most of the media that was available for public consumption was produced by professionals are over. Former consumers are now producers, and the network of relationships within the shared social space guarantees that they can talk directly with each other. These platforms put the power of media in the hands of the people, transforming content consumers into content producers; and it continues to expand through bookmarking, crowd-sourcing, video sharing, social widgets and the like. Increased involvement from consumers improves information of any kind.

4. Conclusion

The innovations of the new media cannot be measured as new ideas keep springing up on almost a daily basis. Technology has increased availability of new ways of reaching audiences—Internet websites, satellite-to-home, audiocassettes, videotapes, blogs, podcasts—along with the increasingly mobile nature of media reception and use, making it clear that it is no longer sufficient to contain the subject by distinct format or technologies of distribution. The scope and dimension of broadcasting has been improved by modern technology, particularly social media. It is therefore important for every broadcaster to embrace this current trend of reaching out to modern audience. As Van Dan Dam (2010) put it: “with the strong presence of the Internet, broadband and social software, the traditional roles of the media elite are being challenged. All the aggregation, filtering, distribution roles and the business models are changing. And social media are becoming part of all media streams.”

From CNN to SKY news, BBC to ALJAZEERA, FOX news to NDTV, TVC News to NTA, AIT and Channels, all broadcast stations now rely on “I-Witness” or “I report” account to give credence to their story. Media organizations across the world depend on stories, footage, video and audio content generated by the audience, and uploaded on the internet through social media platform. We live in a world, indeed aptly referred to as, a global village. As such, regardless of where you reside or come from, your neighbor has become a component part of a global village. Welcome to the new world!

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