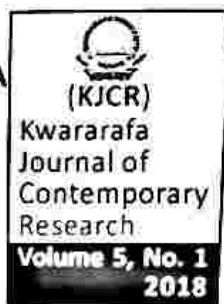


INFLUENCE OF INTERNET ON THE PRODUCTION OF RURAL COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Internet is increasingly gaining momentum in the world of information and communication. It has without doubt altered the conventional method of interaction and information sharing- a new paradigm in the media sector. This paper examines the influence of internet in the production of rural community newspaper. The paper argues that Internet is a veritable source of information that has made reporting and the newspaper production process very simple. Internet is also useful in verifying facts and data for the production of Rural Community Newspapers and pictures can be sourced from internet respectively. The paper also identified the challenges of using Internet in the production of rural community newspapers such as: Internet is hampered by poor economy and dearth of facilities in rural areas, inconsistency in electricity power supply, Cost of computers and other ICT gadgets as well as non- availability of qualified technicians for proper maintenance among others. The paper concludes that Internet is useful in the production of rural community newspaper in Nigeria given that it has repositioned the newspaper industry and journalist worldwide depend largely on it as a source of information and other materials that goes into the production despite the challenges. The paper thus, recommends the adoption of Internet in the production of rural community newspapers as a viable source of information and other materials needed in production.

Key Words: Internet, Newspaper, Rural Community Newspaper, Production.

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Introduction

Information is power and a society that is not informed is deformed. Both the urban as well as rural dwellers depend largely on information to keep abreast of happenings within and outside their immediate environments. Information is the raw material for development of both urban and rural dwellers. Prosperity, progress, and development of any nation depend upon the nation's ability to acquire, produce, access, and use pertinent information.

People in rural areas whether literate or not, should have access to any kind of information that can enable them become productive in their social and political obligations as well become better informed citizens generally. Similarly Diso (1994) submits that, information must as a matter of policy, be seen as a basic resource for development if durable structures are to be provided for effective access and utilization, which entails information capturing, coordination, processing, and dissemination.

Owing to the importance of information in the society, rural community newspapers often report on events in their communities as well as provide a forum for exchange of ideas and free expression. They allow readers to make their voices heard, and they enable ordinary citizens to deliberate on the future of their community. They encourage civil, issue-oriented discourse as well as set the stage for such exchanges. Many community newspapers serve as "watchdogs" to hold elected leaders accountable. They shine light on local government, sometimes using "Freedom of Information" laws to get public records and make those records available to citizens and keep voters informed (Chile, 2005).

The explosive growth and development of the Internet has significantly contributed to the emergence of social network sites in the cyber space (Okorie, Ekeanyanwu and Obanua, 2010; Okorie and Oyedepo, 2011; Okorie, Oyedepo and Usaini, 2012). Teenagers nowadays interact heavily with social media using different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social networking more than ever before (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This has also transformed the cultural landscape in modern societies by

re-inventing the way individuals interact and how relationships are developed.

Today, the use of the Internet is very pertinent and obvious in nearly every field of human endeavors. Internet has broken the barriers of distance and time. The advancement in technology has enhanced access to Internet services. The Internet has remained a veritable medium used for information seeking and knowledge acquisition as well as entertainment and in solving social and economic problems in the society. Scholars contend that, messages and information gotten from the Internet are credible and reliable but several attempts have been made and have been able to debunk this idea (Uwakwe, 2003).

This view is enhanced by (Amunnah, Azubuize and Nwigoh, 2013) that Internet involves information distribution and dissemination. Information, messages and opinions as well as knowledge are stored in the Internet. As situation demands, when it is needed, it is therefore retrieved easily and conveniently from the system and distributed or disseminated to the different audience at the same time. Hanmakyugh (2016) argues that the Internet has been credited with revolutionizing business, education and entertainment, by bridging physical distance in order to bring individuals, organizations and groups closer together. Products like news stories, editorials, features, documentaries and other relevant information on different subject matters are massively produced and disseminated to heterogeneous audience. Given this view, this paper examines the role of internet in the production of rural community newspaper in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Internet

The internet according to Nwajinka (2003) comprises of computer networks that are attached to one another via pathways that facilitates the exchange of information data and files. Internet is the interconnection of the variety of networks and computers (Rupal, 1998). It opens the doors of communication between the various stations. Internet has been able to facilitate storing, processing and transmitting of relevant volumes of data, which is

useful to the present day societies.

Internet is a collection of computers and other devices that communicate with each other (Uwakwe, 2004). He further stressed that; personal computers are connected to other computers either through telephone lines, radio waves or computer cables to transport information. As a result of the internet, many people own personal computers, card slots for attaching modems and other auxiliary devices. They are used for such tasks as the sending of faxes and electronic mail, collecting, storing, and analyzing initial data to activate better decision-making, architectural and engineering drawings, book/newspapers/magazines designs and the facilitation of business transactions

The Rural Community Newspaper

A rural newspaper is a 2-4 page newspaper produced in a tabloid format. It is smaller in size than a standard newspaper and contains condensed articles of news and other subjects of particular interest to adult readers in vernacular language. Rural newspaper refers to print materials on current issues intended primarily but not exclusively for sub-literate adults and development specialists in rural and sub-urban areas.

Chile (2005) argues that, rural newspaper provides channels of alternative grassroots communication in the vernacular language for poor and marginalized semi-literate adults in rural urban communities. Rural community newspaper or press is a locally-oriented, professional news coverage medium that typically focuses on city neighborhoods, individual suburbs or small towns, rather than metropolitan, state, national or world news. If it covers wider topics, community newspaper concentrates on the effect they have on local readers. Community newspapers, often but not always publish weekly.

