

PROSPECTS OF INTERNET TECHNOLOGY IN NEWS PRODUCTION: A STUDY OF VOICE OF NIGERIA AND NIGERIA TELEVISION AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT: *This research work looked at the influence of the internet in news production with a focus on the Voice of Nigeria and Nigeria Television Authority. The objectives of this study were to determine how accessible internet is to workers of the media houses under study and to ascertain how often the internet is used in news production in these media houses. This study employed the survey method, 50 copies of questionnaire were distributed to newsroom workers of the selected media houses. From this research, it was discovered that most journalists are aware of the use of the internet and subsequently embrace it in their news gathering efforts. Also, the journalists, attested to the fact that internet has improved the speed of news production in their organisation, supporting the finding that majority of news room officials in the studied media houses get their reports through the internet on a daily basis.*

KEYWORDS: Internet, News Production, Technology, Communication

INTRODUCTION

From creation, man has found the need to communicate or pass information through one means or the other. Initially it started with archaic methods like drawings on the wall, the disturbance of the soil, the application of certain colours which imply significant meanings, touching, drumming, and sign language etc. Hartley (1982) stated that communication is the means by which we select and organise our experiences, it is a medium through which we learn how to behave and react. Communication is a dynamic process containing unprecedented elements; a contingent sequence of events, interactional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, within an environment of ever changing situations creating shared meanings (Manchin & Niblock, 2006). Communication to the lay man can be defined as the passing of information from one person to another. So, communication is essential for human growth and development and for communication to be effective, there must be a system (see fig 1). In relation to news production, the following communication system components can be described as follows:

- Source: this could be referred to as the various means of gathering information, means of dissemination and news reporters.
- Transmitter: this is any means by which the audience could get the information meant for them. Such means include the radio stations, television stations, internet, newsletters etc.
- Channel: this is use to bridge the gap between the transmitter and the receiver. In news production channels could be either physical or natural. It is said to be physical, when the piece of information is been transmitted by humans (such as the use of postal) while is natural when the information is transmitted by air (such as the use of radio, television and internet).
- Receiver: this is simply the audience/masses
- Noise: the noise can be seen as the any interference in the news production and the various gaps in the dissemination of the information to the audience in such that some part of the message is being lost.

This system should be paramount in all situations or aspects of communication such as news production, telephony, telegram etc.

Source

Destination

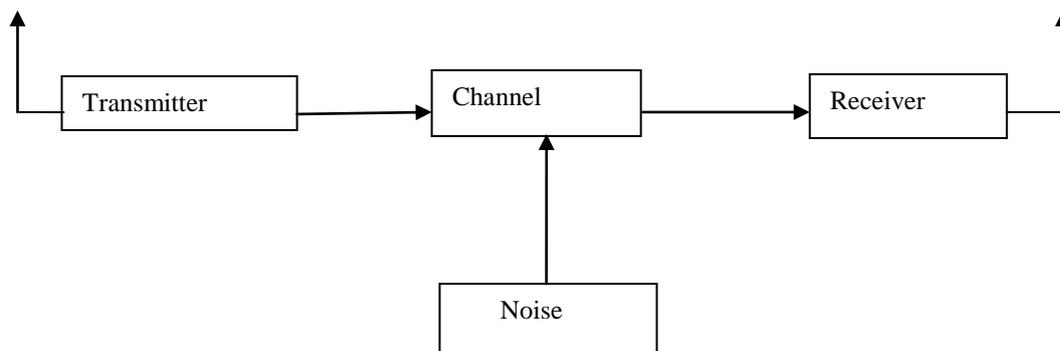


Figure 1: A simple Communication System

Over the years, in the bid to aid the facilitation of communication there have been mass innovations and invention, something adequately discussed by the mediamorphosis theory as discussed by Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008 p.191). Research has shown that the latest form of computer metamorphosis consist of two major areas known as Artificial intelligence and the internet where the internet stands unique of being an endless abyss of information and store house. The internet when used for research and other information gathering needs plus its overall advantage, supersedes its disadvantages. News is a detailed and timely account of an event. Hartley, (1982) says news is a discourse made into a meaningful story. It has also been described as anything that is new and catches attention and, in other cases has been said to have its name derived from the four angles of the earth i.e. north, east, west and south.

In a more media related setting, news gathering takes a toll, which follows a rigorous process but all information has to go through what can be called human interest, research, internal processing, verification and dissemination keeping in mind that no information becomes news until it is totally verified.

