

Social Media and Journalism Ethics in Nigeria: A Study of Journalists in Kwara State of Nigeria



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ABSTRACT: Journalism is a term that has been used to describe the act of gathering and reporting news, either through the print media which includes newspaper, magazine or through the broadcast media to mention television, radio broadcasting system and recently journalism has been extended throughout the world through unrestricted use of social media, whereby the act of gathering and disseminating of news is done without restraint. Conversely, one important thing to note about journalism is the ethics that enhance the profession, its notes worthy to know that any information that is disseminated via any media should be ethically standard. The new media has on a large scale given the opportunity to a whole large number of people to practice journalism without them knowing the ethics that guide the profession, which is affecting the dynamics of the profession. Therefore this study is based on assessing the impact of a new communication system on journalism; whether social media promote the ethics of journalism profession and to know if social media journalists are in compliance with the journalism code of ethics in their dissemination of news and information. In this research, the survey method was adopted and the north-central geo-political zone, Kwara state to be précised was selected for the study.

KEYWORDS: new communication technologies, journalism, ethics, new media, social media, online journalism.

INTRODUCTION

The development of technology has given communication and journalism a new phrase and mode, the incoming of new media (internet) has enhanced the mode of communication, it has made it more interactive, entertaining and enlighten and it has eliminated the extent as which distance was a barrier to communication, it has created a bond between, audience and journalists, people now communicate easily without minding the distance. Also, new media (internet) has also helped journalists in a tremendous way. Gone are the days' journalists run to the newsroom to prepare their reports in other to beat time, with the aid of internet news report can be filed without the presence of reporters, new technologies such as mobile phones, laptop computers, etc, enables the journalists to file their report from any location. Steensen (2011), in his view, he posited that the internet and social media has enhanced the provision of news from different resources in the fastest mean.

The multimedia, interactive, and hyperlink benefit the internet possesses, has in a way enhance the journalism profession in terms of disseminating their reports as such giving the new media an edge over the conventional media. Deuze (2003) mentioned that journalist has the option of choosing the new media format that is best to communicate, putting into consideration the need for the user to respond and interact and the need to archive their report(s) through the use of a hyperlink. Of a truth, comparing this to the rate at which news was being broadcast hourly with the conventional media, to this present age that information is gotten easily just with and access to the internet is actually a plus, considering this the internet (new media) has affected journalism positively.

However, the rise of social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter is reshaping journalism by allowing anybody and everybody to be able to report and disseminate news. "New media technologies like Facebook, WhatsApp, and a whole of internet-based media outlets are allowing disintermediation of news and denting gatekeeping in journalism. (Hermidiam, 2010). In addition, the need for new media journalist to get report and news update done in quickest possible time, sometimes give room to error and scraped information to be disseminated, thereby causing journalists incompetency, as the news will be given to the public without editorial scrutinizing. Thus, this reshaped journalism practice is giving a great concern on the ethics of journalism, concerning the accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and the gatekeeper function.

Furthermore, with the new media, the conventional communication paradigm of top to down is not applicable to the audience, sensitive news information is directly provided on social media without considering the societal implication thereby neglecting the journalistic function. In other words, new media journalism has aloof the reconciling role of journalists among the audience and society (Gunter, 2003).

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Similarly, Bowman & Willis, (2003), mentioned that, the new media journalism shift is also affecting print media, online readers now participate in terms of providing feedback concerning the news being read in an open online space, through blogs chat, messaging. However, the change in information and communication flow is causing a shift in journalistic role and practice; the conventional media previously carry out a public opinion poll to get, undiluted feedback and sometimes conceal the source identity which is not done in the new age media.

Therefore, despite the fact that the core of journalism unwaveringly remains unchanged, it's still obvious the new media has reformed and restructure the morals and ethical issues confronting journalists.

Statement of the problem

The impact of new communication technologies on communication, especially journalism in particular cannot be overemphasized. Since the inception of the new media, there has been a great shift in journalism practices; how stories are gathered and disseminated. New media has in no doubt added a lot of advantages to the media world; however, the new media has affected the ethics of journalists as the gatekeeping function has been sidelined. Also the new media has in some ways rendered conventional media ways of disseminating news and information redundant, as the majority of information consumers now prefer to surf the internet (new media) for news and information update than using the conventional media outlets. Therefore this study is set out to answer, how social media has affected the ethical values of journalism and also to what extent is social media journalists adhering to ethical values.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Has the New media in any way helped improve the quality of media content?
- How reliable is the news from social media?
- Are operators of social media outlet trained journalists or journalism inclined?
- Which platform between the two-sphere of journalism is ethical?
- What makes Social media different from conventional media?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is as follows:

- To access the impact of Social media on conventional media and to know the extent at which is affecting the journalism profession.
- To determine the level of trust Social media audience accord news from social media
- To know the level at which media audiences consume news emanating from social media over that of conventional media.

