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## ONLINE JOURNALISM AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The migration of readers, viewers and advertisers from newspaper and broadcast television to the web is not limited to the developed world but has also become a visible trend in developing countries such as Nigeria. Newspapers have for the past decade decried the decline in circulation as web visits continue to increase, making the future of newspaper journalism an uncertainty. Thus, this paper takes a look at the changes that online journalism has brought in the Nigerian media landscape as its presence is mostly felt by the traditional media. The study adopts the technological determinism theory and the media morphosis theory, for while technological determinist hold that technology is the major determinant of change in the society, mediamorphosis theory believes in the unification of already existing institutions with the changes brought about by technology. Hence, the traditional media instead of being displaced by online journalism, and converge with the new media to enhance its operation. Consequently, the federal government and media-personnel should endeavour to equip media houses with the needed infrastructure to enable them stay afloat in this digital era as online journalism has come to stay.*

**KEYWORDS:** Online Journalism, Traditional Media, Nigeria

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### INTRODUCTION

Ever since the inception of the internet and the proliferation of its services, there has been an unremitting decline in the use of other media. This has initiated and sustained a global trend of unrelenting resort to the internet as a means of news and information dissemination. A trend of this nature has consequently had a baneful effect on the print media, and paradoxically, a positive one on online journalism and e-news. This evolution in media practice is also unequivocally evident in the developing countries of Africa such as Nigeria where the onset of online journalism is gradually putting the demand of newspapers on the ware. The migration of newspapers and television outfits to the web has been consequently accompanied with that of its readership and viewership respectively. However, much as this poses a dilemma, it has jolted journalists and media organizations into the realization that being technologically *sorry* is the only sure means of remaining relevant in an increasingly changing and competitive journalism, and a good number of them are stepping up to the plate. The migration of major newspaper outfits in the country to the internet reaffirms this. For instance, The Punch now runs an online press which avails its readers (both local and Diaspora) the opportunity to access news stories, and connect with the press on a social network to access and respond to news feeds through their mobile service. It also features opinion polls that aids in the reception of feedback from its readers. Some other news outfit go further to accord to its readers the liberty to upload reports of current news-worthy events within their vicinity. Vanguard offers to its readers such as service, Daily Sun in addition offers a search engine which enables its readers to rapidly retrieve information on trending events. Funny enough, it also does offers, for its fun-loving readers, a peculiar dating service. All these commendable

developments in the online media vividly portray the commitment of the online press and media practitioners towards a sustainable growth and efficacy of online journalism in Nigeria. This, considered from a futuristic viewpoint indubitably, guarantees a high prospect of survival, longevity, and success of online journalism in Nigeria. Nigeria has 294 radio and Television stations most of which also transmit on the internet for example Wazobia Fm and Cool Fm, which are both independent radio stations, have their audio programmes streamed live. Their audiences can click, download and listen to these programmes (<http://wazobiafm.com/>). In addition, Cool Fm produces original videos, has a photo Gallery titled "Cool photos", online games titled "Cool Games", and maintains presence on Facebook and Twitter. Other features on its website include an opinion poll site titled "Football Polls" and a "Weather Forecast Site (<http://www.coolfm.us/>). Television stations in Nigeria are not left out as a large number of them maintain presence on the web, where they transmit live programmes. Channels Television, a predominantly news television station, in addition to its live transmission, produces original news videos as well as offering links to YouTube videos. It also maintains presence on Facebook and Twitter, gives "Breaking News" through email alerts to subscribers, conducts "opinion polls" and gives Weather Reports, (<http://www.channelstv.com/global/>).