Statement of the Problem

Internet technology has made information processing fast and rapid thus information can get to anywhere like a flash of light. The internet can provide platforms for media men and women to interact with colleagues irrespective of locations thus enabling news sharing. Mass of files can be sent to people over any distance.

The media industry now witnesses tremendous progress; reporters do not necessarily need to travel far as they can have correspondents give them up-to-date information from anywhere, news production is faster and, broadcasting has gone beyond the mainstream media and viewers can go on the net to watch their favourite stations and the list is endless. However, there are some negative consequences with the use of internet in the media industry. It is believed that the internet could be a threat to media professionalism in the sense that while journalists are trying to send news across hastily before it gets stale, there is the tendency of unchecked facts. In a bid to produce news quickly and compete for scoops, it could lead to not verifying facts and inaccuracy. In the same vein, with the internet, journalists could consult different sources faster and easily. It has also encouraged Citizens' journalism and this is possible with the internet as citizens could become like journalists and send eyewitness accounts either to the media house or on the internet through blogs or social media networks. This shows that the use of the internet in news production has its pros and cons but is still indispensable in this age. This study therefore seeks to find out the extent to which internet is accessible to journalists and also how well it is used to carry out their duties.

Research Questions

The general objective of this study is to find out the influence of the internet on news production with a focus on two stations- Voice of Nigeria (VON) and the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA).

The following questions would be answered in the course of this research:

- 1 How accessible is the internet to workers of the media houses?
- 2 How often is the internet used in news production in these media houses
- 3 How has the usage of the internet improved news production, in relation to other methods?

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This study would be set upon the following theories: Uses and Gratification theory, Technological Determinism theory, Cultural Imperialism theory.

Uses and Gratification Theory

This theory as propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 looks at how the media audience use the media and what gratifications they get from using the media. The theory states that the media audience is an active one and not a passive one in the sense that the audience search for the media and also contents that will meet a certain need-physical needs, companionship, identity needs, social, practical needs, enjoyment etc.

Anaeto, et al (2008) goes further to explain that the theory is concerned with what people do with the mass media, instead of what the mass media do to the people. The theory holds that people are responsible for choosing certain media to meet their needs. One of the assumptions of the theory states that the media is active which means they are goal-oriented and attempt to achieve their goals through the media. In relation to this research, it means that journalists and reporters use the internet and invariably the new media as a medium of mass communication. The internet allows for interactivity and also journalists can search for

reports from any part of the world online and can also interact with news sources to give cutting edge to their reports.

Technological Determinism Theory

This is a theory of digital communication propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. Chandler (2000) is of the assumption that “the entire form of society is seen as being determined by technology”; adding also that “new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals.” Chandler (2000) (as cited in Reed, 2004 p.4) asserts that technology is presented as an independent, self-controlling, self-determining, self-generating, self-propelling, self-perpetuating and self-expanding force. He adds that it is ‘blindly’ shaping society”.

This theory according to Chandler (2000) seeks to show that technical developments, communications technologies or media, or, most broadly, technology in general are key movers in historical and social change and technology is seen as the fundamental condition underlying the pattern of social organization.

Cultural Imperialism Theory

The cultural imperialism theory could also be relevant in that with the advent of the internet and the new media, cultures and ideas are transmitted across borders. This means that the process of news gathering can be made easy and a reporter does not need to travel to a particular country to get a report but there could be a freelancer there or even a correspondent to cover the report, write and send the story in for publication or broadcast.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of the Internet

An internet (Lowercase letter i) is two or more networks that can communicate with each other. The most notable internet is called the Internet (uppercase letter I), a collaboration of more than hundreds of thousands of interconnected networks (Forouzan, 2007).As stated in the article, History of Internet (n.d.) Studies have shown that the development of Internet first started with three universities: University of California, Los Angeles and the Stanford Research Institute on 22:30 hours on October 29, 1969 and was initiated by Larry Roberts from MIT. This lead to the ARPAnet Link from Advance Research Project Agency. Its major aim was to support military researchers they funded in order to build a network that will enable them to share their findings, thereby reducing costs and eliminating duplication of effort and could continue to function in the midst of partial outages that could be caused by bomb attack (Knowles, 1996).

