



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development



IJMRD 2015; 2(2): 393-397
www.allsubjectjournal.com
Impact factor: 3.672
Received: 04-02-2015
Accepted: 18-02-2015
E-ISSN: 2349-4182
P-ISSN: 2349-5979

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Effects of the Emerging Trends in Journalism Practice and Education on Democracy: Nigeria as a Case Study

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Abstract

Journalism is a very dynamic profession. The mode of operation keeps changing every day. With developments in science and Technology, Journalism has changed from what it used to be. News gathering, reporting and distribution now take different forms. While this is a welcome development, the emerging trends equally pose some challenges to the profession. Based on the findings of a research that investigated the impact of the emerging trends in Journalism practice and education and its effect on democracy, this paper discusses the trends in Journalism education and practice and the effect of emerging trends on democracy with Nigeria as a case study. The research is a phenomenological qualitative study which uses in-depth and focus group interviews with selected practicing journalists, journalism lecturers and journalism students/ graduates, politicians and non-politicians. It examines the trends in journalism practice and education and the effect on democracy in Nigeria. Based on the findings of the research, this paper concluded that journalism profession has been transformed by modern technology from what it used to be to a more sophisticated level-both the practice and education. This development has both positive and negative impacts on Nigeria's democracy.

Keywords: Journalism, Technology, Emerging Trends, Journalism Practice, Journalism Education, Democracy, Journalism Practice, Journalism Lecturer, Journalism Students.

Introduction

"We are at the beginning of a Golden Age of journalism — but it is not journalism as we have known it. Media futurists have predicted that by 2021, citizens will produce 50 percent of the news peer-to-peer"[Italics added] (Willis & Bowman, 2003).

Journalism is experiencing the impacts of technological advances around the world today. Newsgathering, reporting, and distribution are being transformed by new technologies. With the innovations introduced to the business of journalism by technology, journalism practice and education have been impacted as well as the democratic process. Willis & Bowman, (2003) recognized this development in journalism business when it declared that, "We are at the beginning of a Golden Age of journalism", (p. 65) and that, journalism has changed from what it used to be. With this development, media futurists are of the view that 50 percent of the news will be produced peer-to-peer (citizen-to-citizen if you like) come 2021 (Willis & Bowman, 2003). With modern technology, there is no doubt that Journalism has changed from what it used to be. Contemporary studies on the impacts of technology on journalism identify a serious threat to the traditional roles of journalists from citizens without formal training in journalism who contribute news items to the mainstream media (Moretzsohn, 2006). With citizen-reporting, any person could hypothetically be a journalist. This is in line with Papandrea's (2007) observation that the Internet has expanded the universe of those who can contribute information to public debate. Papandrea's (2007) added that, "the line between traditional media and citizen journalists continue to blur as both take advantage of all the possibilities the Internet has to offer. Americans increasingly obtain their information and insights into important issues through the Internet and through bloggers in particular. To continue to limit the reporter's privilege to traditional media outlets and professional journalists would unrealistically ignore how the public obtains its information today" (p.590-591). Due to the innovations introduced to the practice of journalism by technology, news reporting and distribution continue to evolve from time to time as new technology and innovations emerge. It therefore becomes imperative for journalism education to keep up with the emerging trends in journalism practice. This has led to a lot of changes and innovations in the curriculum of journalism schools to accommodate the emerging trends in

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the profession. Today, many of the journalism schools now teach among other courses, Online Journalism, Multimedia Journalism, Computer Assisted Reporting, New Media, Social Media, and Citizen Journalism. Because of the synergy between journalism practice and education, the journalism profession continues to play a major role in the society as watch dog and the effect of the emerging trends on democracy cannot be underestimated. In Nigeria, the focus of this paper, journalism continues to play a major role in the democratic process. With the emerging trends in journalism practice and education, political observers opined that the Nigerian democratic space is evolving in line with the journalism profession. The journalism impact of the emerging trends on democracy in Nigeria is what this paper discusses based on the finding of the research being reported. "Historically, journalists have been charged with informing the democracy. But their future will depend not on only how well they inform but how well they encourage and enable conversations with citizens" (Willis & Bowman, 2003). The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of the emerging trends in Journalism Practice and Education on Democracy in Nigeria?
2. How have the new trends in journalism practice and education changed the phase of democracy in Nigeria?
3. Has the Nigerian democracy become more robust than before the trends in journalism practice and education?
4. How have the emerging trends made the Nigerian Journalist more efficient in the discharge of their traditional role of building a virile democracy in Nigeria?
5. What is the future of democracy in Nigeria in view of the emerging trends in Journalism practice and education in Nigeria?

