Social Media and the Changing Nature of Journalism Practice in Nigeria

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Abstract
Social media which are best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, share most or all of the following characteristics, namely – participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness. With their ubiquitous and interactive nature, social media have become sources of information and interaction amongst Nigerians and other peoples of the globe. Based on this fact, it has become expedient to find out how social media have affected the face of mainstream journalism in Nigeria. In carrying out this study, the researchers used the survey method of scientific inquiry. The 16-item questionnaire was administered to 50 respondents, comprising of news reporters, feature writers and producers in radio, television stations and a newspaper organization who were selected through a systematic sampling technique. The findings revealed that social media have changed the ways news is being produced and disseminated in mainstream journalism. The study also shows that *Twitter* is the most used site with 73.53% among other social networks in accessing information by journalist in Edo State. The paper therefore

recommends that mainstream media should adopt the virtue of social media and adapt them to journalistic practices. The paper further recommends that journalists should create new ways of packaging and disseminating news to the public.

Keywords: Social Media, Mainstream Media, Journalism, Transformation, Journalists

Introduction

Social media technologies are <u>social software</u>, which mediate human communication. When the technologies are in place, social media are ubiquitously accessible, and are enabled by scalable communication techniques. It employs web- and mobile-based technologies to support dialogue and "introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals" (Wiki, 2012).

Social media have become an integral part of how people communicate, stay in touch, keep on top of new developments, and otherwise connect with the world around them. Social media have, in the past year or two, become a mainstream online activity. <u>Kaplan</u> and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological multi-faceted and technological foundations of <u>Web 2.0</u> and allow the creation and exchange of <u>user-generated content</u>." The term is often used interchangeably with Web 2.0, which more specifically, refers to the second generation of Internet-based services. O'Reilly (2005) provides a comparison of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 to demonstrate how Web 2.0 represents a new mindset:

Web 1.0 was the era when people could think that Netscape (a software company) was the contender for the computer industry crown. Web 2.0 is the era when people are recognizing that leadership in

the computer industry has passed from traditional software companies to a new kind of Internet Service Company.

In another conception, Social media are seen as tools supporting the old networks and contributing to the development of new digital networks. According to Ociepka (2012:25)- "social media (symmetrical media) are understood as new communication technologies allowing individuals to intensify social contacts while sharing contents, engaging in discussion, but also controlling content via networks they participate in". Social media share most of all the following characteristics, namely - participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness (Mayfield, 2008). Government agencies regularly rely on social media to engage with their customers for improved citizen services and it is cost effective. Social Media integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation to collaboratively connect online information. "Through social media, people or groups can create, organize, edit, comment on, combine, and share content, in the process helping agencies better achieve their mission goals (Wikipedia)." Social media technologies take on many different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social booking marking. They are distinct from traditional media, such as newspaper, television, and film as they are comparatively inexpensive and accessible to enable anyone to publish or access information.

Mainstream media (sometimes referred to by the acronym **MSM**) are those media disseminated via the largest distribution channels, which, therefore, represent what the majority of media consumers are likely to encounter. The term also denotes those media generally reflective of the prevailing currents of thought, influence, or activity (Wiki, 2012). Large news conglomerates, including newspapers and broadcast media, are

often referenced by the term. Consequently, the term *mainstream media* has been widely used in conversation and the blogosphere, often in oppositional, pejorative, or dismissive senses, in discussion of the mass media and media bias.

The term journalism is the <u>investigation</u> and reporting of events, issues and <u>trends</u> to a broad audience. Momoh (2010, p. 1) defined "journalism as the gathering, evaluating and distributing facts of current interest". In journalism, reporters research and write stories for print and electronic distribution, often with the guidance of editors or producers. Though there are many variations of journalism, the ideal is to inform the intended audience about topics ranging from government and business organizations to cultural aspects of society such as arts and entertainment. The field includes editing, photojournalism, and documentary (Wiki, 2012).

Journalistic influence is growing less important, however, as social networking sites like *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter* provide a constant source of alternative news sources for users. Journalism is traditionally practiced through news organizations such as newspapers, broadcasting stations or news websites. These organizations have their individual modes of operations and cultural expectations, but they are part of a larger culture in which the profession is practiced.

The practice of journalism requires that journalists should be professional, objective and accurate in news reporting and should strive to maintain a balance between fair competition and the need for solidarity within the profession (Enobakhare, 2011). Journalism serves many useful and vital functions in a democratic society (Rolnick *et al*, 2007, p. 3). These are as follows: (i) informs the public about facts and events that are important (ii) provides forum for diverse viewpoints (iii) serves as a watchdog of government and other institutions to alert the public about wrongdoing (iv) advocates changes in the publics' interest (v) pursues the truth with unwavering commitment.