In 1967, at an Association for computing Machinery (ACM) meeting, ARPA presented its ideas for ARPANET, a small network of connected computers (Hofstetter, 2003), that engaged the computers in a kind of Mesh Topology network, where by the computers on the network shared equally in the responsibility for ensuring that the communication was accomplished.The idea was that each host computer (not necessarily from the same manufacturer) would be attached to a specialized computer, called an Interface Message processor (IMP), where the IMPs in turn would be connected to one another (Hofstetter, 2003).

The messages being transmitted where divided into packets that wound their way through the network on an individual basis. Each packet contained some information and the address of

the destination to which it was to be delivered. If one of the computers along the way stopped functioning such as in a bomb attack, the packets would automatically find an alternate route to their destinations. Thus, every computer on the network was treated as a peer and that is why, to this day, no computer on the Internet is more important than any other, and no one computer is in charge (Hofstetter, 2003).

During the 1970s, Universities began using the Internet protocol to connect their local networks to the ARPAnet. Access to a pentagon's computers on the ARPAnet was tightly controlled, but the University computers were permitted to communicate freely with one another. Because the IP software was in the public domain and the basic technology made joining the network relatively simple, the Internet became more diverse. By late 1972, more than 40 computers were connected using ARPAnet as a backbone. Later, ARPA was renamed Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), and research on network connectivity continued (Knowles, 1996). With the diversity, there were a lot of security risks, and in 1983, the military segment broke off and became MILNET.

Cerf and Kahn's landmark 1973 paper outlined the protocols to achieve end-to-end delivery of packets. This paper on Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) included concepts such as encapsulation, the datagram and the function of a gateway. In 1977, the University of Wisconsin decided to create a new network for the advancement of computer science technology. This idea eventually became CSnet. By the 1980s, CSnet was connected to ARPAnet using a gateway and the TCP/IP protocol. It was at this point, we could argue that the Internet was fully born (Knowles, 1996).

Features of the Internet

Some features of the internet are:

- Interactivity
- Intermediary
- Research Instrument

Interactivity

The internet allows for interactivity that is two-way or multiple-way communication in that users can connect and interact on an issue especially with social networking sites, chat groups, blogs etc. Steuer (1992, p. 84) (as cited in Paulussen, 2004) defines interactivity as "the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time". In the same vein, Newhagen & Rafaeli (1996) also cited in Paulussen (2004) assert that interactivity is "the extent to which communication reflects back on itself, feeds on and responds to the past".

There are some dimensions of interactivity as identified by Massey and Levy (1999 p. 527) and (cited in Paulussen, 2004), where they say that with the internet, there is the 'immediacy of content'. They posit that "the technological ability to instantly report an unfolding news event may be the one characteristic of online journalism that most clearly distinguishes it from traditional journalism (Paulussen, 2004).

Intermediary

Internet usage in news production helps to bridge the gap between one place and another; one does not need to travel a long distance to know what is happening far, with just a click on the web, there is a huge flow of information.

With the internet, there is something known as cross talk, where people in two different environments are brought together. For example, on CNN, a reporter from another part of the world can be linked to the main studio for discussion without any difficulty and this could look like they are in the same place.

Research Instrument

The internet can be used for research to investigate a topic of interest. In media practice, it can also be used for investigative journalism. In doing investigative journalism, a reporter deeply investigates a topic maybe on crime; corruption etc. to get in-depth information and this could go on for months or years.

The Impact of the Internet on Journalism Practice

The advent of the internet has offered boundless opportunities to the media profession. Reporters now have new ways of gathering information and making their reports relevant. Citizens or news consumers have also become like reporters in that they can cover reports in their locality for people to know about and this underscores the essence of interactivity and feedback.

Some scholars Koch, (1991); Pavlik, (2001) as (cited in Hermans, Vergeer and d'Haenens, 2009 p.140) are of the opinion that "changes brought about by the Internet is enriching." They further add that with the Internet, "every journalist can consult various sources faster and more easily, as a result of which reports become more varied and gain more contextual depth."

According to Bastos, Lima and Moutinho (n.d.) "the current technologies of new media make news gathering and production more efficient, faster and cost-effective." They add that "these technologies also enhance producer creativity and encourage new approaches to old tasks." The job of gathering news has been made a little easier with the use of internet tools. Reporters do not necessarily have to be everywhere to get eye-catching reports, they can surf the net and also subscribe to big news agencies to keep their reports fresh. When there is an international event, the media house must not necessarily send a reporter to that location to get the report, they can view it live on the net, they can have a freelance journalist over there willing to tender the report or they could also have a correspondent in that location to cover the report and send to the headquarters for dissemination. While the report can be introduced in the news bulletin, the reporter at that location could be linked to let the audience have a feel of what is going on at that place through cross talk.

