

Utilisation of Social Media for News Gathering and Dissemination by Journalists in Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study sought to ascertain the place of social media in modern day reporting. Questionnaire and interview schedule were used to generate data from respondents drawn from different media houses across Edo state in South-South Nigeria. The results show that majority of journalists now accept the use of social media as an integral tool for news gathering and dissemination, with the acceptance extending from individual journalists to institutional levels. Furthermore, social media exert immense influence on several aspects of journalism like aiding wider coverage and increasing the audience base. The study shows that social media do invade privacy and violate copyright laws primarily due to dearth of legislation and regulatory frameworks. It was also observed that social media tools do struggle with credibility issues due to their anonymous nature whereby some sources use pseudo names. Based on the findings of this study, it is expected media outfits would maximise the use of social media for news gathering and dissemination. It is also hoped the outcome of this study will stir up the discourse on the need to develop platforms on social media where credibility of content can be verified.

Keywords: Social Media Networks, Assessment, Journalists, Newsgathering, Nigeria

Introduction

Social media, online newspaper readership, the changing nature of journalism practice, and advertising have come to define our lives in a new way. Social media offer platforms where people engage in social interaction, create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web2.0, and that allow the creation and

exchange of user-generated content” (p.59). Also, social media operate from the pedestal of mobile and web-based technologies which in turn creates highly interactive platforms through which individuals, corporate organisations, communities, and even countries share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. These platforms empowered by social media have caused tremendous changes to occur in the field of communication whether between organisation, individuals, or communities (Hermkens, 2011).

Furthermore, new media facilitate access to up-to-date information to support real time decisions and bring out accuracy in broadcasting. For instance, the mobile telephone as presented by Elegbeleye (2005) is able to make people communicate on real time basis, saving time and money among other conveniences like enabling people to download broadcast contents or even listen to live broadcast messages. In addition, the WebTV turns a television set into a computer screen, permitting access to the Internet where recent and upcoming programmes are displayed. As such, it provides not only access to the web but also, several sites of its own, including one for programmes scheduling. The WebTV also offers several features that allow the Internet to enhance television viewing. For example, it provides a programme listing feature that takes viewers from a renewable screen schedule directly to a show with a simple click (Baran, 2009).

In recent times, the new media have improved the rate of mobility like in the case of digital radios, CD-ROM, DVD etc. The mobility of digital radio, for instance, accounts in large part for its personal nature. This is because digital radio is the listener's friend; it travels with them and talks to them personally (Baran, 2009). Traditional (old) media make certain claims about the veracity of their information. However, the new media make few of such claims now and it is possible that their credibility will keep increasing. In effect, the new media technologies have been able to perform the post-modern function of making the non-presentable perceptible as Lylard (1983) in Morris & Ogan, (2002) put it that in creating new configuration of sources, messages and receiver, new communication technologies force advertisers/marketers/researchers to examine their old definitions.

Statement of the Problem

A commonly talked about concern in social usage by journalists' news is how to verify information. People's attitude towards verification is quite critical; the disposition is to treat information posted online with reservation and suspicion. To what degree should news organisations deploy the use of social media in their work? Can these platforms be trusted to deliver? These and many more are issues that a number of scholars have to ponder upon for some time now. Today, many media houses across Nigeria now maintain a ubiquitous presence in the virtual world. They have developed their own websites, have twitter handles, Facebook presence and are actively using social media platforms to reach the ever elusive audience cutting across various strata of human endeavours.

To this end, it becomes necessary to examine these social media tools being used by journalists to disseminate news in Edo state. How reliable are the contents generated online? Should mainstream media practitioners join in the use of these platforms? Have they enhanced or detracted from the journalism profession? It is as a result of these nagging questions that necessitated this scholarly investigation.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do journalists in Edo State use social media for news gathering and dissemination?
2. What are the social networking sites journalists in Edo State use for news gathering and dissemination?
3. How do journalists in Edo State perceive the use of social media for news gathering and dissemination?
4. What are the problems journalists in Edo State face as a result of using social media for news gathering and information dissemination?

