Integrating Social Media for Information Gathering and Dissemination: Views of Broadcast Media Professionals

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Abstract

The popularity and influence of social media are continuously changing media operations in general and media consumption in particular. Information gathering and dissemination are increasingly becoming faster, cheaper and more accessible using social media platforms. This study investigates social media for information gathering and dissemination among media professionals in Nagarta Radio and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Kaduna. The study sought to find out the availability and usage of social media platforms by the two radio stations for information gathering and dissemination, the benefits, and the challenges of integrating social media in information gathering and dissemination. The study was anchored in Mediamorphosis theory, while an In-Depth Interview was employed as the methodology for data collection. The purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) respondents (heads of departments/units) for the in-depth interview. The study found out that radio stations use social media for information gathering and dissemination. Integrating social media for radio broadcasting has allowed them to reach out and interact with more audiences, thereby allowing more content generation and broader audience reach. They, however, revealed that fake information, poor network, staff inexperience, source incredibility and difficulty in managing audience comments were the significant challenges of using social media in information gathering and dissemination. The study concludes that the staff of the two radio stations derive benefits in the use of social media but with some challenges and therefore recommends that the management of the two radio stations should encourage their staff on the frequent use of social media technologies for information gathering and dissemination to maximize wider audience reach while at the same time utilizing the available procedures of online content verification before disseminating to their audiences.

Keywords: Social Media, Media Professionals, Information Gathering, Information Dissemination

Introduction

The advent of the Internet and its attendant benefits has brought about changes in how media organizations develop content is being carried out. This is specifically evident in the ample opportunities offered, mainly social media applications. The Internet in general and social media in particular have increasingly changed media operations, especially content generation, dissemination, and consumption.

Integration of ICTs in general and social media helps radio stations reinvent their operations and alter how they engage with their audiences.

Social media usage has resulted in a new type of storytelling and content production that is more interactive with the audience. The confluence of radio and the Internet provides radio stations with chances to bridge the gap between media content producers and consumers in networked public spaces (Benkler, 2006). No doubt, therefore, the journalism practice in Nigeria is increasingly enhanced and, in some instances, changed with the use of social media. This is similar to what obtains in the developed countries (Guanah, & Ojo, 2018).

The growth of social media services has expanded the scope of content sourcing and dissemination in journalism practice. This is evident in how social media platforms have become news outlets for the general public and helpful tools for media professionals to carry out their information gathering and dissemination activities. "Journalists use social media to find story leads and share their work with audiences, making journalism more interactive. As the social media technologies have various features tailored for specified functions, journalists use different social media tools for different journalistic functions" (Kumari, 2018, p.55).

Consumption of media content today is also not the same as pre-satellite/internet days when people waited for their morning papers or sat down at an appointed time for the evening radio/television news. Today, more and more readers, listeners and viewers go online for their information needs. Even though the radio, television and newspapers are still with us, there is a growing competition between these conventional information outlets and their online counterparts. The proliferation of social media reveals how individuals broadly use traditional media to discover what happened but turn to social media to discuss what happened.

Across the world, media organizations maintain the old media while at the same time having a solid online presence. This allows their message to reach all kinds of audiences who they might not have reached if they stick to only one channel. It has also been argued that traditional media is more effective in reaching out to broad base audiences, but new media is a great way to reach out to a specific audience. The increasing popularity and acceptability of social media as the new source of information and the need for journalists and media organizations to harness these benefits, therefore, inform this study as it intends to find out how

media professionals in two radio stations in Kaduna integrate social media in the process of gathering and disseminating information.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study:

1). To find out the availability of social media technologies in *Nagarta* radio and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Kaduna and how media professionals in the two radio stations use the social media technologies in information gathering and dissemination.

2). To find out the benefits of using social media by the two radio stations.

3). To find out the challenges of integrating social media for information gathering and dissemination.

Social Media and Radio Broadcasting

The proliferation of social media and the increasing interest by journalists in using it for information sharing (Information gathering and dissemination) has changed how media organizations interact with the audience. The relationship between the media and its audience is now interactive and participatory, contributing to the production and consumption of the content (Bossio, 2017).