Transformation, especially as it affects this study can be described or referred to as a marked change in the nature, form or appearance. In media studies and practices, transformation may refer to mediamorphosis and the way in which news are collected, processed and disseminated with relevance to evolving media technologies. In the words of Fidler in his book *Mediamorphosis, understanding news media* (1997), it is the;

> Transformation of communication media, usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive, and political pressures and social and technological innovations.

For the purpose of transformation, the society should be prepared to learn new ways of doing things, which will be easy to learn, and probably accepted by a greater majority of the people.

The Problem

In modern society, people obtain information, education, news and other data from electronic and print media. In many ways, mainstream journalism has maintained an authoritative voice as the storytellers of the Nigerian past. Its documentary style, narratives, detailed exposures, and its position make it the prime source for public memory. As social networking becomes more popular among older and younger generation, it has gradually undermined the traditional voices of news media. This has resulted in a shift towards reading on emails, smart phones, and other electronic devices rather than print media. Based on the fact that, social media are ubiquitously accessible and with its interactive nature, social media have become sources of information and interaction amongst Nigerians and other peoples of the globe and this has necessitated this study which is to find out how they (social media) have affected the face of mainstream journalism in Nigeria.

Research Questions

Social media appear to have come to stay like other means of communication, It is expected to have its impact on the traditional media and this is why this study is aimed at, finding out how social media have affected the face of mainstream journalism in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the following research questions were formulated.

1. What is the relationship between social media and the mainstream media?
2. Do user-generated contributions actually help produce more timely and accurate report?
3. To what extent does user-generated content replace old ways of reporting?
4. What problems do social media pose to the mainstream media in journalistic practice?

Literature Review

In the new media, the literature review about social media and the mainstream media are very instructive. Social media display the changes that affect the conduct of the mainstream media. In the classical understanding, mainstream journalism was used for propaganda and early public diplomacy campaigns to inform the public abroad about the country and to disseminate other messages. "But nowadays, they have to respond to the development of networks society with the uses of social media which serve as source of information about audience and at the same time allow sharing information to reach niche audiences" (Ociepka, 2012).

Two major works, that of Newman (2010) and that of Giles (2005) and few others formed the focus of this review. Newman (2010) says that, many critics´ believe the interjection of audiences through comments; video links and so on, is a great way to enhance news coverage and offers an extra layer of details. To him, it is clear that the social media have changed the face of

communication and that journalists are beginning to have a new way of packaging and disseminating news to the public.

To Igwala (2012), the face of journalism is changing rapidly as new media technology increasingly lowers entry barriers and enables ordinary people to lend their voices and perspectives to day-to-day events, and this reality she calls "citizen journalism or citizen reporting". Newman is of the view that new media have keyed into the possibilities opened by social media by going on the Internet through the process of convergence. In support of his statement, Newman (2010), in his study- "the relationship between successful journalism and the integration of audience participation in an era of growing technology" states thus:

> 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 content. Also, journalists should focus on making our stories accurate rather than setting ourselves unachievable goals of piping the audience to the post for breaking news. Verifying our content and maintaining access to our sources is what we do, so let´s stick to what we do best, relax about the audience and prepare ourselves for the battle with next Internet trend.

He also urged that journalists should recognize that collective intelligence could be a benefit not just a burden in mainstream journalism.

In addition to the above, mainstream media now try to reach prospective and existing audiences through interaction and information exchange provided by such sites like *Facebook*, *Google*, *and Twitter* and among several others. In all these, the objective is to surmount the challenges to mainstream media posed by the social media.

In another work, Newman (2009), explores "how

mainstream media organizations are responding to this wave of participatory social media". He examines how journalists and leading news organizations in the UK and USA are increasingly involving audiences in the way they research and tell stories. The study explores the dilemmas and issues raised by greater audience engagement through case studies, interviews with leading practitioners and managers, as well as drawing on previously published interviews and research. He also looks at how mainstream media coverage of breaking news events is changing; using topical case studies from the G-20 London summit and Iranian street protests. From the study, he found out that the aftermath of the Iranian elections (June, 2009) provided the latest example of how powerful new Internet tools like *YouTube*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* are changing the way media are produced, distributed and consumed. The work also showed that user-generated picture or video scoops regularly lead television bulletins and the front pages of newspapers, whilst a new category of opinionated blogging is redefining the frontiers of journalism itself.

An excerpt from Giles (2005) remarks on Barron´s online commentary focused on the crisis of confidence confronting the mainstream media, combined with a technological revolution and structural economic change.