Literature Review

The importance of social media in our society today cannot be over emphasised. These media tools have become so important that most media organisations now strive to make them an integral part of their operations. Ekeli and Enobakhare (2013) in a study titled *Social Media and the Changing Nature of Journalism Practice in Nigeria*, argue that the contents of social media have helped the journalists to produce more timely and accurate reports. Out of the 34 journalists surveyed in that study, about 88% agreed that the contents of social media were positive in helping to generate timely and accurate reports while 12% did not think so. On whether they think user-generated content is gradually replacing old ways of reporting news to a significant level, 32% agreed that user-generated contents are sure replacing the old ways of reporting news to a minimal extent, while about 13% agreed that user-generated contents have replaced old ways of reporting news to a very large extent.

The disruption of our individual and commercial attitudes as a result of the use of social media can be felt across the globe. This change surpasses what was recorded with the advent of television. Just as television turned a nation of people who listened to media content into watchers of media content, the emergence of social media has created a nation of media content creators and disseminators. According to an online platform, Pew Research Centre, nearly 80% of American adults are online and nearly 60% of them use social networking sites (stateofthedia.org, 2013).

More Americans get their news via the Internet than from newspapers or radio, as well as three-fourths who say they get news from e-mail or social media sites updates, according to a report published by CNN. The survey suggests that Facebook and Twitter make news a more participatory experience than ever before as people share news articles and comment on other people's posts. According to CNN (2010),

75% of people got their news forwarded through e- mail or social media posts, while 37% of people shared a news item via Facebook or Twitter.

In the United States, 81% of people say they look online for news of the weather, first and foremost, National news at 73%, 52% for sports news, and 41% for entertainment or celebrity news. Based on this study, done for the Pew Centre, two-thirds of the sample's online news users were younger than 50, and 30% were younger than 30. The survey involved tracking daily habits of 2,259 adults of 18 years or older. From the survey, 33% of young adults get news from social networks. 34% watched TV news and 13% read print or digital content. Furthermore, 19% of Americans got news from Facebook, Google+, or LinkedIn while 36% of those who get news from social network got it yesterday from survey. More than 36% of Twitter users use accounts to follow news organizations or journalists and 19% of users say they got information from news organizations of journalists.

TV remains most popular source of news, but the TV audience is aging (only 34% of young people) as 29% of those younger than 25 say they got no news yesterday either digitally or traditional news platforms. Only 5% under 30 say they follow news about political figures and events in DC. Only 14% of responders could answer all four questions about which party controls the House, current unemployment rate, what nation Angela Merkel leads, and which presidential candidate favours taxing higher-income Americans. Facebook and Twitter are now pathways to news, but are not replacements for traditional ones because 70% get social media news from friends and family on Facebook (Pointer.org, 2012).

In a Nielsen (2011) study, it is reported that Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other website online. In the same report, the average American spends more than 17 minutes per day on a social media site. Recently, in a study conducted by American Press Institute (2014) aimed at finding out their preferred medium for receiving news. Findings revealed that most participants reported reading print newspapers only “sometimes,” with fewer than 10% reading them daily. The teenagers instead reported learning about current events from social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and blogs.

Bastos (2014) in his summation showed that social media users read a set of news that is different from what newspaper editors feature in the print press. On October 2, 2013, the most common hash tag throughout the country was “#governmentshutdown,” as well as ones focusing on political parties, Obama, and healthcare. Most recently too in Nigeria from May, 2014 is the hash tag “#bringbackourgirls” that has gone virile in most online platforms. Several news sources/media organisations all have twitter, and Facebook pages, like CNN and the *New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times* of Nigeria etc all providing links to their online articles thereby getting an increased readership. Additionally, several college news organizations and administrators have Twitter pages as a way to share news and connect to students (state of the media, 2012).