According to Cordeiro (2012), the Internet has altered media content usage as such radio stations nowadays transmit through the Internet, providing a single content source to several listeners at the same time. Streaming has become a method of facilitating the download and playback of material by allowing users to listen to the files as they are being downloaded

As Boyd and Ellison (2007) suggest, many social media platforms maintain pre-existing social networks, while others help to connect strangers through various communication tools. Social media platforms also provide opportunities for broader commentary on current events, through the processes of linking, as well as possibilities for users to add their own perspective as informal and even humorous contributions to discussion of news events. This might occur in the form of links to other voices and reportage, or the creation of memes and humorous hashtags.

The increasing importance of social media to news consumers has influenced news production values, including: increasing prioritization of the interactivity of news content, participation of audiences in news, transparency in news production processes, and immediate, 24-hour dissemination of news on social media (Usher,

2017). Social media may be utilized for radio in a variety of ways, and new forms of radio programming can be created around the concept of incorporating social media into the broadcast (Karttunen, 2017). Social media allows for honest engagement, which is crucial in live radio. Hosts receive real-time feedback and suggestions on their shows and can respond to them live on air.

The positive implications of this audience engagement on social media are the apparent democratization and pluralization of the institution of journalism - the more people involved in the investigation, production and dissemination of news, the better opportunities for information to be disseminated to global audiences. This collaborative turn in the journalistic process has been articulated as 'participatory' journalism, describing the phenomenon of participation in and contribution to the gathering, selection, publication, dissemination and interpretation of news (Domingo, Quandt Heinonen, Paulussen, Singer, & Vujnovic, 2008).

Also, Benedict (2013) argues that social media has transformed traditional broadcasting norms. New technology and increasingly powerful mobile devices have allowed networks to break down the so-called "fourth wall" and connect audiences with programming like never. Broadcasters are using this technology to create a "second screen," extending programme content to screens alongside the primary television view.

Prospects and Challenges in the Use of Social Media for Broadcast Stations

Integrating social media in the operation of the mainstream media is confronted with several challenges (Bossio, 2017). Journalism practice has transitioned in response to the social and technological affordances enabled by the increasing use of social media. The traditional norms of objectivity, verification and professional autonomy to transition into new forms of journalistic practice that are increasingly collaborative and priorities authentic and transparent processes of presenting the news and other media content are now challenged.

Some of these innovations in everyday journalistic practice include the potential for collaboration with online sources, the immediate and global distribution of source materials, and the prioritization of an 'authentic' authorial voice. Journalists using these new practices have been influenced by social media cultures that prioritize sharing, authentic self-expression and the rejection of notions of universal truth. However, the transition of professional journalistic practice to social media environments has also challenged legacy news organizations and the overall constitution of journalism as a professional institution (Bossio, 2017).

Although many journalists have integrated social media into everyday practices, there remains skepticism about whether the quality and veracity of information found on social media platforms could ever equate to traditional reporting practices. Journalists often appear to rely on established norms of practice to produce news, simply transferring traditional journalism practices to new communication tools (Singer, 2015; Hermida, 2012). However, as Paulussen (2016) suggests, the accumulation of these changes over time shows that the evolution of journalism is quite dynamic, incorporating new individual practices, new organizational strategies and new understandings of journalism as an institution.

Albarran (2013), in a study that sought to find out how nine different traditional-based media organizations in the United States integrate social media in their activities, found that all of the media organizations are involved in a social media strategy with varying levels of development, with the exception of Cumulus (the only radio station among the sampled media) which is only minimally involved in a social media strategy. The statistics also show that media businesses understand the value of social media and are aggressively incorporating it into their digital platforms. Each firm was examined separately in order to provide a comprehensive picture of their activities.