Emerging Trends in Journalism Practice and Education

As stated earlier, journalism practice continues to change from time to time and the training of the journalist continues to change from time to time as well. With computer technology, the newsroom has been revolutionized. Journalism is no longer what it used to be. Reporters now report the news with the aid of the computer (Computer Assisted Reporting). With the invention of the internet and media modalities as such as Facebook, twitter etc, news reporting has become democratized such that every citizen with access to media technologies such as internet-ready camera now report the news (Citizen-Journalism). Apart from democratizing news reporting, internet and the social media have expanded the news sources available to journalists and the universe of those who can contribute information to public debate. With the emerging trends in the practice of journalism, journalism education continues to change to reflect the emerging trends in the profession. While those on the job learn the emerging trends either on the job or go back to school, Journalism schools had to make changes to their curriculum to reflect the emerging trends in the field. Courses such as Online Journalism, Multimedia Journalism, Computer Assisted Reporting, New Media, Social Media, and Citizen Journalism are being taught in journalism schools today to reflect the emerging trends in the field.

According to Barnathan J. (2013, August 9) there are five key trends reshaping journalism education in the US. Some

may be unique to Nigeria, but most are not. The list of the trends include: Technological transformation, rise of data journalism, new business model, Journalistic value, online education.

Literature Review

The literature points to how the past decade heralded innovations and advancements in information technologies- the birth of electronic messaging systems, executive systems, collaborative systems, and group decision support systems. (DeSanctis, & Pool 1994). The literature summarizes how innovations and advancements produces a wealth of literature in Information System (IS) and consequently increased the use of IS theories to examine the potential and impact of these innovations and advancements. Undoubtedly, the pace and direction of information and communication technology (ICT) innovation and concomitant organizational change which comprise the object of study of the information systems (IS) field, are set by the advanced countries of the world- North America and Europe. Nevertheless, the international IS literature includes an increasing number of studies in IS innovation experiences in other regions of the world, mainly the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. (Avgerou, 2008, p. 133).

The literature pointed out that panelist at the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) in 1997 were confronted with the question of "why should IS academics and professionals devote attention to developing countries?" Their consensus was that, developing countries are a huge and yet untapped market Avgerou (2008). Walsham (2001) pointed out the "ethical significance of researching the way ICT improves the life and conditions of people in non-affluent regions of the contemporary world" (p. 25) is yet another reason for conducting research in developing countries. The above highlights the different reasons why researchers from western countries conduct research in developing countries of the world. Therefore, "with the increasing number of IS researchers from developing countries", coupled with the "increasing number of IS professionals working on global IS infrastructures" (Walshams, 2001, p. 25), this study qualifies as one concerned with the way the emerging trends in journalism practice and education impact democracy in developing countries like Nigeria.

By and large, the body of literature on the impact of information technology examines the changes necessitated by information technology (DeSanctis & Pool 1994). Using the Structuration Theory, DeSanctis and Pool (1994) examine the structures provided by advanced information technologies and the actual structures that emerge as a result of human interactions with this technology and recommended adaptive structuration theory (AST) as a viable approach for the study of the role of advanced technologies in organizational change. Avgerou, (2008) discusses how developing countries have attempted to benefit from information and communication technologies. There are three major discussions in IS implementation and associated organization and social change in developing countries. The three discussions are categorized under the following processes:

1. A process of technology, knowledge transfer, and adaptation to local social conditions
2. A process of socially embedded actions

3. A process of transformative techno-organizational intervention associated with global politics and economics (Avgerou, 2008, p. 133)

Mark, Al-Ani, and Semaan, (2009) laments the little attention given to IS research in developing countries and observed that:

“We are living in a global era yet too few studies address how non-western cultures adopt technology. One of the lessons learned from this study is that western cultural practices, as introduced with technology adoption, may not translate well into non-western cultures (P. 698).