According to Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2013, p.10), “in the US, among those who use social media to find news, 47% of these people are under 45 years old, and 23% are above 45 years old. However social media as a main news gateway does not follow the same pattern across countries. For example, in this report, in Brazil, 60% of the respondents said social media was one of the five most important way to find news online, 45% in Spain, 17% in the UK, 38% in Italy, 14% in France, 22% in Denmark, 30% in U.S., and 12% in Japan. The report further states that; there are differences among countries about commenting news in social networks, 38% of the respondents in Brazil said they do comment on news in social network in a week. These percentages are 21% in U.S. and 10% in UK. The authors argued that difference among countries may be due to culture difference rather than different levels of access to technical tools (Reuters, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the New Media Theory. According to McQuail (2005), this perspective explores the synchronisation of the communication experience on the premise of greater flexibility and access. Fundamentally, it is anchored on key themes like *less power and control, social integration and identity, social change and development, and space and time* (McQuail, 2005). In respect of power according to this theory, it is difficult to place the new media in relation to the possession and exercise of power as can be easily identified in the old media; such as in terms of ownership, monopolisation of access thus effectively controlling information flow (but this can be prone to abuse as we have seen in some instances). In other words, access is democratised. The sender, receiver, participant and the spectator are all engaged in one exchange or network. Within this context, we no longer have a dominant direction of information flow. The new media has also opened up ways for new means of social integration through diverse social interactions. The theory further buttresses the fact that new media has overcome space and time.

The new media theory postulates the change being witnessed in mass media circle today. The underlying assumption is that a disparate set of communication technologies that share certain features apart from being new, are made possible by digitalisation. Consequently, this has also brought about convergence between all existing media forms in terms of their organisation, distribution, reception and regulation (McQuail, 2005).

The major thrust of this study is unravelling the impact of new media which is on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation. The research also examines social media – a means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information, ideas and user-generated content in virtual communities and networks in the practice of journalism. Thus, the new media theory provides new and diverse opportunities for the broadcasting media in terms of application and uses of

these technologies. The relationship between this theory and this study is hinged on the fact that new media and its components have greatly enhanced the operations of the mainstream media in their day-to-day activities. Instead of subsuming the mainstream media, practitioners have devised means through which their work is enhanced using platforms made available by the new media. Media organisations today operate platforms like *Facebook* pages, *Twitter* and *YouTube* accounts which, without doubt, has enhanced the speed of delivery, improved interactivity, and indeed flexibility by increasing audience access to news on the go without having to go in front of large computers.

Methodology

This study used quantitative and qualitative research designs. The survey design was to facilitate the validation of data. The survey research design is considered appropriate for this study because it helped in gauging perceptions on the use of social media as tool for gathering and dissemination of information by Journalists in Edo state Nigeria. This design was specifically used to elicit the response of journalists on their perception on the use of social media for gathering and dissemination of news. The study also used interview as an instrument of data collection. Some senior journalists in Edo state were interviewed.

The population was comprised of only registered journalists with the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Edo state who regularly attend NUJ meetings and who indicated they understood the concept of Social Media. The total number of registered journalist in Edo state was supplied by the NUJ secretariat, Edo State. The respondents were met on the days for state chapter meetings. Besides having a good number of journalists in the Edo state chapter, the study requires the views of an informed population who to a reasonable extent are knowledgeable in the use of social media and are able to give authoritative and informed analysis about them, hence the choice of using them for the study. The total population is 200.

The survey sample size for this study is 133. The researcher arrived at the size through the application of Yamane (1974) formula for determining the sample size when the population is known or finite. Following the sample size obtained using the Taro Yamane formula; a purposive sampling method was used to arrive at the final respondents selected from each chapel of the stratum of the population. This was done to ensure that the researcher gave the questionnaire to persons whose opinion was relevant to the study and who had knowledge of the use of social media for the purpose of news gathering and dissemination. The research instrument for collecting data for this study was a combination of questionnaire and interview schedule.

The questionnaire consists of 26 items divided into three sections – A, B and C. Questions in section A being demographic variables while section B had questions on thematic variables on journalist usage and perception of social media with multiple questions while section C adopted the Likert's rating scale type format to gauge

respondents' perception of social media and journalism practice. The questions were formulated in the dichotomous response format such as Yes or No and Likert scale. Questions in the questionnaire were designed to provide answers to research questions one to four. The researchers distributed 133 copies of the questionnaire but only 129 were found usable.