Some content producers saw social media as an intimate space, with an imagined audience reinforcing social connections, while others saw the audience as 'themselves' and derided creating content for a particular audience as inauthentic self-commoditization (Mandiberg, 2012; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Instead, modes of authenticity were deemed important as representations of 'real' social interactions in the online space. Similarly, interactions were based on attracting followers of content, rather than 'fans'. This eschews the sense of elite social authority that traditional norms of journalism practice might otherwise promote (Abidin, 2016). While practices of authenticity and objectivity are not necessarily opposed as techniques for representing news, it is the implied social distance that traditional norms of objectivity seemingly promote that is challenged by social media representations of news. Thus, new practices that prioritize authenticity in reportage have shown the limits of objectivity as an ideal norm of journalistic practice.

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The ability to collaborate with online sources, the rapid and worldwide delivery of source materials, and the priority of a "genuine" authorial voice are only a few of the advances in everyday journalistic practice. Journalists who use these new techniques have been inspired by social media cultures that value sharing, honest self-expression, and the rejection of universal truth concepts. The transfer of professional journalistic activity to social media platforms, on the other hand, has posed a challenge to heritage news institutions and the broader structure of journalism as a profession (Bossio, 2017).

Nwanne (2016) conducted a study on "Journalism and new media in Nigeria: Issues, challenges and prospects" to investigate the problems associated with the use of new media in journalism and discovered that lack of finance, power supply, technical-know-how and training are the major challenges that hinder full incorporation of new media in the broadcast media stations.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the Mediamorphosis theory. Mediamorphosis refers to the "transformation of communication media, because of the complex interplay of social and technological innovations, perceived needs and competitive and political pressures" (Tankuakio, 2002, p.5).

According to Fidler (1997), there are five mediamorphosis principles which are key to its application in integrating new innovation (social media) to the old one. These principles are:

Coevolution and coexistence principle, which refers to the relationship between new and existing media formats; in both cases, the newer and older formats necessarily change interrelation to and exist side-by- side in time with the other. The second is the metamorphosis principle, which states that new media do not develop in a vacuum'; rather, they are often a product of the evolution of older media formats. The third is the propagation principle, which occurs when new communication formats perpetuate the dominant and valued traits of existing forms, with these traits frequently transmitted via 'communicatory codes called languages'. Survival principle, the fourth, refers to the reality that existing media formats must adapt, typically by identifying niche areas of fit, in order to continue their existence in the presence of newer, and possibly better, formats. Lastly,

opportunity and need principle, the fifth, explains that innovation by itself will not guarantee successful adoption. People must perceive that the new format is relevant to their lives within the existing social, political, and economic settings of the time.

The changing global media environment is signified by the coexistence and co-evolution of media forms, gradual metamorphosis of new media forms from old ones and the challenges brought about by the adoption of new or social media. The theory according to Biagi (2003) encourages examination of all forms of communication media as members of an interdependent system, and to note the similarities and relationships that exist among past, present and emerging forms. This implies that the digital media that are emerging will be similar to the old media, yet different in ways that will make them distinct from their predecessors.

History indicates that old and new media forms coexist, rather than the old ones dying. For example, AM Radio coevolved with television in the post-world war II era, and another co- evolution also surfaced when F.M. Radio came into the scene to take most of the music audiences and this, according to Fiddler (2005), is the bedrock of mediamorphosis. One of the principles of mediamorphosis is that the new media do not develop in a vacuum; rather, they are often a product of the evolution of older media formats. The theorist postulation that the new communication formats, social media in this instance, perpetuate the dominant and valued traits of existing forms, will be tested by this study. As such, the theory guides this study in understanding how the two radio stations adopt social media platforms for information gathering and dissemination.

This study focuses more on the 'survival' principle of the theory. It maintains that existing media formats must adapt, typically by identifying niche areas of fit, to continue their existence in the presence of newer, and possibly better, formats.