In an ethnographic report of how technology was adopted and used by citizens to be resilient during wartime, Mark, Al-Ani, and Semaan (2009) interviewed 45 Iraqi citizens experiencing the war in Iraq using semi-structured interview. From data collected, the researchers “identified properties of resilience as reconfiguring social networks, self-organization, redundancy, proactive practices, and repairing trust in information” (p. 689).

The study concluded noting that, technology expands the options and the reach of citizens in war ravaged areas and enables them to have a wider choice of actions. The study added that, technology supports people in being resilient by enabling them to control identity, collaborate in travel, create an organizational memory, and provide alternative sources of news and information. The authors observed that, “As people adopted and used technology to be resilient, we found a merging of old and new cultural practices” (p. 689). The authors discuss these changes and describe the implications for how technology can support resilience during war.

Figueiredo, Prado, Camara, and Albuquerque (2009) analyzed the overall impact of Web 2.0 technologies for social and economic development in five Brazilian communities, and identify the strengths and shortcomings derived from the application of these digital tools. The researchers evaluated the impact of video blogging in five Brazilian communities that participated in a ‘telecenter’ pilot project engaged in citizen journalism. Through the telecenter, the five Brazilian rural communities used Web 2.0 collaborative tools to post video about their communities between 2006 and 2008.

During this period, they posted 95 short videos using inexpensive digital video cameras. They recorded various aspects of their community life-religious celebrations, oral history, arts and crafts traditions, folklore, and environmental concerns. The study used qualitative method (semi-structured interviews). The themes were specified while the questions were open-ended. Repetitions of some of the questions were allowed while the order in which the questions were asked was very flexible (p.79).

The study is in three phases: Digital inclusion, information inclusion, and social inclusion. The study found evidence that video blogging tools empowered the community as a whole, and young video reporters in particular. These are some of the contemporary works that attempted to highlight some of the impacts of technological innovations in developing nations discussed in the literature for the study.

Theoretical Foundation

The research was anchored The Task-Technology Fit (TTF) theory which posits that, Information Technology (IT) is more likely to have positive impact on individual performance and uses as long as the given IT matches the

task it is used for (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995). There are eight factors in Task-technology developed by Goodhue and Thompson (1995): quality, locatability, authorization, and compatibility, ease of use/training, production timeliness, system reliability, and relationship with users.

While the TTF theory operates at the individual level of analysis, Zigurus and Buckland (1998) came up with an analogous model operating at the group level. Over the years, the initial TTF has been applied to different ranges of IS, and thus undergo some modifications to suit a particular study (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995). This theory can equally be adapted to examine the impact of technology on journalism. In line with the TTF theory, it can be argued that journalism is likely to receive a boost when appropriate technology that matches the task that journalist perform is used. So with use of appropriate technology, journalism practice and education will be enhanced and the effect on democracy, the focus of the research cannot be underestimated.

Methodology

Technological advances are leading every field of human endeavor in many exciting directions Aborisade (2012). Perhaps more than any other profession, journalism is experiencing the impacts of technological advances around the world today. Newsgathering, editing, and distribution are being transformed by new technologies (Gillmor, 2004). This is a new development in journalism that is fast transforming the way news is gathered, reported and distributed. The research investigated the emerging trends in journalism (practice and education) and their effects on democracy in Nigeria. The research is a qualitative phenomenological study to tap into the lived experiences of the participants. The study conducted an in-depth and focus group interviews to identify the major trends in journalism practice and education and their effect on democracy in Nigeria. Focus group and in-depth interviews are regarded as the best tools to gather data for qualitative study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) believe that a face-to-face interaction like the one in focus group and in-depth interviews is needed to vividly capture “thought, feelings, beliefs and assumption”. Interviews are predominantly used to capture participants lived experience McNamara (1999).