The Barron`s article had noted that "Print`s business model is imploding as younger readers turn toward free tabloids and electronic media to get news. For him it has become fashionable these days for many in the media to indulge in self-flagellation, hail the emergence of 'citizen journalists', and applaud the death of dinosaurs who 'don`t get it.' He concluded on a supportive note for the mainstream media and observed:

> In a polarized country facing difficult challenges, the public needs our skills, experience and most of all our professionalism to give them the vital information they need to make good decision

about their lives and our nation`s future.

In a rather supportive tone, Newman (2010), also makes the point that whilst audiences are undoubtedly interested in social media and contribution to news, they revel in the fact that they can sort fact from fiction by taking their news from `professionals`.

Washington Post media critic, Howard Kurtz in (Giles, 2005) expresses the following views about social media and mainstream journalism:

> Millions of people with access to a wide audience are looking over the shoulders of journalists, are practicing journalism themselves…. Many bloggers are careful and thought provoking, others partisan or mean-spirited. But they are here to stay, and by and large they provide a healthy check on those who once monopolized the news agenda.

In a newspaper editorial, in The *St. Petersburg Times*, Giles (2005) also advised that "mainstream journalists have nothing to fear from bloggers if they remain true to fundamental standards of accuracy and fairness and warned that journalists must remain cautious before passing along information from blogs or reacting to their charges, and that they should continue to learn from a form of mass media that is evolving before our eyes". Also in Giles (2005), Nick Lemann observed that-

These are tough times in journalism, not just ethically, but also economically, professionally and politically. There is an ever-increasing amount of material that flies the flag of journalism, but doesn`t qualify by our standards. All of us are concerned about the depth of our audience` loyalty to what we have considered the best journalism.

The *Washington Post`s* Ombudsman, Mike Getler, in (Giles, 2005) commenting on the blogsphere observes thus:

The blogsphere is a wonderful thing, but it doesn`t seem so new to me because it does what readers have

always done: read, write, analyze, complain, correct. It has always been true that if you make a mistake on even the most arcane matter in a newspaper, someone out there will catch it and let you know". The Web and the explosion of blogs have greatly expanded the public reservoir of knowledge and understanding in important ways by challenging the accuracy of reporting and adding analysis.

Getler further argues that newspapers are "central to an informed citizenry and that their special role cannot be filled by competing media…".

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the mediamorphosis theory of mass communication. According to Fidler (1997), mediamorphosis is a unified way of thinking about the technology evolution of communication media (www.amazon.com/media-morphosis). Fidler derives his mediamorphosis principles from the concept of co-evolution, convergence and complexity. The thrust of Fidler's position is that as new media forms evolve, and develop, they influence overtime and to varying degrees, the development of other existing media such that rather than the emergent media displacing the existing one, the existing one converges with it to enhance its operations. The essence of mediamorphosis is the idea that the media are complex adaptive systems. In other words, the media, as other systems, respond to external pressures with a spontaneous process of self-reorganization (Anaeto, *et al*, 2008, p. 191).

The theory is appropriate for this work because, it explains how the new media and their components have affected the future of the mainstream media in their day-to-day activities.

Methods

The study used the survey method. This was justified by the fact that survey research studies both large and small population is done by selecting and studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of sociological and psychological variables (Osuala, 2005, p. 253). The sample of this study consists of 50 journalists drawn from the total number of six hundred (600) registered journalists in Edo State working in various media houses. This is composed of news reporters, feature writers and producers in radio, television stations and newspaper organizations. They were chosen because of their level of awareness and exposure to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and recognizing the fact, that it would be impossible to carry out an exhaustive study on the Nigerian populace. The questionnaire was adopted because it is useful for collecting data on people's knowledge, values, preferences, attitudes and beliefs. According to Obasi (2000), the questionnaire is a data gathering instrument in which respondents are given standardized or uniform questions to complete in written forms.

Using the systematic sampling technique, an interval of one of every twelfth (1 in 12) persons from the population of 600 (six hundred) journalists were selected. Fifty (50) copies of questionnaire were administered on journalists from five media organizations, comprising of Edo Broadcasting Services (15 Respondents), Independence Television (7 Respondents), Nigeria Television Authority (10 Respondents), Silverbird Television (5 Respondents) and The Nigerian Observer (13 Respondents) respectively. Responses to opinion-testing questions were ranked in simple percentages. These variables were also tabulated and crosschecked with independent variable, for the avoidance of doubt.

Results

Out of the 50 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 42 (84%) were returned. The number of respondents who agreed that they accessed the Internet was 34 (68%) and this number became the base of the report of this research. The results of the data analysis are presented in the Tables below and the discussion on the implications of the result follows after.