Methodology

This study employs the in-depth interview as its methodology. The in-depth interview enabled the collection of detailed data from respondents. The population of the study consisted of the management staff of two radio stations that were purposively sampled for this study. The radio stations are *Nagarta* Radio and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Kaduna. The two stations were purposively sampled in terms of representation based on ownership and bandwidth of operation. In terms of ownership, the FRCN is a government-owned radio station while *Nagarta* Radio is privately owned. Both stations operate on the

Ample Modulation (AM) Band. Both stations have three departments each as relevant for this study and the heads of the departments were targeted to be the media professionals because they are responsible for the station's social media presence, training and other related issues that the study seeks to obtain. As such, they are directly involved with news gathering and dissemination. These departments are the News and Current Affairs department, Programmes department and Engineering department (with special focus on the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Unit). Therefore, the heads of the three departments in each of the radio stations were purposively sampled. This is because they are the heads and in a better position to give in-depth information about the usage of social media by the two radio stations. The sample size for this study, therefore, is six.

Findings and Discussions

An in-depth interview was done with three heads of departments from each radio station, making a total of six interviews. The first three respondents are staff of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Kaduna. The first respondent is the Assistant Director of the ICT department; the second respondent is the Assistant Director of Programmes department, while the third respondent is the Director of the News and Current affairs Department of the station. The fourth, fifth and sixth respondents are from *Nagarta* Radio, Kaduna. The fourth respondent is the head of Information Communication Technology (ICT), the fifth is the head of the Programmes department, while the sixth is the head of News and Current Affairs department of *Nagarta* Radio.

The first objective of the study sought to ascertain the availability of social media technologies in the two radio stations and how media professionals use the social media technologies in information gathering and dissemination. Respondents from *Nagarta* and FRCN, Kaduna reveal that the two radio stations have social media accounts/platforms. Respondents four, five and six, who are from *Nagarta* radio disclose that the station has been using social media for information gathering and dissemination since 2016 while respondents one, two and three, who are from FRCN Kaduna explained the station has no social media accounts specifically for the Kaduna station but there is for the national station. It has therefore been using the national station's social media accounts.

However, the two radio stations, according to the six respondents, allow for use of personal social media accounts of their staff for information gathering and dissemination but it is not official. They explain that there is no written communication that either allows or stops a staff from using personal social media

accounts for information gathering and dissemination. According to the findings, the managements of the two radio stations refuse to officially accept the use of personal social media accounts because of the likely problems it may cause but still do not want to stop them because the social media accounts assist in content production and dissemination, audience participation and programmes promotion.

The six respondents therefore, reveal that the two radio stations have social media accounts/platforms and are using them for information gathering and dissemination. The findings in Albarran (2013) reveal how media stations studied, incorporate social media in their activities. The findings confirm that media companies recognize the importance of social media and are actively integrating social media across their digital platforms. The argument of Cordeiro, (2012) that radio stations nowadays broadcast over the Internet, distributing a single content source to simultaneous listeners is also validated by findings of this study.

On the usage of social media in information gathering and dissemination by media professionals in *Nagarta* Radio and FRCN, Kaduna respondents three, four, five and six of the reveals that the radio stations use social media in gathering and disseminating information. They disclose that *Nagarta* Radio uses Facebook and Twitter for live streaming while WhatsApp is used in gathering information from the traditional audience and use such information in the station's future productions. They explain how the staff use social media in sourcing for information for content production and dissemination. Respondents four and six specifically add that *Nagarta* Radio use twitter and Facebook for live streaming of the station's broadcast.

Also, Nagarta radio, according to the respondents, receives feedback about its operation and content disseminated from Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp audience. Specifically, respondent six states that "we are using social media for programme promo where we tell people about certain programme, when the programme is coming on air, who the guest is and what topic(s)/issue(s) are to be discussed".

On the other hand, respondents one, two and three maintain that FRCN, Kaduna which has no official social media account at the Kaduna station only uses the national station's platforms to post content and monitor audience responses to improve future production of news and programmes. They also reveal that individual staff of the station may use social media platforms to interact with their audiences about programmes' content, production and presentation. One of the

respondents' states that "a producer of a particular programme for instance, may form a WhatsApp or Facebook group for his/her programme through which programme idea, presentation style and the content of the programme can be discussed". This is in line with the assertion by Karttunen, (2017) who believe that Social media can be used in different ways by radio stations and that new types of radio content can be built around the idea of integrating social media as part of the show. Also, Benedict, (2013) posit that social media has transformed traditional broadcasting norms. New technology and increasingly powerful mobile devices have allowed networks to break down the so-called "fourth wall" and connect audiences with programming like never before. Broadcasters are using this technology to create a "second screen," extending programme content to screens alongside the traditional media.