**Keywords:** *Online Journalism, Change, Traditional Media*

## **ONLINE JOURNALISM**

Online journalism also known as digital journalism is a contemporary form of journalism where editorial content is distributed via the internet as opposed to publishing via printer broadcast. What constitutes "online journalism" is debated by scholars, however the primary product of journalism which is news and features on current affairs, is presented solely or in combination as text, audio, video and some interactive forms, and disseminated through online media platforms. Fewer barriers to entry, lowered distribution costs and diverse computer networking technologies have led to the widespread practice of online journalism. It has democratized the flow of information that was previously controlled by traditional media including newspapers, magazines, radio and television. A greater degree of creativity can be exercised with digital journalism and traditional media. Mark Deuze (2003) has isolated three dominant features that are fundamental to the possibility and vitality of online journalism. The first feature he identifies is interactivity, which he defines as the ability for readers or audiences of online content to react to or interact with and even adapt news content presented to them. The comment section of online content is a key element of this attribute. The second feature is multimodality, which is the technical capability for news content to be delivered in multiple platforms - text video, audio and animated graphics. Solely, static textual content would be regarded as deficient multimodality. The third feature that defines the exceptionality of online journalism is hypertextuality, which Deuze describes as the ability of news sites "to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so forth through hyperlinks" (Deuze 2003:206). Here, the presence of links that connect readers to related material within the same websites and/or that lead readers to external sites relevant to the content being presented constitutes the core of hypertextuality.

## IMPACT ON READERS

Online journalism allows for connection and discussion at levels that print does not offer on its own. People can comment on articles and start discussion boards to discuss articles. Before the internet, spontaneous discussion between readers who had never met was impossible. The process of discussing a news item is a big portion of what makes for online journalism. People add to the story and connect with other people who want to discuss the topic. Online journalism creates an opportunity for niche audiences allowing people to have more options as to what to view and read. Online journalism opens new ways of storytelling; through the technical components of the medium, online journalists can provide a variety of media, such as audio, video and digital photography. Digital journalism represents a revolution of how news is consumed by society. Online sources are able to provide quick, efficient, and accurate reporting of breaking news in a matter of seconds, providing society with a synopsis of events as they occur. The speed in which a story can be posted can affect the accuracy of the reporting in a way that doesn't usually happen in print journalism.

**Traditional Media (Mainstream Media)** 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. Large news conglomerates including newspapers and broadcast media, are often referenced by the term. Traditional media are agents of mass communication which is a technology-mediated communication. It involves the simultaneous transfer of messages or information to a diversified audience. Feedback can be delayed here and opinion may not be easily aggregated.

Change, with regards to this study has to do with a remarkable transformation 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 change, the society should be prepared to learn new ways of doing things, which will be easy to learn, and probably accepted by a great majority of the people.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on two theories: the technological determinism theory and the mediamorphosis theory of mass communication. Accordingly, technological determinists believe that, particular technical developments, communications technologies or media, or most broadly, technology in general are the sole or prime antecedent causes of change in society, and technology is seen as the fundamental condition underlying the pattern of social organization (Chandler, 1995).

Technological determinists interpret technology in general and communications technologies in particular as the basis of society in the past, present and even the future. They hold that

technologies such as writing or print or television or the computer "changed society". In its extreme form, the entire form of society is seen as being determined by technology; new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals. At the least, a wide range of social and cultural phenomena is seen as shaped by technology. "Human factors" and social arrangements are seen as secondary (Chandler 1995).

The second theory on which this study is premised is the mediamorphosis theory. According to Fidler (1997), mediamorphosis is a unified way of thinking about the technology evolution of communication media, ([www.amazon.com/media-morphosis](http://www.amazon.com/media-morphosis)). Fidler derives his mediamorphosis principles from the concept of co-evolution, convergence and complexity. The thrust of his 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. That is, the media, as other systems, respond to external pressures with a spontaneous process of self-organization. (Anaeto, et al, 2008,p.191). Both theories are appropriate for this work because, they explain how online journalism has affected the day-to-day activities of the traditional media.

### **The Present Media Landscape in Nigeria**

In modern society, people obtain information, education, news and other data from electronic and print media. In many ways, the mass media have maintained an authoritative voice as the story tellers of the Nigerian past. Its documentary style, narratives, detailed exposures, and its position make it the prime source for public memory. However, as online sources become more popular among older and younger generation, these sources have 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, online media are ubiquitously accessible and with its interactive nature, online forums 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 the traditional media can co exist with the internet while surrendering some tasks.