The internet allows for localisation of content, in that when stories break maybe on the international scene, they find an angle to it that will be relevant to the audience they feed. With the internet, there is a high level of interactivity and also feedback from audiences. Before now, it was difficult to find out what the audience of a media organisation thinks about their services but with the internet, there are online platforms for audiences to fill our survey forms as regards the station or media organisation. Also, news can get to people in real time. Most media organisations- print and electronic now have online versions that

readers or viewers can log on to, to listen and view. Interviewing can also be made easy instead of going to where the potential interviewee is, the reporter and the person can connect online.

In the case where a media organisation has an online version, content can be updated at every minute making it dynamic.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used the descriptive survey design.

Population of the Study and Sample Size

The population of this study comprised all newsroom staff of the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), and the Voice of Nigeria (VON). For the purpose of this study, a sample size of 50 respondents was selected; 25 from NTA and the other 25 from VON.

This research adopted the purposive sampling technique. It was chosen based on specific characteristics and qualities peculiar to the newsroom staff of these two organisations. Copies of questionnaire comprising close-ended questions were used to get responses to answer the research questions.

RESULTS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research work focused on the utilization of internet in news production in two selected media organisations. The data was analysed while answering the research questions.

RQ1: How accessible is the internet to workers of the media houses?

Table 1: How did you learn how to use the internet?

Response	Frequency		Percentage	
	VON	NTA	VON	NTA
Personally	17	15	34	30
Officially	8	10	16	20
Total	25	25	100.0	

Table 2: Are you exposed to the internet at work?

Response	Frequency		Percentage	
	VON	NTA	VON	NTA
Yes	25	25	50	50
No	-	-	-	-
Total	25	25	100.0	

Table 3: What percentage of newsroom staff is familiar with gathering data on the internet?

Response	Frequency		Percentage	
	VON	NTA	VON	NTA
0 – 35%	2	5	4	10
35 – 70%	5	4	10	8
70% and above	18	16	36	32
Total	25	25	100	

From table 1 it can be seen that 64% of respondents expressed that they learnt how to use the internet on their own, while 36% claimed to have learnt how to use it officially. Thus, it can be deduced that a greater amount of people learnt to use it on their own. Also from table 2 which asked about their exposure to the internet at work, it was discovered that the internet was readily made available to the workers of both media houses, because all the respondents expressed that they were exposed and had access to the internet at work, leading the researcher to agree with Hermans et al (2009) when he said ‘there is no doubt that the rise of the Internet as a technological innovation has influenced the profession.

Table 3 shows that 14% of respondents believe that 0-35% of newsroom staff are familiar with how to get information on the internet, 18% believe that 35-70% of journalists are familiar with how to get information online, while 68% are of the opinion that more than 70% of journalists are familiar with gathering news online.

RQ 2: How often is the internet used in news production in these media houses

Table 4:How often do you get your reports from the internet?

Response	Frequency		Total	Percentage		
	VON	NTA		VON	NTA	
Daily	13	15	28	26	30	56
Weekly	5	3	8	10	6	16
Monthly	7	7	14	14	14	28
Total	25	25	50	100.0		

From table 4, 28 (56%) respondents get their reports from the internet daily while 8 (16%) and 14 (28%) get their reports from the internet weekly and monthly respectively. This means that majority of the respondents admit to getting their reports from the internet on a daily basis, thus we can generalize and say these media houses use the internet daily.

Table 5:How do you rate internet facilities in the newsroom?

Response	Frequency		Percentage	
	VON	NTA	VON	NTA
Good	9	5	18	10
Poor	2	6	4	12
Fair	14	14	28	28
Total	25	25	100.0	

Analysis from table 13 shows that 14 (28%) respondents rate the internet facilities in their newsroom as ‘good’ while 8 (16%) and 28 (56%) rate the internet facilities ‘poor’ and ‘fair’ respectively.

RQ3: How has the usage of the internet improved news production, in relation to other methods?

Table 6: Has internet usage improved the speed of news production in your organization?