Table 1: Sites Usually Accessed

Social Media Sites	Frequency	%
Facebook	6	17.64
YouTube	-	-
Twitter	25	73.53
Wikis		
Podcast	-	-
Blog	-	-
All sites	3	8.82
Total	34	100%

Table 2: Categorization of Information as Additional Source of News Information

Response	Frequency	%
Useful	16	47
Very useful	18	53
Don't know	-	-
Total%	34	100%

Table 3: The Level of Contribution of the User-Generated Content to Mainstream Media News Content

Response	Frequency	%
Minimal level	2	5.9
Medium level	22	64.7
High level	10	29.4
Total%	34	100%

Table 4: To know if user-generated contents help to produce more timely and accurate media report

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	30	88.2
No	-	-
Don't know	4	11.8
Total%	34	100%

Table 5: The Extent Which User-Generated Contents Replace Old Ways of Reporting News

Response	Frequency	%
Minimal extent	11	32.4
Large extent	19	55.8
Very large extent	4	11.8
Total%	34	100%

Table 6: Relationship between Social Media and Mainstream Media

Relationship	Frequency	%
Competitors	9	26.47
Co-operators	21	61.76
Alternatives	4	11.76
Total%	34	100%

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Table 7: Problems posed by Social Media to Mainstream Media in Journalism Practice

Type of Problem	Frequency	%
Economic problems	5	14.71
Ethical problems	10	29.41
Reliability problems	3	8.82
Deadline problems	1	2.94
All of the above	15	44.12
Total%	34	100%

Discussion

The respondents who are engaged both in the electronic and the print media as reporters, feature writers or columnists and producers seem to have come to terms with the existence of social media in their day-to-day activities and this is why 34 of out of the 42 journalists surveyed agree that they are exposed to it (social media). This fact is similar to Burno (2010, p. 10) observations thus:

> Social media have become not only an innovative, real-time distribution channel for mainstream media, but one of the news sources preferred by the final users as well.

Supporting the observation of Burno, Imelda (2011, p. 3) also affirms:

> That over the year, social media have evolved into powerful tools for communication at least for some news organizations and journalists who are trying to reach out to a wider audience outside their conventional mediums. Most of them are now embracing *YouTube, Facebook* and *Twitter*, the most popular and widely used of social media forms, in posting updates, stories and finding news sources.

To the respondents as it is shown in Table 1, *Twitter* represents the highest preference (73.53%) followed by the *Facebook* (17.64%). It was also found out that only three out of the

34 respondents accessed all the six (6) sites mentioned in the study (*Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Wikis, Podcast* and *Blog*).

In terms of categorization of information retrieved from social media as additional sources of news and information, 18 respondents (53%) out of the 34, found them to be very useful and 16 representing (47%) agreed that they were useful (Table 2). This finding also agrees with Wikis discovery:

> That in the year 2012, social media became one of the most powerful sources for news update through the platforms like *Twitter* and *Facebook* (Wiki, 2012).

On the level of contribution of the user-generated contents to the mainstream media news contents, it was found out that social media's contribution as recorded by the 34 respondents showed the following frequencies: 22 (64.7%) respondents regard the contribution as high, 10 (29.4%) respondents see the contribution as medium and 2 respondents (5.9%) consider it as minimal (See Table 3).

The research also showed that, the contents of social media have helped the journalists to produce more timely and accurate reports. Out of the 34 respondents, 30 (88.2%) averred that the contents of social media were positive in helping to generate timely and accurate report while 4 (11.8%) do not know (See Table 4).

Table 5 reveals that 19 (58.8%) of the respondents believe that user-generated contents have replaced old ways of reporting news to a large extent, 11 (32.4%) said that they have replaced the old ways of reporting news to a minimal extent, while 4 (11.8%) agreed that user-generated contents have replaced old ways of reporting news to a very large extent.

On the relationship between social media and mainstream media in journalism practice, 21 (61.76%) respondents regard social media as co-operators, 9 (26.47%) consider them as competitors while 4 (11.76%) see them as alternative media (See table 6). The finding, which recognized social media as co-

operators with the mainstream media, is also not too different from that of Maria Andriana, an environmental journalist who writes for the Indonesia's Antara News Agency. For her, social media supplement her reporting. She points out that "using *Facebook* for instance, has become a constructive learning and journalistic experience" (Imelda, 2011). To Surjadi in Imelda (2011, p. 5), comments that social media are becoming more and more important as a reporting tool and that he uses its networks to contact resource persons. Alongside Harry Surjadi, Navin Singh Khadka, a BBC correspondent in Nepal says that "social media has been very important for reporting and producing his stories as the BBC has been increasingly using new media platforms" (Imelda, 2011).