Hence, as the internet changes the face of communication, journalists are beginning to have a new way of packaging and disseminating news to the public. Though few journalists in Nigeria have access to the internet and most of them do that in their respective places of work (without personal internet access) because internet connection is limited to senior people especially managing editors and senior staff notwithstanding, they are not left out of the global village. So journalists access internet from cyber cafes, libraries and media resource centres and most of them still use the internet to send e-mail. Beyond sending email to headquarters and receiving instructions from the internet, new opportunities for journalists to sell stories not only to other media houses locally but across the globe has emerged. The internet has made the world smaller to journalists to explore. This wonderful technology has also made research on various subject matters available via chatting and exchange of messages. This has created new markets and form of journalism where journalists specialize and work as online journalists, content managers or editors for particular websites. The internet is pushing journalists to learn new skills on how to add content to a web site, blog and create hyper text links. The internet is also leading journalists to basically know photographic skills

such as how to take digital pictures and upload them to a computer or add them to a blog and website. Internet has made it easy for journalists to research on any subject as it is one of the biggest resources. It makes it easy to find out what acronyms stand for and also research a certain subject matter. No doubt, the internet is also changing the way we write for newspapers as we now have to learn how to strictly write for online newspapers.

The rapid adoption of internet or online journalism by journalists is a nationwide phenomenon. The process by which computerization or digitalization impacted upon the media of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has moved on many fronts and at different speeds. Agba (2007:83) notes that "with desktop publishing and word processing packages, particularly the page maker, the production of newspapers, magazines, journals etc has become an interesting business, more so with the use of video display terminals (VDTS).

Desktop publishing which is the use of a computer and specialized software to combine text and graphics to create a document that can be printed on either a laser print or a typesetting machine has lessened the burden of typesetting on the old manual typewriter. The use of computer in layout and printing enhances accuracy, helping to control newspaper and magazine costs. Electronic editing, proofreading, formatting, spell checking tools, calculator and other software tools now facilitate the speed and ease of news gathering and dissemination. Also, the use of electronic publishing which involves the process through which print media disseminate printed messages using electronic media has closed the wide gap between print and electronic media as a result of convergence in technology. Bittner, (1989:277) merely mentions the power of teletext but today, teletext transmits text between teleprinters and teleprompter via computer with a television transmission system sending data to various media homes as well as home receivers equipped with compatible decoder. A good example of this is being demonstrated the way the Nation Newspaper in Nigeria typesets in Lagos but prints its hardcopy simultaneously in Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja, no doubt a new era in the history of media technology is here with us. Electronic editions of newspapers have also been delivered to various homes through this system.

Another landmark in the era of online journalism has been the ability of the media to harness the potentials of World Wide Web (www) among other services provided by the net. The www which is a system for accessing, manipulation, and downloading a very large set of hypertext-linked documents and other files located on computers connected through the internet has afforded both the source and receiver to send and receive messages as well as advertise goods and services.

The internet is by far the most noticeable manifestation of media proliferation. To this extent, Ende and Udende (2011, p.55) believes that "a common feature of our globalised World is the explosion of media options which are continually offering a bewildering amount of information on a variety of issues". Consequently, the internet has also yielded the spread of social media. These are internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio. Using these sites, individuals and groups create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person conversations. They are in many forms including blogs and microblogs, social networks, wikis, social bookmarking, tagging and news, writing humanities, digital storytelling and scrapbooking, and data, image and video sharing etc. Some of the well known sites include Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr,

LinkedIn, Wordpress, Live Journal Blogger, Typepad, Wikipedia and lots more. Kaplan and Micheal (2010, pp 59 - 68) see social media as "a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". The tools are social because they are created in ways that enable users to share and communicate with one another.

Today, the advent of these technologies tends to make everyone who can use them a mass communicator. One can stay right in his bedroom, sitting room or even in a moving vehicle and access information entertainment, events and enjoy full interaction with the world just by pressing a button. Just a click and the world can become aware of recent developments instantaneously. As such, online news is gradually growing among the audience and the potential market for it is rising steadily. Perhaps this is why in the year 2012, social media became one of the most powerful sources of news updates through its various platforms. This has made the extent to which news consumers rely on social media to evolve rapidly globally.