Two senior practicing journalists with several years of experience were interviewed. This was to enable us get their perception on the use of social media for the purpose of news gathering and dissemination. Data from the interview were used to support findings from the survey as well as answer research questions two and three. Percentage frequency counts were used in the process of data analysis in this study. The data that were gathered from the questionnaire and interview were used to answer the research questions.

Results and Discussion

A total of 133 journalists were sampled across Edo state. All the 133 copies of the questionnaire administered were retrieved but only 129 were found to have been correctly filled. This gave us a response rate of 97%, which is more than satisfactory. The second section presents data generated from the interview. They are presented in themes bothering on the questions asked during the interview. Details of the data obtained from the survey are presented below.

Table 1: Usage of Social Media for Gathering and Disseminating News

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	125	96.9
No	4	3.1
Total	129	100.0

From table 1 we can deduce that the use of social media platforms for the purpose of news gathering and dissemination is now the norm among majority of journalists in Edo state as 125 representing 96.9% are now actively deploying them for this purpose.

Table 2: Frequency of Social Media Usage for News Gathering and Dissemination

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
All the time	57	44.1
Sometimes	60	46.5
Seldom	9	6.9
None of the above	3	2.3
Total	129	100.0

In Table 2 above, the frequency of social media usage by journalists in Edo state for the purpose of news gathering and dissemination was sought. A substantial number of respondents admitted to using the social media often in most of the news the gather and disseminate. We can thus infer from the data that social media tools have become key components of the news gathering and dissemination process as they are now used frequently.

Table 3: Noticeable changes in the way news is gathered and disseminated as a result of social media

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Easy Access to Information	50	38.7
Easy transmission of information to newsroom	54	41.8
Faster delivery between source of information and news consumers	25	19.4
Total	129	100.0

On the question whether social media have caused any change in the way news is gathered and disseminated, from the above data in table, we can deduce that indeed the way and manner news is gathered and disseminated has been altered drastically. Social media now provide easy access to information (38.7% of respondents believe so). A journalist can easily file in his or her report right from the scene of the event without needing an Outside Broadcast Van (OB Van). Again, some can post directly on the news medium's website thereby beating the barrier of time in publishing such reports. Also, consumers of news are better served the news faster with the use of these social media tools by journalist. A presidential spokesman can deliver news faster to millions of followers on twitter than any conventional media.

Table 4: Ways of Determining the Credibility of Social Media Content before Usage

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Checking if the person posting such an information is in a position to have it	46	35.6
Checking with Relevant Authorities Agencies if such an event occurred	44	34.1
Checking if the social media handle is old or recent		30.2
Total		100.0

Indeed, contents on social media seem to be grappling with credibility issues. As such, we sought to ascertain the avenues through which these contents are being

verified before they can be used by journalists. This is because there are ways to determine the credibility of media content sourced from a social media platform before it can be used. Certain individuals do take to social media to post contents that might be malicious. Journalists can verify such by finding out whether the person in question is in a position to issue such a statement or give such information. If the social media account, for instance, twitter, Facebook etc was recently opened, it could have been hurriedly created for sinister reasons and the journalists need to look closely to be sure before using any information sourced from such an account. Finally, from the above table, social media contents can also be verified by checking in with the relevant authorities like the Police, Ministries etc.

Table 5: Specific Use Social Media is deployed to Gathering News

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
News update	40	31.0
Research	60	46.5
News Monitoring	29	22.5
Total	129	100.0

Table 5 above sought to establish the specific use social media are deployed to by respondents. The findings show that 46.5% of the entire respondents use social media for research purposes as it concerns news gathering. Another 31.0% use these platforms for news update; while the remaining respondents deploy social media for monitoring news.

Table 6: If Social Media Influence the Process of News Gathering

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	126	97.7
No	3	2.3
Total	129	100.0

The influence of social media in news gathering has been in contention for some time now. As such, Table 6 above sought to know whether indeed social media wield any influence. Majority of the respondents (126 or 97.7%) agreed to the assertion that social media indeed does have some influence on the process of news gathering.