Response	Frequency		Percentage	
	VON	NTA	VON	NTA
Yes	25	25	50	50
No	-	-	-	-
Total	25	25	100.0	

The interpretation of this table shows that all the respondents from both media houses believe the internet has greatly improved their work. The use of the internet in their newsrooms have improved speed of gathering information, processing the information and also sending to different places if need be. Some media houses send soft copies of the news to other states for printing and distribution unlike when it was printed in one location and then copies had to be taken to different states for distribution. With the internet also, news can be reported as it happens without waiting for the next bulletin. Besides the internet, the respondents added that other methods of news gathering are through interviews, eye witness reports, workshops, lectures, events coverage and so on. Apart from gathering news online the internet can also be used for editing. Respondents were also asked some challenges they face with internet usage and majority said it is the slow speed of the service provider.

Another finding from the research says that, 24% of respondents said their organisation sends them on internet related course training programmes. 76% responded that their organisation do not send them on internet training programmes that they do it on their own. This then means that if some of these journalists are trained adequately on how to use the internet for their job then they would be more productive not only in searching for reports but also making use of good editing tools and also interacting with audiences appropriately to get feedback on the services of the media organisation.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The use of internet in newsrooms across Nigeria is gaining some grounds. Some reporters use the internet to gather foreign news and also to get news sent in by correspondents in other locations. The use of internet has also encouraged citizens' journalism. This research sought to find out the extent of compliance of the media houses under study with the internet. The findings of this study shows that majority of the respondents use the internet and most of them learnt how to use it through personal training and not training by the organization.

This study is not just a study on paper but addresses the need for journalists of the 21st century to adopt the use of the internet in news gathering, production and dissemination as it gives some ease. It is also important for journalists to improve their technological skills and media houses should better equip their newsrooms so that Nigeria will key into the ongoing technological revolution that is making news production easier.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that journalists are aware of the power of the internet; they use it and have some level of confidence in it because it can help them gain access to some information that can only be derived through the use of social media as a platform. Based on the findings of this research, despite the fact that 56% of the respondents rated the newsroom internet

facilities in their offices as poor, it can be seen that all the respondents are of the opinion that internet usage has improved the speed of news production in their organisation. 68% from the respondents believe that up to 70% and more of newsroom staff members are familiar with how to get information online, keeping them a step ahead of their competition and also creating for them an avenue in which they can dialogue with their audience giving them a way to listen, work on their flaws, serve the people better and improve their news delivery e.g. (Channels television).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings it can be seen that most journalists have a good understanding of how the internet works, but the problems they face while trying to access it poses a setback to the overall dissemination of news. The following recommendations suffice:

- The media houses should take more steps into understanding the internet to further aid its application to speedy and accurate news production.
- Media organisations should send more of their workers on internet training programmes or workshops, because from the research it was discovered that the rate at which these media organisations send their workers on training exercises is low. Here they can come in contact with professionals from all works of life that have used the internet in one way or the other to improve their businesses, thus giving them an edge over other news production outfits.
- Furthermore, it is imperative that media houses equip their newsrooms with more computers for use and quick access to the internet by staff members. Despite the working policy that exists in some places e.g. VON that each newsroom staff member should have his/her own personal laptop, it would be highly professional to have a newsroom fully equipped and up to par that can match the newsrooms abroad who make it a point of duty to provide computers for their staff members apart from their own personal laptops.
- Needless to say, media houses should not give in to the temptation of information without borders. From the research, it was discovered that these media houses felt as journalists they owed the citizens a duty to provide them with verified information. Thus, information gotten from the internet and social media should still be taken with a pinch of salt.
- To create a better link between themselves and the people, they should embrace the internet by creating a bigger and bolder online presence. They can make accounts on social networking sites e.g. face book and twitter which would be a representative of the media house just like it is with the likes of CNN, they would establish a platform where the people can interact with them, give feedback and post news or videos of topical events that is happening in their locality.
- Although we cannot adequately put the ‘Nigerian factor’ to rest in this case of the internet and news production e.g. fluctuating electricity, Service provider network problems etc., media houses should try as much as possible to totally eradicate all things that could stand as a problem or threat to their use of the internet. They should take care of their equipment and though expensive, should try to pay their internet bills promptly thus avoiding situations where their connectivity would be revoked, leading the company to close up e.g. NN24.
- Although this research work is focusing on VON and NTA, news production does not only involve the media but the citizens as well. The government should provide an enabling environment i.e. provisions for wireless connections, stable electricity etc. to allow for the free flow of undisrupted information.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is not done to be generalised to all media houses in Nigeria. The media houses under review were taken as sample for this study and the researchers recommend that future researchers conduct a study more generalizable to the Nigerian media to find out exactly what obtains in most media houses around the country.

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