

The Influence of New Media on Conventional Media in Nigeria

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Abstract

The advent of new media has posed several challenges to conventional media. Some of these challenges, for example, can be clearly seen on the circulation of print newspapers world-wide, especially in the USA. However in Nigeria, the effect of the new media on conventional media is still manageable. Nigerian newspapers still attract advertising dollars even with the presence of online newspapers. The two complement each other. This paper, argues that the presence of the Internet will not replace newspapers, just as radio did not replace newspapers and television. Also, it looks at the present situation of conventional media, especially print newspapers vis-à-vis the new media in Nigeria. The researcher believes that the newspaper outlook may change resultant of the Internet inception, but the news contents are still intact. Though the conventional media share online presence, yet they have not fully embraced the new technology. The paper argues further that the drop in circulation as experienced by print media is as a result of the younger generation's preference for the new media as they are more interactive compared to the online version of mainstream media. There are also television stations which have an online presence such as NTA and other national television. A considerable number of Nigerian citizens have their own Internet connections, so that they can read newspapers online, thus suffocating the print media from advertising revenues at this time of global economic downturn. The paper, concludes that in Nigeria, the new media and conventional media will continue to coexist and reinforce each other presumably beyond the envisaged year 2020.

Keywords: new media, conventional media, Nigeria media, Internet news, online news, newspapers

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, fast developing technology has been fuelling an information revolution. The new media, digital broadcasting and the internet are sweeping away the limitations of the analogue world and weakening the grip of government-owned platforms. The nature of the relationship between the broadcaster and its audience is changing. New media in this information age provides an immediate, informative, intelligent, interactive platform for discussion and debate. New media is essentially a cyber culture with modern computer technology, digital data controlled by software and the latest fast developing communication technology. Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, and often have characteristics of being networkable, dense, compressible, interactive and impartial. Examples are the internet, websites, computer multimedia, games, CD-ROMs and DVDs. Young people are attracted to the easy means of getting information with internet based terminals or hand phones which provide them information of their choice anytime, anywhere. They need not have to wait for any broadcasting schedule to be connected to get the information.

Internet blogs, news portals and online news, Facebook, You Tube, podcast and webcast, and even the short messaging system (SMS), are all new media. The modern revolution enables everybody to become a journalist at little cost and with global reach. Nothing like this has ever been possible before. The impact of new media has been noticed by governments in some developing countries where seats have been lost in the Senates and Parliaments due to the impact of the new media's uncensored, audience penetration and interactive tendencies.

For example, when the government depended on the mainstream media which it controlled to give information to the electorates, while the opposition used the new media which was uncensored, faster, cheaper and reached a bigger audience. Ironically it was the same government that had spent billions of dollars to foster the growth of the new media technology (Nagasvare & Krishnasamy, 2011). However, it cannot be denied that the first media revolution was characterised by newsprint, while the second by radio, TV and internet, hence it is undeniable that the third media revolution, where professional media competes for attention alongside user-generated blogs, YouTube and Qik videos and Twitter, poses quite a conundrum (Silicon Republic Knowledge and Events Management Ltd, 2009).

2. THE INTERNET AS A GLOBAL NEW MEDIA

According to a recent report by the Pew Research Centre (2012), it was highlighted that in the digital era, news has become omnipresent. Americans access it in multiple formats on multiple platforms on myriad devices. The days of loyalty to a particular news organization on a particular piece of technology in a particular form are gone. The overwhelming majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to get news on a typical day, including national TV, local TV, the internet, local newspapers, radio, and national newspapers. Some 46% of Americans say they get news from four to six media platforms on a typical day. Just 7% get their news from a single media platform on a typical day. The internet is at the center of the story of how people's relationship to news is changing. Six in ten Americans (59%) get news from a combination of online and offline sources on a typical day, and the internet is now the third most popular news platform, behind local television news and national television news.