Inspite of the usefulness of social media to the mainstream media in the practice of journalism in Edo State, journalists in the state agree that social media are problematic to journalistic practice. Fifteen out of the 34 respondents (44.12%) agree that social media imposes economic, ethical, reliability, and deadline problems in journalism practice, 10 (29.41%) out of the total respondent say it poses ethical problems, 5 (14.71%) believe it poses economic problems; 3 (8.82%) say its poses reliability problems and only 1 (2.94%) says it poses deadline problems (See Table 7).

Conclusion

Summarizing the capacity and ability of social media as it affects the activities of the mainstream media, Newman (2009), cited in Imelda (2011, p. 7) says:

> Social media (have) opened up new opportunities for some to widen the impact of their journalism, for others, it is making the sourcing of information and contacts easier and quicker. As with so many aspects of the Internet, social media are providing a useful extra layer of functionality, enabling stories to be told in new ways, not changing the heart of

what journalists do.

The above observation brings to focus once more, the growing influence and power of social media in today's journalistic practice even in developing countries like Nigeria. To return to the basic concern of this study, which is "social media and the changing nature of journalism practice in Nigeria with Edo state as a case study", there is need to quickly revisit the four basic questions thus:

In question one, the paper raised the issue of relationship between social media and the mainstream media, and it was established that both social media and the mainstream media are seen predominantly as co-operators and are seen to supplement and complement the activities of one and another.

In question two, "do user-generated contributions actually help produce timely and accurate report?" The answer is 100 percent affirmative. Social media help journalists in the updating of the information which they disseminate timely and accurately and help them in the cross checking of their facts.

In answer to question three, to what extent does the user-generated content replace old ways of reporting? The work shows that largely, social media have replaced the old ways of reporting news, because in most events, especially breaking news, social media tools connect people in real time and they are comparatively inexpensive and accessible to enable anyone to publish or access information. Imelda (2011) further supports this assumption when she observes:

> That the aftermath of the Japan crisis provided the latest example of how powerful new Internet tools like *YouTube, Facebook* and *Twitter* are changing the way media are produced, distributed and consumed because these social media were able to filled the slack of the traditional news outlets within the first hour of disaster, media audience turned to social media to get an idea of what hit Japan.

Lastly, on the problems which social media pose to the mainstream media in journalism practice, the study reveals that social media poses ethical, economic, reliability and deadline problems to the mainstream media. The nature of ethical problems posed by social media emanate from the fact that most of the operators of social media are not trained journalists and are probably not familiar with the ethics of the profession and this renders them incapable of weighing the professional and moral significances of their actions. Their judgment of what constitutes news, fairness and objectivity are usually obscured by their urge to publish quickly. For instance, the way in which social media in Nigeria handled the issue of the hospitalization of President Goodluck Jonathan's wife, is a case in point. Social media's dispatches contain a lot of speculations and lies. Skoric in Imelda (2011, p. 8), not far from the one, raises this concern. To him "Issues on ethics and transparency are likely to become more prominent as journalists increasingly rely on social media for information and for disseminating their stories".

Commenting on the issue of ethics, Arun Mahizan, deputy director of the Institute of Policy Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS) pointed out that social media tend to have "players of dubious intent, competence and credibility, which are standards issues in information" (Imelda, 2011).

The second problem revolves around the issue of the survival of the mainstream media since the more vibrant and younger generation rely more on the *YouTube*, *Twitter*, Blogs for their daily information needs. The reliability (believability) problems have much to do with credibility of sources and fairness and balance in the treatment of news and views. Although deadline matters are scored lowest by the respondents it is still nevertheless important, because this is where social media have the greatest advantage of mainstream journalism, since players at social media are never ironically 'asleep' and have no production or editorial inhibitions like the mainstream media.

Recommendations

It has become too obvious that social media have made considerable in-roads into journalism practice and gained more grounds in citizen journalism than the mainstream media. This invasion of the profession by social media has therefore become a reality, and the best the mainstream media can do is to brace up to it and convert the challenges, which it poses to advantages. To do this, mainstream journalism should therefore adopt the virtues of social media, adapt them to journalistic practices, and create new ways of packaging and disseminating news to the public.

Instead of considering social media as a challenge, journalists should accept it as a "whistle blower" and use the investigative process of journalism to add authenticity or otherwise to social media inputs.

In order for the mainstream media to keep journalism alive in this new era of social media and fast-paced world, three guide-posts of journalism practice are recommended. They are: the journalist's obligation to the citizen, his loyalty to truth and his discipline of verification.

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