Five categories of participants were involved in the in-depth interview to provide answers to the research question-ten practicing journalists, ten journalism lecturers and ten student/ graduates of Journalism and ten politicians and ten non-politicians. Five Focus Group interviews were also organized made up ten participants in each group-ten practicing journalists, ten journalism lecturers, ten students/graduates of journalism and ten politicians and ten non-politicians. The five focus groups were spread across the five geo-political zones in Nigeria as well as the in-depth interview. No participant was allowed to participate in more than one focus group and those who participated in the focus group interview were not allowed to participate in the in-depth interview. In all, One hundred participants were involved in both the in-depth and focus group interviews.

Findings and Discussion

Ninety percent of participants in the in-depth interview category agreed that the emerging trends in journalism practice and education enumerated above have made

Nigeria's democracy more robust because they believe the emerging trends have produced a more vibrant press that continued to guide and protect the democratic process. They believe with internet and the social media, Nigerian journalists are now free to challenge the status quo unlike in the past when Nigerian government could gag the press with impunity. Ten percent believe the emerging trends set back the democratic process because of lack of cohesive force to chat a proper democratic cause for the country. They believe the emerging trends have made journalism an all comers affair which they believe is not healthy for democracy. Eighty percent of participants in the focus group interviews are of the view that the emerging trends in journalism practice and education agreed that the emerging trends is good for democracy while twenty percent are of the view that the emerging trends made the Nigerian press lose its usual vibrancy with which they fought the colonial masters and secured the Nigeria's independence for the country, the vibrancy with which they fought the military and return the country to democratic rule. They also identify a big threat to the mainstream press due to the invasion of the profession by the technology-savvy citizen-reporters.

Summary and Conclusion

This study is yet another attempt at creating a foundational theoretical framework on how technology transforms the journalism in practice and education in Nigeria. The themes that emerged from the one hundred participants that took part in the in-depth and focus group interviews for the study are very fundamental and germane to this framework. Many of these themes directly or indirectly identified the emerging trends in journalism practice and education in Nigeria. Integrating citizen-reporters into mainstream media in Nigeria was seen as a major issue that needs to be addressed. This will need a lot of work from the mainstream media to ensure Nigerians are aware of the significance of citizen-reporting and help address the problem of Internet bandwidth, power outages, and affordability of technology in the country through advocacy and enlightenment on the need to create an enabling environment for journalism to thrive so that democracy can thrive too. Journalism profession will also have to reach out to more Nigerians and introduce them to emerging technologies so that they can be part of the new journalism. The Nigerian government will be doing the country some good if effort is made to improve the country's technological backbones, Internet bandwidth so that the new journalism which is seen as the alternative voice of expression can effectively and efficiently serve communication scholars, media experts, and practitioners so that the country's democracy can thrive.

The most significant technological transformations of the journalism business in Nigeria identified in the study come from the in-depth interview with the practicing journalists. They provide very copious insights into the lived experiences of journalists in Nigeria and how the emerging trend in journalism practice and education transform journalism for democracy to thrive in the country.

Participants in the in-depth interview category of the data collection for the study relayed the impacts of the emerging trends in journalism practice on democracy and mirrored the challenges facing journalists in Nigeria which accounts for the differences between the Nigerian journalists and

their counterparts in Europe, America and elsewhere around the world. These differences, they believed prevent the Nigerian journalists from guiding and promoting the country's democracy like their counterparts in other countries. Above all, the study sheds light on how the emerging trends in journalism practice and education leads to a vibrant democracy in Nigeria. By identifying the synergy between journalism practice and education, the future of democracy in the country is said to be properly guaranteed in the hands of the future journalists who are expected to take advantage of the emerging trend to move the country's democracy forward.

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