Respondents three (from FRCN, Kaduna) and six (from *Nagarta* radio) coincidentally explain that the editors and reporters of their stations have personal twitter accounts and therefore follow government officials, lawmakers, analysts and news makers through whom they either source for information or clarify claims or stories attributed to them for confirmations. This, according to them, helps the radio stations in avoiding the dissemination of fake news.

Research objective two sought to find out the benefits of using social media by the two radio stations. Findings reveal that *Nagarta* Radio and FRCN Kaduna benefit from social media usage. One of these benefits according to respondents one, two, four and five, is listenership expansion. Respondent six opines that followers, friends or listeners of an online content are limitless. He adds "If you have social media accounts, so many people will be following you regardless of your coverage area. It is just like our streaming, they listen to us live, and we get feedbacks from all over the place where ordinarily, our transmitter cannot cover." According to Moller, (2013), the emergence of the social media has changed the ways in which audiences are reached out under various platforms. Instead of audiences being exposed to one channel or medium they are now exposed to multiple channels of media (social media platforms) at a time.

Respondents three and six also indicate that *Nagarta* Radio and FRCN Kaduna use social media to break news. Respondent six tags it "break it first" which means when a story occurs or an event takes place, break the story first on the social media (go to your Facebook or Twitter account, break the story that this is what has happened) then the details will come in later through the conventional media. He stresses that "If you don't use the social media, you will be left behind". Many people nowadays do not even tune to these conventional television

or radio channels but they always go to social media to source for information because of its availability and accessibility and they tend to believe anything they see on such platforms. Respondent six further adds that "you must have such platforms or accounts to be able to feed your audience with verified information through those platforms before you give them stories in details on the traditional media later". Asekun-Olarinmoye, Sanusi, Johnson and Oloyede, (2014) found out that technology has increased availability of new ways of reaching audiences along with the increasingly mobile nature of media reception and use, making it clear that it is no longer sufficient to contain the subject by distinct format or technologies of distribution. The scope and dimension of broadcasting has been improved by modem technology, particularly social media. This study and its findings are therefore similar to what has been gathered from *Nagarta* Radio and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Kaduna.

Respondent six further adds that social media usage also helps the radio stations in maximizing revenue generation, adding that "through social media we get clients who are ready for business. If you don't interact with your audience you cannot have audience traffic, and on social media what we sell is audience not airtime".

Research objective three sought to find out the challenges of integrating social media for information gathering and dissemination. The data gathered revealed that using social media by *Nagarta* radio and FRCN is associated with a number of challenges. Fake information is the central problem as pointed by all the respondents. Specifically, respondents three and six state that you can easily get yourself into trouble if you are not careful about using social media information. Respondent three further narrates that there was an instance that a staff member took information from the social media and used it in one of the station's magazine programme and the station ended up in court for using that information without proper verification and certification. The respondents therefore emphasized that using unverified information has legal implications while using such over and over could undermine the integrity of the media organization. The prospects of using social media in information gathering and dissemination however does not eliminate challenges just as Bossio (2017) argues that integrating social media in the operation of the main stream media is confronted with several challenges. The traditional norms of objectivity, verification and professional autonomy in the traditional practice are now challenged. The transition of professional journalistic practice to social media environments has

also challenged legacy news organizations and the overall constitution of journalism as a professional institution (Bossio, 2017).