Table 7: Ways through which these influences manifest

Options	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	126	97.7
No	3	2.3
Total	129	100.0

Having established the fact that social media do influence the process of gathering news, Table 7 sought to identify the key areas where such influence can be noticed. The findings show 14.7% of the respondents identified this influence in the area of reporting news with amazing speed. Another 15.5% still identified wider reach or coverage; while 8 respondents representing 6.2% of our sample population traced this influence of social media to efficiency in news gathering. Also, wider audience base was identified as another area of influence by 10 respondents (7.8%). But an overwhelming 72 respondents totalling 55.8% of the population identified all of the above as areas where the influence of social media can be felt in news gathering and dissemination.

Summary of Data from Interview Data

As earlier pointed out, there was need to interview some senior journalists' in Edo state. The research adopted the Yin (1994) explanation building method where themes were developed around the subject matter. As such, two senior practicing journalists with over fifteen years of experience were purposively interviewed. This was to enable us get their perspective on the use of social media for the purpose of news gathering and dissemination. The interviewees were Mr. Desmond Agbama, who was the Nigerian Union of Journalist Chairman in Edo State at the time of the interview, and Mr. John Alechenu, the Political Editor of the *Punch* newspaper. Data from the interview were used to support findings from the survey as well as answer research questions 2, 3 and 4. They are presented below:

Social Media and 21st Century Journalism

Without doubt, social media are playing vital roles in virtually the life of everyone today. This is more so with the journalism profession. More and more journalists are daily using social media in their daily work of news gathering and disseminating. This view was strongly supported by our interviewees, Mr. Desmond Agbama and Mr. John Alechenu, who both agreed that they are about the most popular and developed means of disseminating news and information to a mass audience in the 21st century. They believe that a practicing journalist will only ignore the social media to their own detriment as they combine the qualities of the visual, audio and print qualities of the traditional media and made up for some of the obvious deficiencies observed in the conventional media. Social media can make or mar the journalism profession. Mr. John Alechenu believes strongly that social media in the hands of a

skilled practitioner remains a veritable tool for development, instructional learning and mass mobilisation. That it can positively influence learning experiences and learning outcomes when effectively and efficiently deployed. He however went on to posit that social media in the hands of an unskilled and crooked journalist is a destructive tool capable of reversing its positive attributes.

Social Media Adoption in Journalism

Social media adoption in journalism is constantly being scrutinised and remains a subject of interest to many practitioners of the profession. Journalists and scholars have both advanced reasons for the adoption of these platforms in order to improve efficiency and delivery. Mr. Desmond Agbama is of the opinion that their adoption must be encouraged as it is almost impossible to practice journalism in the 21st century without the efficient use of these social media platforms. This was further supported by Mr. John Alechenu who is of the opinion that from news gathering, to reporting, publishing and dissemination, the social media have become an indispensable working tool. For him, journalists especially those within the traditional medium should adopt these social media platforms. This has the capacity to free the social media space from bastardisation by untrained journalists, who now come up as bloggers, commentators etc.

Organisational Support for Journalists Adoption of Social Media

The case has always been made for organisational support for journalists' adoption of social media platforms for the purposes of news gathering and dissemination. This is because, some media organisations still harbour some level of scepticism with this adoption primarily due to issues of credibility. As such, there was need for the researcher to ask questions that will give us insight into how media outfits have fared so far in the adoption of these platforms especially in their operations. Mr. Desmond Agbama says his organisation is yet to carry out the required amount of training of its personnel in order to meet the requirements of the efficient deployment of the social media. He went on to add that he believes that the management of most media organisation are yet to fully come to terms with the potentials of this technology and such take it for granted that their staff already knows what to do. As for our second interviewee, his organisation is yet to key-in to this adoption of social media platforms. Although, his organisation does have an Online Editor whose duty is to run the social media component of the Newspaper.