In other words, rural newspaper is based on the belief of the people. It provides a channel of alternative grassroots communication through which the poor are allowed to speak for themselves. In presenting their vision of the world, self esteem, self confidence and morale are improved. The rural newspaper is capable of strengthening the cohesion of community groups and

may be the catalyst needed to release powerful energy for change. Apart from information dissemination, rural community newspapers boost the local economy through advertising and in news coverage. They showcase community businesses at a time we need to be shopping locally, investing in the community and protecting local jobs. They allow "mom and pop" businesses to reach their most likely customers.

The people who operate these newspapers work and live in the communities. They share their values. They understand these community because they're a part of it. Community newspapers are much more than paper and ink. Community newspapers pull communities together. They help connect people with those around them. In this way, community newspapers provide a valuable form of public service.

Nwanwene 1997 in Chile (2005) argued that rural newspaper is considered to be one of the major tools for extending fundamental knowledge meant for and derived from the local community. He further argued that the thrust of a rural community newspaper includes news, general information, social criticism, entertainment as well as self help.

Rural newspaper is therefore a publication for and by the rural people containing news, views and advertisements for the rural community. It should therefore be compiled, printed and published in the locale it is meant to serve by the rural people themselves and be published in the language spoken by majority of the people for who it is published and reflect the collective aspirations of the community involving all aspects of their lives such as cultures, language, customs, social and improved development.

Review of Related Literature

The Roles of Rural Community Newspapers

According to Michelle Michigan press (2009) report, the rural community newspaper perform the following roles in the community:

Community newspapers boost the local economy – both through advertising and in news coverage. They showcase community

businesses at a time we need to be shopping locally, investing in the community and protecting local jobs. They allow “mom and pop” businesses to reach their most likely customers.

Community newspapers bring us “good news”—news of Scout projects, civic club fundraisers, little-league registration, chamber of commerce happenings, church bake sales and students who make the Honor, Roll or Dean’s List. They help neighbors get to know each other a little better. They often report on anniversaries and family reunions, reminding people of the things they like so well about their community.

Community newspapers provide a forum for expression. They allow readers to make their voices heard, and they enable ordinary citizens to deliberate on the future of their community. They encourage civil, issue-oriented discourse and they often set the stage for it.

Many community newspapers serve as “watchdogs” to hold elected leaders accountable. They shine a light on local government, sometimes using “Freedom of Information” laws to get public records and make those records available to citizens. They keep voters informed. They let people see how their tax dollars are being spent. During an economic downturn – when tax dollars are scarce and the demands on them increased – that’s important.

The people who operate these newspapers work and live in the communities they cover. They understand their community because they’re a part of it. Newspaper stocks have been taking a beating, and news reports tell us these are dark days for their industry. Community newspapers are much more than paper and ink. Community newspapers pull communities together. They help connect people with those around them. In this way, community newspapers provide a valuable form of public service.

History of the Internet

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 led 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 efforts 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 were divided into packets that would find their way through the network on an individual basis. Each packet contained some information and 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.

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.

Research Instrument

Internet also serve as a research instrument since the use of search engines is only possible with the aid of internet services.

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.

Scholars Koch, (1991); Pavlik, (2001) 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 (2013) "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.

Impact of Internet on the Production of Rural Community Newspapers

Sambe and Nyitse (2008) argues that the newspaper industry has continued to experience much changes occasioned by advances in technology particularly in the areas of copy writing, reporting, editing, page making, filming as well as other aspects of production.

- i. Source of Information- Journalists worldwide depend much on the services of the internet for a wide range of information. it could be relied upon to provide update information and as well as background details respectively.
- ii. The internet has revolutionised the newspaper industry. It has made reporting and the newspaper production process very simple.
- iii. Internet is also useful in verifying fact and date for the production of rural community newspapers.
- iv. Internet also serve as a source of photography- this implies that pictures can be sourced from the internet to complement stories as well as beautify the pages of rural community newspapers respectively.
- v. Stories can also be culled from the internet.

Challenges of Using Internet for the Production of Rural Community Newspaper

Okoye (2000) identified some of the challenges associated with the use of internet in the production of rural community newspapers

to include:

- i. The usage of internet is hampered by poor economy and dearth of facilities in rural areas.
- ii. Inconsistency in electricity power supply
- iii. Cost of computers and other ICT gadgets
- iv. Non- availability of qualified technicians for proper maintenance
- v. Proliferation of low quality ICT gadgets- this results to constant break down which leads to frustration and increased cost as this has to be replaced
- vi. Lack of technical know-how on the part rural community newspaper owners. This also hinders the effective use and application of internet in the production of rural community newspapers.
- vii. Poverty- Most rural community newspaper owners don't have the funds to acquire internet service gadgets. This results to non- application of internet in the production of rural community newspapers.
- viii. Lack of confidence in ICT service providers in the rural areas.

Conclusion

From the foregone, the paper concludes that the Internet is useful in the production of rural community newspaper in Nigeria hence journalists worldwide depends on it as a source of information. The internet equally allows for localisation of content so when stories break maybe on the international scene, they find an angle to it that will be relevant to the audience they feed as well as a high level of interactivity and also feedback from audiences respectively despite the enormous challenges. The paper thus recommends the adoption of internet by publishers in the production of rural community newspapers as a viable source of information and other materials needed in production.

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