Review of Literature

Journalism as it is known involves the function of surveillance revealing the good and bad in the society; journalism is the adventure through which information is being disseminated to the audience, thereby making everyone that engages in such activities a journalist. Media practitioners can present disjointed, hollow events, occurrences of chances into newsworthy events. (KENT, 2007). In the same light, Weinberg (2008) see journalists as those who gather information analyze and process it, before delivering to the public, he further explained that this field of journalism includes, photo, journalism, documentary, and all these acts put together makes journalism genuine and thrilling. Kent (2007) support further, by opining that journalism gives public opinion currency and disseminating authentic information about issues.

However journalism is experiencing a radical revolution with the advent of online journalism (new media) that has opportune everyone to be a journalist, because of the availability of internet, Rodman (2009 p.37) submitted that everyone is a journalist, journalism is not a foreign or strange kind of profession, anyone seeking new development can write and share with others.

What is social media?

Social media has been defined to be a website that gives the audience (people) the opportunity to share profiles and create visible relationships among fellow users (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). In addition, Kapoor et al (2017) see social media as a group of information technologies that enhances interactions and connections. Kietzmann et al, (2011) said, social media is a web-based application that presents people the opportunity of sharing information, the creation of relationships, and friendships. A further definition explains social media as an "internet based-application built on web2.0, while he explains web2.0 as a platform for connecting combined intellect (Huang & Benyoucef 2013).

In understanding social media, some major distinctiveness is to be considered, firstly social media encourages participation. Social media are never inactive, even though some social media network such as Facebook sometimes allows passive screening of what others are posting, despite this at least there will be information that will give an avenue for interaction. This function in itself differentiates social media from traditional media where personal profiles are not provided. Secondly in view of its participatory style, social media enhance interaction, of which this interaction could be with existing friends and family, or newly made friends or acquaintances that have a common interest.

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The Present Day Media in Nigeria

In present-day people get information, educational, entertainment news from the electronic media and print media. In various ways, the mass media in Nigeria over the years has been able to claim authority as a storyteller. Its dissemination of information, the detailed narration of documentary, and the likes has made them the major source of public memory. However, as social media become more accepted by the older and young generation, it is gradually undermining the voices of conventional media. This has, however, caused a shift towards reading on smartphones, and other forms of electronic devices other than the conventional media (Felix, 2011)

Based on the fact that social media platforms are universally accessible and it is more interactive, it is gradually becoming a source of information and interaction among Nigerians and other people of the world.

Consequently, social media has changed the face of journalism; journalists have started to have a new means of gathering and disseminating news information to the public. The journalist in Nigeria aren't left out of the global village, they now have access to the internet especially on their respective place of work, which has enabled them to be able to access new opportunities that the social media offers, such as accessing news stories, not only from local media but also across the globe. The social media has made the world smaller for journalists to explore (Christiana, 2014).

The advent of new media seems to make everyone who has access to them a journalist. One can be in the comfort of their home, on transit, and have access to news information, entertainment happens around the world, and even have interaction with friends and colleagues by just a click. Probably, the reason why social media became one of the most dominant sources of news updates in the year 2012. Social media news is steadily growing among the audience. By just a click the whole is a wear of a news update instantaneously (Christiana, 2014)

Ethical Problem on Social Media

There is a saying that, where there is no law offense is inevitable, numerous unethical problems on the social media has been a concern to the journalism profession, and without concrete effort to curb it journalism profession might soon be in great jeopardy, as the advent of the internet has avail everyone the opportunity to be a journalist (Ezeibe, C. C. & Nwagwu, E. J., 2009). It is obvious that unethical actions of new media journalists can or will soon cause great damage to the journalism profession thereby affect the integrity of the media in general. Unethical practice in new media is copious, howbeit few of such are examine.