**News Value:** Online journalism has redefined news value. At a time journalists could attach news to more of political, public affairs and government activities and consider these as topics required to keep the audience informed. However, people define news differently; to a business person, it may be financial information while team scores may be for sport lovers but one thing is sure; news is about information that is timely, important and intership to its audience and all these have changed the definition of news as it goes online. With the latest technology, news is now immediate that audience begin to expect eventually every minute in this country. It is now a habit in Nigeria that audience go to the internet to post, know and read the latest any time there is crucial issue - only those with less media literacy wait for traditional news. Good examples of this were demonstrated during the controversial return of late president Yar'Adua from his Jeddah Hospital in Saudi Arabia and when he finally died. Hence, today's 24-hour news environment is kept fresh and the implication is that an hour ago news becomes obsolete the following hour.

### **Ubiquitous Nature of Online Journalism**

Looking at "the way internet and journalism influence each other, it is obvious that the new form of journalism is ubiquitous in structure. Though not everybody in a society has access to the internet to assess the news (because of digital divide), the presence of mobile phones has made it possible for journalists to gather news even where especially those who use their phones as mobile internet and send stories which in turn readers have access.

In all, journalism today finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but potentially by the audience it serves. Armed with easy-to-use web publishing tools, always on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the online audience has the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information; and it's doing just that on the internet. The internet as a medium for news is maturing with every major news event, online media evolve. While news sites have become mere responsive and better able to handle the growing demands of readers and viewers, online communities and personal news and information sites are particularly becoming increasingly diverse and playing important role that, until recently, has operated without significant notice from the traditional media. A very good

thing about online journalism is that it introduces fresh voices into national discourse on various topics and help build communities of interest through their collection of links.

## CONCLUSION

When people are online, they are looking for much more information and that makes journalists provide more information on the subject matter. An online version can provide more information and in some cases, provide video clips and a series of pictures unlike the print version which has limited pages. The internet is much more interesting as it provides journalists with multimedia platform where journalism can provide data, video and voice as Gesher (2002:176) believes that online newspaper, is meant to capture wider audience internationally. As technology advances, more changes will continue to occur. Williams (2003:227) sums it up:

Early in the next millennium, your right or left cufflinks or earnings may communicate with each other by low-orbiting satellites and have more computer power than your present PC. Your telephone won't ring indiscriminately; it will receive and perhaps respond to your incoming calls like a well-trained English butler. Mass media will be redefined by systems for transmitting and receiving personalized information and entertainment.

On this note, it is important to emphasize that the internet in comparison with other media institutions displays the followings as discussed by McQuail (2005:141)

- (1) The internet is not only or even mainly concerned with the production and distribution of messages. It is at least equally concerned with processing exchange and storage of information.
- (2) The internet is as much as institution of private as well as of public communication
- (3) The operation is not typically professional or bureaucratically organized in the same degree as mass media.

However, the lack of political will among the national leaders should be addressed. Most governments do not help matters as they show lackadaisical attitudes towards investing on their media to make them functional towards serving the people hence, the media audience prefer to go online to get the best they think is better for them. Popular belief has it that news coming from official, traditional media is superior in quality and readability than news reported by a blogger or someone with a shaky camcorder. Traditional media keep on being preached as the source of truth, but what they lack is exactly the essence of truth-validation. Online journalism on the contrary, finds its strength in the continuous, ongoing validation process operated by large community. Thus, what is emerging is a new media ecosystem, where online communities discuss and extend the stories created by traditional media. These communities also produce participatory journalism, grassroots reporting, commentary and fact-checking which the traditional media feed upon, develop as pool of tips, sources and story ideas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Media houses that are yet to train their staff should do so as soon as possible.
- (2) Media houses that are having online sites should endeavour to sustain it.

- (3) Government should provide enabling infrastructure in rural areas so that journalists can access such areas in order to send and get report in such areas.
- (4) An online version (i.e of traditional media houses with online press) should provide more information and in most cases provide video clips and series of pictures unlike the print version which has limited pages
- (5) Media houses should make provisions for internet facilities in all their offices for the members of staff in order to compete with their counterpart the world over.

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