Another challenge, according to respondents three and six, is the social media audience' writing skills. Many radio listeners cannot read and write which makes interaction with them on social media very difficult. Respondent six said that "most of our listeners are Hausa speaking people and you see somebody sending information that you can't even read and comprehend for assessment as feedback". Also, he observed that the responses they get from certain people, sometimes, are not palatable; they get to receive even personal insults from some social media accounts. Some feedbacks are not radio worthy and cannot be sent to listeners while at the same time discarding such information may likely cause problem for the station. He further reveals that "sometime, the way a listener or an audience responds to certain issues will be determined by his perspective or exposure on certain things. Sometimes just like I said, somebody may just come to your platform or your account or page and post certain things or sometimes, somebody's account may be used or hacked and through that, they will penetrate your platforms especially for Facebook where accounts can be hacked. Certain things can be posted which will appear as if it is from the radio station and may not be true"

Respondents three, five and six submit that a listener or audiences may also post certain things on the radio station's platforms which may be palatable or not but the station has to be careful in handling such. In many instances, the comments by some followers or friends may be irrelevant. They opine that "you can write something on economy for instance but somebody (a hacker) will advertise a certain product through someone's account. It's a challenge because instead of getting relevant feedback or information as regards what you posted, you may be seeing something different entirely."

The respondents further revealed that other challenges associated with using social media in *Nagarta* Radio and FRCN are technical problems, problems of network connectivity, data subscription, and staff strength. *Nagarta* Radio which is a privately-owned radio station, according to respondent four, is always struggling to pay salary and running cost which sometimes consume all the revenue and, therefore, leaves no money for data subscription and that adversely affects its social media presence, especially streaming. In line with these findings, the study of Nwanne (2016) discovered that lack of finance, power supply, technical-know-how and training are the major challenges that hinder full incorporation of new media in the broadcast media stations.

However, the respondents state that they have strategies of handling some of the challenges of using social media. Respondent three discloses that "recently, we've told our staff especially in the news department that when you see a story on social medial, cross-check with the conventional media. What I mean, by conventional media, is that any story you see on the social media handles of media houses that you know, be it television or radio, check their online platforms if you see the same story, then it is true, but if you don't see it, that means, the story is fake. There is no way you would see a story on social media which is true and isn't already carried by reputable media organizations in Nigeria; that's the mechanism we use especially in the news department."

With regard to irrelevant social media comments, the radio stations, according to respondents two, three, five and six, are careful about how to deal with such. Everything is about trying to get a loyal audience. Respondent six states that "if one's audience is scattered, when you post something about Katsina, the person from Kano may not be happy that you are not giving the coverage it deserves, but one should be able to use public relations language to appeal to his audience' conscience and mind to explain why the station did what he/she feels offended. Politely educate them on what you have done because it isn't good to lose an audience or to allow an audience to go because they felt something had not been done right. So, in this case, P.R. language should be used to appeal to their feelings, emotions and understanding".

Generally, the findings of this study also reaffirm some of the principles of Mediamorphosis which is also one of the theories for this study. One of these principles is that the new media do not develop in a vacuum; rather, they are often a product of the evolution of older media formats. The theorist's postulation that the new communication formats (social media), perpetuate the dominant and valued traits of existing forms (in this case, radio stations) has been confirmed by the findings of this study. This study however focused more on the 'survival' principle of the theory which maintains that existing media formats must adapt, typically by identifying areas of fit, in order to continue their existence in the presence of newer, and possibly better, formats. The findings revealed that *Nagarta* Radio and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Kaduna adopt social media platforms in the process of gathering and disseminating information for better content and wider coverage.

Conclusion

This study investigates the integration of social media in gathering and disseminating information by *Nagarta* Radio and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria. Findings have established that the two radio stations have social media accounts and that they use them for information gathering and dissemination despite the challenges associated with the usage. Specifically, the staff of these radio stations reveal how they use WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter in generating information from the audience and how they manage such in their daily operations. Although the two radio stations indicate that social media helps in news and programmes direction, engaging audience through participation and providing current information, it also pushes fake information, which poses a significant threat to media credibility. They, however, reveal that investigating source credibility, online facts check, and multiple sources verification are some of the mechanisms employed in managing media content. It is, therefore, recommended that the management of the two radio stations should encourage their staff on the frequent use of social media technologies for information gathering and dissemination to maximize wider audience reach as well as employ the available procedures of verifying content generated online before disseminating it to uphold the credibility of their stations.

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