Privacy

Privacy is said according to Louis W. Hodges (cited in foreman 2010:231) to be right to decide who can have access to information about oneself. Privacy is core to human society every human deserve the right to be free in their own "zone" without the fear of being questioned about their actions, however, when individual privacy is being intruded and being made news it's become unlawful, without private life civilize life is not visible. Louis w. Hodges (Foreman, 2010)

Accuracy

In recent times the degree of accuracy the news/reports published online has been questioned, which a lot of people as reasoned to be fictitious. The majority of the online platforms are rumor factories that don't check for facts before they disseminate to the audience. Majority of the online news outlets are not trained media professionals, compared to the conventional media, some of them found themselves in journalism just because of the availability of internet, they, therefore, are not in the awareness of ethics of the profession, they are always in the hurry to break news in other to enhance their popularity but do not give room to the editorial procedure that aimed at accuracy

Obscenity

Any statement or actions that do not speak morals is counted as obscenity. Before now conventional media know of a rule that publishing of nudity, pornography and sexual violence which are examples of obscenity is prohibited in journalism practice, according to Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), it is stated that journalist should be in the knowing the impacts images and words have on their audience and therefore not hurt with the words and images the published, however today the publishing of unethical images and words has been the order of the day on social media, which is contrary ethical requirements and expectations.

Attribution

In journalism it is required of a journalist to attribute the sources of their information, hence, this promotes credibility, and men of the press are expected by all costs to avoid plagiarism, as this detrimental to the profession. Attribution has been said to be the practice of journalists to mention those that feed them with the information they broadcast. (Gans, 1979), online journalists are present in the practice of coining information and not accrediting the source in their report.

REPORT ON MINOR

New media journalist having been indulging in a worrisome act of reporting children/minor, without concealing their identity, it is unethical to mention names or even display the picture and interview children under 16years, according to UNICEF, a child image or story that might put a child's siblings or peer at risks even when the identities are changed, obscured or not used. However the

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new media has been found guilty of this, a good example was a rape case of a 13years old minor in Benue state in Nigeria that went viral on social media in October 2018.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The most relevant theories for this research work are Social responsibility and gatekeeping theory because the study is centered on how journalists should execute their professional responsibility to humanity.

Social responsibility Theory

This theory is relevant to the study because it is regarded as part of the western theory that included part of libertarian principles. The fundamental principle of the social responsibility theory of the press is that the press should be free to execute their job as professionals; however, in executing their duties it should be done with a sense of responsibility, of being ready to be truthful, credible, accurate and ensure fairness in discharging their duties (Mcquail 1993:117). However, if the media fail to display their responsibility to the public, the social responsibility theory states that authority should encourage the media to conform by way of controlling them with laid down rules. Journalists are expected to be answerable to the people they serve, knowing they are the priority in line with the business. Adeyemi (2013:125-126) states that media practitioners are expected to be credible, objective, truthful, and accurate.

METHODOLOGY

The survey method was adopted for this research. Out of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria the north-central was selected consisting of seven (7) states. Kwara state was selected is one of the states in the zone, accommodating more journalists. Therefore for the purpose of this study, five (5) media houses were purposely selected, in which 10 journalists were chosen from each media house to make a sample size of 50 respondents. In collecting the data, a well-structured research instrument (questionnaire) containing 20 items on the subject of discussion was used.

Data collected will be analyzed and coded. The data will be analyzed by doing simple frequency calculations and presented in a tabular format for easy understanding, and it will be further analyzed with the aid of a simple percentage.

The respondents were purposely selected from different conventional media outlet in Kwara state, the major reason for using purposive sampling, was due to the fact that the researcher wants to know the view of experience journalists on the matter of discussion. The researcher used the questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. SPSS version 20 that has devices such as frequency counts and simple percentages was used; while data were presented in tabular form for better understanding.

Presentations of Data and Results

50 questionnaires were distributed online, and the whole 50 were correctly filled and retrieved given a response rate of 100% and 0% mortality rate.

Respondents Bio Data

From the data gathered and analyzed 17 (34%) out of the 50 respondents are female while male respondents are 33 (66%). 2 respondents (4%) out the respondents are within the age bracket of 18-23, 3(6%) out of the 50 respondents are within 24-27 of age, 22 (44%) are within the age bracket of 28-35 years of age whereas, 23(46%) are within 36-40 years of age. This implies that the majorities of the conventional media journalists in Kwara states are male, and are within the age's bracket of 28 to 35 years. 37(74%) out of the 50 respondents are married, 12 (24%) are single whereas 2(4%) are divorced.

Table 1. Awareness and usage of social media

	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total
Have you heard of social media?	50 (100%)	0(0%)	50(100%)
Do you use social media?	50 (100%)	0(0%)	50(100%)
As a journalist do you use social media in disseminating Information?	46 (92%)	4(8%)	50 (100%)

The study revealed that all journalists interviewed have heard about social media and they make use of social media. However, only 46 (92%) of them use social media in disseminating information, the remaining 4(8%) don't use social media to disseminate or broadcast information.