The process Americans use to get news is based on foraging and opportunism. They seem to access news when the spirit moves them or they have a chance to check up on headlines. At the same time, gathering the news is not entirely an open-ended exploration for consumers, even online where there are limitless possibilities for exploring news. While online, most people say they use between two and five online news sources and 65% say they do not have a single favorite website for news. Some 21% say they routinely rely on just one site for their news and information (Pew Research Centre, 2012). In this new multi-platform media environment, people's relationship to news is becoming portable, where 33% of cell phone owners now access news on their cell phones; personalized, where 28% of internet users have customized their home page to include news from sources and on topics that particularly interest them, and participatory, where 37% of internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter.

As a result of the advent of the Internet, people's experience of news, especially on the internet, is becoming a shared social experience as people swap links in emails, post news stories on their social networking site feeds, highlight news stories in their Tweets, and haggle over the meaning of events in discussion threads. For instance, more than 8 in 10 online news consumers get or share links in emails. The rise of the internet as a news platform has been an integral part of these changes. This report discusses two significant technological trends that have influenced news consumption behavior. First, the advent of social media like social networking sites and blogs has helped the news become a social experience in fresh ways for consumers. People use their social networks and social networking technology to filter, assess, and react to news. Second, the ascent of mobile connectivity via smart phones has turned news gathering and news awareness into an anytime, anywhere affair for a segment of avid news watchers (Pew Research Centre, 2012).

However, Lawrence Amaku (2012) elucidates that the practice of journalism in the modern-day Nigeria is no longer an all-comers affair. Tertiary education combined with adequate professional training, as well as continuous skills acquisition is the hallmark of a modern-day journalist. To succeed in the practice of journalism, a 21st century practitioner has no choice but to keep abreast of information technologies that have encroached and impacted on traditional journalism practice. This is not only advisable, it is imperative for the journalist's continued survival and relevance in an industry where the world no longer waits for the news print or radio/TV to break the news. The world relies more, these days, on the "new media" to provide on-the-go, real-time information on the latest happenings around the world. New media have been described as interactive forms of communication that use the Internet, including podcasts, really simple syndication (RSS) feeds, social networks, text messaging, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds and more! Analysts say new media make it possible for anyone to create, modify, and share content with others, using relatively simple tools that are often free or inexpensive. New media require a computer or mobile device with Internet access (Amaku, 2012).

3. THE CHALLENGES FACING CONVENTIONAL MEDIA

It was reported that media researchers have commended the role of Web 2.0 which has become a new media mass led by individuals zapping information from Digg to Tweets from their homes or on the street. Media houses from newspapers to TV stations are struggling to compete and stay relevant, as the reader can opt to be informed by Facebook status feeds or by following Tweets on Twitter or RSS feeds on whatever they fancy (Silicon Republic Knowledge and Events Management Ltd, 2009). Across the world, amidst a major economic recession, newspapers and TV stations are being hit by declining ad revenues, with some organisations blaming this on the rise of the internet. Venerable titles such as the *Rocky Mountain News* have shut down, while the *Boston Globe* is said to be losing US\$1bn a week.

Other newspapers are viewing the move to internet-only publishing as their key to survival, as it cuts out overheads such as printing costs. But van Doorn dismisses talk of the internet contributing to newspapers' decline and says the wider economic issues, such as the collapse of banking and property industries, are what are really taking the toll. "You can say the same for a number of industries. Newspapers are suffering the same fate as a lot of other industries. You shouldn't confuse the economic depression with the rise of Web 2.0." But in terms of the media's ability to make money from advertising, van Doorn says that the history of advertising is studded by shifts. "Once, most of it was on the streets on posters because that's where the people were, then it was newsprint, then TV and radio, and logically, because it shifts, there's a decrease in one or other media. Where people will be spending more and more of their lives will be the digital space.

"There is no real business case to make for a newspaper that is not in the digital space." Van Doorn declares that there's a case for both print and online. If you can do something online with a lower cost level and you can make an income, great. But the real question is what will people want to consume and how. Maybe they will be willing to pay more for a physical book or magazine than for an electronic version. Uche Nworah (2005) expatiates that at the heart of the issue of the Internet providing the Nigerian media with a wider audience, is also the problem of reduced cover price revenues and advertisements.