Challenges of Social Media Usage by Journalists

In spite of the obvious potentials inherent in social media usage, it however, comes with considerable challenges. Despite the very noticeable potentials of using the social media as a tool for news gathering, it is however fraught with its weaknesses; the speed at which news is reported also makes some of its content questionable. This

gives room for hasty reports that lack basic journalistic ethos of cross checking facts before publication. Mr. Desmond Agbama and Mr. John Alechenu both agreed that often, the facts are incorrect, exaggerated, false, unconfirmed, and the sources are not usually credited. They attribute this challenge to lack of adequate training in the use of social media resources. Another challenge they identified is lack of finance on the part of journalists to purchase social media platforms or equipment. There is also the challenge of expertise as there are still a number a journalist out there who are yet to understand how to deploy this Internet resource for optimum output. Mr. John Alechenu specifically identified dearth of infrastructure as in Internet penetration in some parts of the country as major setbacks.

Organizational Policies for Acquisition of Social Media Platforms

Media organisations are being charged to make significant investment in the acquisition of social media platforms for their operations as a matter of policy. Mr. Desmond Agbama says his organisation helps staff to acquire multimedia enabled gadgets like smart phones, tablets, laptops as against the old practice of acquiring still and video cameras, recording midgets and so on. Our second interviewee says that reporters are now required to record audio with their gadgets, take photographs with same and send their reports from event or incident venues. In the same vein, breaking news and developing stories are monitored closely on social media through same gadgets.

Discussion on Findings/Answer to Research Questions

In today's changing world, it is without doubt that many journalists across the globe have come to embrace the use of social media tools in the discharge of their journalistic duties. This is mainly due to their efficiency in reaching a diverse audience out there without the limitations of geographical boundaries. The data from questionnaire and the interview schedule were used to answer the research questions.

Research Question one: *To what extent do journalists in Edo State use social media for news gathering and dissemination?*

Majority of journalist now accept the use of social media as an integral tool for news gathering and dissemination. Today a great number of them are hooked to social media platforms such that they not only avail them avenues for news sourcing but for dissemination as well. Respondents said that they have come to embrace social media platforms like Facebook, twitter etc as reporter's tools in trade such that it is almost out of place to imagine a journalist not being on any of these platforms. The study also discovered that this acceptance transcends individual journalist to institutional level. That a considerable number of media outfits now adopt these tools as a key aspect of their news gathering and dissemination process. Newspapers, magazines, radio stations now have Facebook and twitter accounts.

A considerable number broadcasts eye witness reports. These are stories sent

in by citizen journalist via online platforms. For instance, Channels television and Sahara Reporters now upload videos on YouTube and such trending reports can be accessed by anyone with Internet connectivity. Journalists have also developed capacity by way of training to become proficient in the use of these social media platforms.

Research Question two: *What are the social networking sites journalists in Edo State use for news gathering and dissemination?*

From the data gathered in the course of this research, Twitter, Facebook, BlackBerry Messenger, Instagram and YouTube top the list of social media platforms commonly used by journalist in gathering and disseminating news. This fact was corroborated by Quadri (2014, p.1) in her verdict on the place of social media in journalism in the 21st century:

Since the explosion of social medium like Twitter and Facebook, social networking sites are gradually becoming some of the newest tools for reporters and correspondents to use in news gathering, networking and promoting their work. But many newsrooms in Nigeria are still fuzzy on the usage. Social media can be used in the newsroom as a reporting tool, as an avenue where news and information are disseminated as they are happening and also to get feedback from readers and audience.

Research Question three: *How do journalists in Edo State perceive the use of social media for news gathering and dissemination?*

The verdict on the perception of journalists towards the use of social media as a means of gathering and disseminating news was unanimous. According to our respondents for the interview, themselves veterans of the profession, these platforms have become so popular and indeed form an integral part of mass communication in the 21st century. No serious practitioner (journalist), they opined, will ignore social media as doing this will be at their own detriment. The reason for this they attribute to social media's ability to combine visual, audio and print qualities of the traditional media thus making up for inherent deficiencies of each genre of the media.

In essence, many journalists have come to embrace the possibility that the social media offer and are sure deploying these tools to ply their trade (Dwyer, 2010) agrees with this position. He believes that nowadays, there is no media organisation worth its name that does not have an online presence. Playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and other information was the definition of journalism in olden times. Today it is defined as – Revelation, current events, gossip, new information, imparting facts. There is no “News” anymore; rather, just about anything is news today.