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Table 2. Social Media Networking Site Respondents Have an Account With and operate

	Frequency	percentages
WhatsApp	7(14%)	50(100%)
Facebook	6(12%)	50(100%)
Instagram	0 (0%)	0(100%)
All of the above	37 (74%)	50(100%)

Table 2 above examined the social media networking site the respondents operate and have account with, 37(74%) out of 50 respondents use all the sites, 7(14%) have account with WhatsApp, 6(12%) have account with Facebook. This means that the journalists are a heavy user of the social media networking site

Table 3

Research question 1

Has the new media helped improved media contents?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19(38%)	50(100%)
No	7(14%)	50(100%)
Maybe	24(48%)	50(100%)

Table 3 examined respondents' opinions on the effect new media has on media contents. 19(38%) out of the 50 respondents are of the view that the new media has improved the media contents. 7(14%) of the respondents didn't see any positive improvements, while 24 (48%) out of the respondents think there are possibilities that new media improves media contents. These findings mean that majority of the journalist in Kwara state believes the new media has added value to media contents, as it enables them to report from anywhere and enhances fast dissemination of information.

Table 4

Research question 2: How reliable is the news from social media.

To answer research question 2 question number 8 and 9 from the questionnaire were presented in tabular format and was analyzed using SPSS with a descriptive device such as frequency counts and simple percentages as follows

Item	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total
1. Do you trust information from social media	29(58%)	21(42%)	50(100%)
2. Do you think information from social media is reliable?	27 (54 %)	23(46%)	50(100%)

Table 4 shows the information on the trust and reliability of the information on social media. Item 1 on the table shows that journalist in Kwara state trust information from the social media 29(58%) out of 50 respondents believes information from social media is trustworthy, 21(42%) on the contrary feels it is not trustworthy, 27 (54%) thinks it is reliable and 23(46%) thinks otherwise. This further interprets table1, item1 above that state high percentage of the journalist uses social media to disseminate information, reason while the majorities trust the information on social media. In recent days most conventional media outlets are creating social platforms on social media for global reach.

Table 5

Research question 3: Are operators of social media outlet trained journalists or journalism inclined? To answer this research question, question 11 on the questionnaire was analyzed.

Are social media operator Trained?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	5(10%)	50(100%)
No	20(40%)	50(100%)
Maybe	25(50%)	50(100%)

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Table 5 above revealed that 25(50%) of the operators of social media may be journalists or are journalism inclined, 20 (40%), feels the operator of social media are not journalist, while 5(10%) also feels the social media operators are journalists. This data representation implies that there is the possibility of having more journalists operating social media in these present days, because a lot of conventional media have platform on social media networking sites, that are been operated by their staff (journalists). However, due to the fact that social media is a large community and there are lots of citizen journalists in operation, there are still chances that there are untrained journalists on social media as the data stated.

Table 6

Research question 4: Which platform between the two-spheres of journalism is ethical? In answering research question 4, question 12 and 14 on the questionnaire was analyzed.

Do you think social media contents have ethical values

	Frequency	percentage
Yes	2(4%)	50(100%)
No	32(64%)	50(100%)
Maybe	16(32%)	50(100%)

Table 6 seeks to know if the news information from social media is in any way ethical. 32 (64%) out of 50 respondents agreed that news/information emanating from social media is not ethical while 16(32%) are on either side of the coin, and 2(4%) feels they are ethical. However, since some of the journalists operating on social media platform aren't trained, it is not surprising that the news disseminated by them is not in line with journalism codes of ethics

In addition, research question 4 is further explained in table 7 below. 38(76%) out of the 50 respondents answered in affirmative that conventional media is more accurate in information presentation and news converge. 1(2%) thinks social media is accurate and 11(22%) believe they are both accurate. This means that in terms of accuracy and ethics of journalism, social media content is still far from being ethical. There are lots of in-house practices done by conventional media that make them stand out in terms of being ethical, among which is gatekeeping.

Table 7. Which platform provides more accurate information?

	Frequency	Percentage
TV and radio	38(76%)	50(100%)
Social media	1(2%)	50(100%)
All of the above	11(22%)	50(100%)

Table 8

Research question 5: What makes Social media different from conventional media? The study has revealed some differences between social media and conventional media which are explained in table 8 with question 15 on the questionnaire.