The latter being closely linked to each other. Nigerians popularised the FAN (*free readers association of Nigeria*) concept, a term and acronym used to refer to the practice of locals congregating around newspaper vendors' tables to read newspapers and magazines for free without actually buying any, probably a reflection of the socio-economic circumstances and intellectual awareness of the people that indulge in such activities (the *FANatics*). It may seem now that such practices have now been elevated and taken to another level with the advent of the internet, since the free readers or punters now only need to log on and then freely read any newspaper or magazine of their choice, this obviously will have a huge impact on revenues as less hard copies will be bought.

4. THE NIGERIAN NP INDUSTRY VIS-À-VIS THE NEW MEDIA

As a matter of fact, Nigerian advertisers have not yet started taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the internet, to advertise their products and services in the websites of some of these media organisations. Only a few advertisers are doing this at the moment. It was hoped that such advertisements may actually increase so that the free news now readily available on the internet can be subsidised, and also to make up for the shortfall from the hard copy sales. While there are no hard figures from any sources in Nigeria to support these assertions, it suffices, however, to cite the site of the global internet advertising revenues, which has grown steadily to over \$8 billion annually. According to Tom Hyland, Partner and Chair, New Media Group, PricewaterhouseCoopers "Single digit, sequential growth demonstrates the industry has left behind the large revenue spikes that characterized the early years. We're now looking at a maturing, stable industry that inspires further investment by large, traditional marketers." It can be argued that in a way, the internet has led to a decrease in the revenue of some of the media organisations in Nigeria, while at the same time increasing their costs, as money would have to be invested into setting up such web sites, and also paying the staff that would constantly maintain them, however if we are to go by global trends which foretell an increase in internet advertising usage and revenues, then any incidental costs will eventually be offset by the expected advertising revenues, hopefully (Uche Nworah, 2005)

5. THE WAY FORWARD FOR NEWSPAPERS

The way forward for newspapers, mainstream as well as other conventional media particularly in Nigeria would be first of all, to improve their credibility. As it is now there are segments of the society which see mainstream media as the mouthpiece and propaganda tool of the ruling government. The newspaper industry is facing two simultaneous crises stemming from the decline in newspapers' circulation and advertising revenues and the rise of widely available and free online news content. The United States suffered the most severe fall in circulation, and advertising revenues dropped 8.7 percent in the period from March to October 2010. This reduction in revenues from advertising was further exacerbated by the financial crisis of 2007-085. The entrance of alternative online sources of news also marked a new era of digital competition. Consequently, one of the principal challenges for news organizations became the establishment of new, alternative revenue streams that do not rely solely on the traditional print model.

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Thus, it suffices to mention that the assumption by media analysts and commentators that the newspaper industry is in perpetual decline is half true and dependent on circumstances. Therefore, the idea of the "death of print" is better founded on the realistic assessment of the impact of technological advancements. But the shift away from the traditional business model of the printing press is not new, it has been occurring since the early 1980s. Akhmad Kusaeni (2012) declared that, "Everyone can write what they want to write, while journalists must provide precise and true information. There are regulations binding them, so people will still rely on them for precision."

6. CONCLUSION: NEWS OVERFLOW

In conclusion, wherever we go, news is there, says Rantanen. While Van Doorn concurs that journalism will not be extinct, however, it will have to coexist and try to differentiate itself. Journalists will have to climb down out of their ivory towers as they did in the past when journalist was the one person who would get the information, present it and inform the public on what's happening, but the new media in the example of Twitter has made this impossible (Silicon Republic Knowledge & Events Management Ltd, 2009). At this juncture, one can declare that with the new media models of information dissemination the balance between the supply and demand of news has been tilted, creating a situation where there is an oversupply of news. The situation is analogous that: Earlier you wanted to buy news from the newsboys on the street, but today you run away from the newspaper freebies being dealt at every corner. But at the same time as we have all the news from faraway places we could possibly wish for, local news is often lacking. Traditionally the news sources have been very close to official sources, which means the scope is often national or international. We know better what is happening internationally than what is happening locally.

The news models are in transition, moving away from old concepts while embracing new models of transmitting information. News in the past set the time; you could recognise news by the way news articles always referred to a time and place. Now the news narrative has changed, as references to time have become obsolete when reporting to a global audience. With the temporality aspect lost old monopolies have also been broken up by the new media. One no longer has to wait until the 9 o'clock news. News is all the time; there is no time without news.

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