Research Question four: *What are the problems journalists in Edo State face as a result of using social media for news gathering and information dissemination?*

There is the challenge of inadequate training in the use of social media resources. This was raised by one of the respondents. The financial wherewithal to purchase social media platforms or equipment is also a problem. Internet penetration remains very low in many parts of the country. From responses obtained from senior journalists interviewed, they opined that despite the undeniable potentials of using the social media as a tool for news gathering, it is however fraught with glaring weaknesses; the speed at which news is reported also makes some of its content questionable. This is because accuracy and presentation of facts are sacrificed on the altar of speed which is often difficult to verify. Often times, the facts are incorrect, exaggerated, false, unconfirmed and sources most times not credited. This is a major drawback for the usage of social media by journalists as the profession itself is built on the solid foundation of ethical norms: truth, facts, accuracy and balance cardinal points lacking in the jet speed of social media reportage. Asough (2012) painted a better picture of this when he said that:

In journalism, the use of social media platforms is also quite a delicate issue. This is because the question of its compliance with ethics needs to be answered for it to be effectively used for journalism purposes. The risks that journalists or media organizations could face when using social media platforms could include a breach of editorial values or ethics which includes losing credibility because they do not do an effective check or verify stories they post or cull from social media sites and could result in journalistic “disasters” when false stories are posted or culled. There is also the issue of non-attribution in stories, which could be a serious ethical issue (p.6)

Another issue according to him is that news on social media sites are laced with partiality. The reason for this is that a considerable amount of the news that people post on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs are highly opinionated. This trend Asough (2012) attributes to the fact that with these social media sites, everyone has become a journalist. And ethics are fast becoming strange. And of course, you don't expect bloggers, for instance, to keep to these strict” professional ethics that professional journalists are subjected to. Who would take up the responsibility to keep every blogger in check for ethics? He went on to conclude that “It is a mad house”, as the saying goes. Everyone says what he or she feels like saying, without fear of intimidation or punishment (p.6).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings from the research, we established that the acceptance level of social media among journalist keeps growing by the day as more and more journalists and media organisations now adopt them. Social media platforms exert tremendous influence on the entire process of news. Almost every journalist is now an active

participant in one social media platform or the other. Social media platforms have also become major avenues for news monitoring and updates on developing stories. They are also veritable tools for getting breaking news by journalists. Eye witness reports can be posted almost immediately as they occur through citizen journalism using Internet enabled devices and mobile phones. These platforms have also simplified media operations making the job of a journalist easier.

Research is now easier and access to uncountable materials online through social media makes it a reporter's delight; hence the amount of influence they wield. They have also introduced dramatic changes in the entire business of news gathering and dissemination. Media organisations now have a wider reach and audience base. This is made possible through social media platform as outfits like AIT, Rhythm FM, Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS), The Observer, all cutting across media genres now have accounts where they reach a huge audience base out there that they would not have been able to reach through mainstream media. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube remain the most popular platforms being deployed by journalists to for news gathering and dissemination

Social media have credibility issues owing to the anonymous nature of those who contribute to its content. This is mainly responsible for the scepticism on the part of media organisations to use such contents. However, findings establish that such news items posted on social media can be verified.

Based on this conclusion, the following recommendations are suggested to address some of the implications of the findings of this particular study:

First, the use of these platforms by journalist should also be encouraged by the management of their media organisations. This is because a lot of journalists from the findings of this research do not take advantage of the enormous opportunities inherent in these platforms. For instance, they could subscribe to Facebook only leaving out a platform like Twitter with its capacity to deliver instant breaking news intermittently between seconds.

Second, social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc should be adopted as alternative platforms through which the conventional media organisations can extend their reach and coverage.

Third, as a result of the ease with which social media platforms are deployed for the purpose of news gathering and dissemination, it is important to further train and retrain journalists on their use as this will help push their acceptance. Although they are easy to use but initial training is required and a constant update of innovation on international best practices would be needed periodically.

There is also the need to institute avenues on social media where content can be verified. This is one of the problems identified in this study. The verification must be in tandem with what is obtainable in the mainstream media such moves or initiative will permanently put to rest the credibility issues which have bedevilled social media content thus restraining several media organisations from using them.

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