Which is timely in news and information dissemination?

	Frequency	Percentage
TV and Radio	6 (12%)	50(100%)
Social Media	30(60%)	50(100%)
All of the above	14(28%)	50(100%)

: Table 8 shows that 30 (60%) 50 out of the respondents submitted that social media is timely in news and information dissemination. 6(12%) are of the opinion that TV and radio are timely, while 14(28%) feel both are timely. This clearly states that social media is timely and fast because social media information and news reports lack editorial screening.

Also, research question 5 is further explained in table 9 below. 30(60%) out of 50 respondents agreed that social media encourages fake news, 18(36%) strongly agree social media encourages fake, and 2(4%) disagree that social media encourages fake news. This means that fake news is highly disseminated on social media. However this is not possible in conventional media because there are a lot of codes of journalism put in check before information are given to the audience, also conventional media outlets are answerable

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to authorities like National Broadcasting Cooperation (NBC), Nigeria Union of Journalist (NUJ), and Nigeria Press Council (NPC) that might sanction them for any malicious or fake reports. In addition, conventional media will always want to do their due diligence of verifying information before dissemination in other to protect their images

Table 9. Do you think social media encourages fake news?

	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	30(60%)	50(100%)
Strongly agree	18(36%)	50(100%)
Disagree	2(4%)	50(100%)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Elucidating the demography of the respondents the study revealed that the majority of the journalists in Kwara states are male and they are within the ages of 28-35 years. The study also revealed that journalists in Kwara state have heard about social media and they make use of social media in disseminating information to their audience. Explicating the different types of social media networks the journalists in Kwara state have an account with, the study revealed that they made use of the social media platform, from WhatsApp to Facebook, and Instagram.

The study has further revealed that journalists in Kwara state have welcomed social media networking sites as part of journalistic tools. Social media have significantly changed the practices of journalism, as it provides journalists with the opportunity to report and disseminate news information from any location with ease. This study in accordance with Ruth (2010), states that, social media has helped journalists to disseminate instant news, and also allows the audience to give feedback to news and information received. Findings also revealed that a lot of conventional media houses and journalists are now creating social platforms on social media for global reach. In view of this information on conventional media social media platforms, are in line with the codes of ethics of journalism. However, there are numerous users of social media platforms, that also post or disseminate information on social media and aren't trained in journalism practices, by implication it means that they are disseminating information that is not ethical, therefore the ethicality of information on social media still needs to be questioned especially when it is not from a conventional media social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

In this present age, there has been a rapid increase in the usage of a new category of information technology which is widely known as social media. This media with the aids of the internet encourages and promotes interpersonal and interactive modes of communication. Dwyer (2010) in about a century and a half ago, communication between people basically involved physical presence. The reporter had to run to the newsroom after gathering news to beat time. However, with the advent of the internet a lot changed in journalism, filing news reports, gathering information can be done in any location without actually being physically present. This by extension has enabled everyone whether journalism inclined or not, to be able to disseminate information on social media. But Journalism is a decent profession, and those in its practice are expected to be loyal, trustworthy, and to have some sense of decorum. This is for obvious reasons. Fortunes are built and lost through information. Empires are won and torn apart through information. It is an understatement to posit that information handling, dissemination, storage, and management should not be left to persons who have not assumed the commitment to upholding a certain level of decorum, diligence, discipline, and responsibility. Responsibility does not exist without obligations and repercussions. It is a trite fact of law, that when there exists a right or privilege, there must be a corresponding duty.

It is my submission that anyone- skilled or unskilled, who wishes to disseminate information for third party consumption must assume certain responsibilities, principal among which is to observe basic established ethics of journalism.

RECOMMENDATION

This study recommends that social media should remain liberal, but the participants must assume basic responsibilities. There is a need for national governments to regulate social media platforms in the form of granting basic uniform responsibilities on participants who wish to contribute and disseminate information. These regulations must be made with great restraint and should only achieve minimum imposition of ethics, enough to identify contributors and publishers (persons who disseminate to third parties). This will not significantly put an end to the social media chaos in the world today. However, it will bring the social media space close to the level of responsibility seen in the conventional media space, as obligations and repercussions will become felt in the new media which has become familiarized with operating with anonymity.

LIMITATIONS

During the study there were some limitations encountered, administering the questionnaire via online, also the study covered one out of the six (6) geo political zones in the country Nigeria, however the study covered a part of the country, that has a high number of media houses and journalist operating in that zone. However, the view expressed in the research might not be simply generalized in other part of the country.

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