

INFLUENCE OF INTERNET TECHNOLOGY ON JOURNALISTS AND JOURNALISM PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The internet is a global network made up of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks connected by electrical, wireless, and optical technologies. Internet technology refers to the wide range of protocols and technologies that make the internet easier to use and function. The aim of the study is to evaluate how the internet has affected Nigerian Journalism practice while highlighting the underutilisation of modern communication technologies in the country's journalism industry. This study adopted two theories which are technological determinism theory and democratic participant theory. The conclusion of the study is that people use the internet to search for information and updates on current events, which has forced journalists to look for every way to expand on their coverage of many topics. Unlike print publications which have a limited number of pages, the audience may access more news on the internet in a timely manner and watch it through a sequence of images and video snippets that add to the news vibrancy. This study recommends that media organisations should train their employees through workshops so as to be knowledgeable about anything related to the internet. Also, government should allocate funds for the construction of infrastructure in remote areas to enable journalists send and receive reports more quickly and easily.

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INTRODUCTION

As the internet transforms communication, journalists are starting to present and distribute news to the public in new ways. As technology develops on a daily basis, the internet is also evolving as certain significant developments are altering the nature of communication. Reporters are beginning to use more efficient techniques for obtaining news from the public and preparing and disseminating it to the wider audience.

The new field of journalism known as "*digital journalism*", sometimes referred to as "*netizen*" or "*online journalism*" is as a result of the internet. This is a modern kind of journalism where stories are shared online rather than in print or on television. The advent of digital technology in recent years has led to, or rather, stimulated, the growth of digital journalism, which has had a significant impact on traditional media (Omega, 2024).

Journalists can now readily perform independent research on any issue they are interested in, even outside of their region, as the internet is one of the most comprehensive tools and makes it easy to learn what acronyms stand for as well as investigate a certain subject matter. Indeed, even for print media, the internet has improved journalism, since we now have to learn how to write only for online publications (Adelabu&Okia, 2021).

This paper's objective is to evaluate how the internet has affected Nigerian journalism practice while highlighting the underutilisation of modern communication technologies in the country's journalism industry. It also examines the capabilities of contemporary technology and how it alters traditional journalism.

JOURNALISM

Journalism practice refers to the professional actions and standards that journalists follow when obtaining, reporting, and presenting news and information to the public(Onyebuchi et al., 2019). It covers a wide range of topics in journalism, including as ethics, reporting methodologies, and journalists' roles in society. Social responsibility theory is one of the normative ideas that guide journalism practice(Uzuegbunam, 2015). According to this view, journalists are responsible for serving the public interest by presenting accurate, balanced, and unbiased information.

Over time, journalism has changed significantly, especially with the introduction of internet technologies. It is crucial to look at journalism both before and after the internet to fully comprehend these shifts.

Journalism before the Internet

Newspapers and magazines were the main sources of news. While magazines usually produced weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly issues, newspapers were issued daily or weekly. Reporters would dedicate weeks or months to a single topic in order to delve deeply into investigative journalism and unearth societal concerns, scandals, or corruption. Editors were essential in choosing which stories to publish since they made sure the material was true and pertinent. While upholding strict journalistic standards, this gatekeeping also restricted the range of viewpoints.

News spread more quickly with the introduction of radio in the early 20th century and television in the middle of the century. Radio news bulletins and nightly news programs gained popularity. Information was consumed in a more organized manner as a result of the news being presented in predetermined cycles, such as morning, evening, and nighttime broadcasts.

Global news sources for newspapers and broadcasters included the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and Agence France-Presse (AFP). These organisations had a big impact on how international news was covered.

Journalism with Internet Technology

By building websites, news organisations made their content available around-the-clock. The collapse of print newspapers and magazines as the main news sources was caused by this change. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become important for the spread of news. These platforms allow journalists and news organisations to instantaneously contact a larger audience. Through blogs, social media, and other online platforms, the internet made it possible for regular people to report news, democratising information exchange and bringing in a variety of viewpoints (Abdullah et al., 2019).

Real-time news updates were made possible by the internet, which cut down on the news cycle from hours or days to minutes. Videos, infographics, and interactive information are now frequently included with news reports, which improves the storytelling quality.

The business structures of traditional media companies have been impacted by the change in advertising revenue from print to digital platforms. Paywalls and online content subscription models become more popular as a result of this change. Clickbait and dramatic headlines became more popular as a result of the competition for online attention (Pengnate et al., 2021). The quick dissemination of information also facilitated the spread of false information and fake news.

News companies employ analytics to monitor reader behavior and preferences so they can create content that is relevant to their audience. According to Narayanan (2023), social media

companies' algorithms favour particular kinds of material over others, changing the news that users view. Big data accessibility has spawned a new genre of journalism called "data journalism," in which writers use data visualisation and analysis to unearth and clarify intricate narratives.

The way news is gathered, reported, and consumed has changed as a result of the internet, revolutionising journalism. It has brought new forms of storytelling and democratised knowledge, but it has also brought with it difficulties including the spread of false information and the difficulty in developing sustainable revenue models (Cuffley, 2022). Investigating and reporting the truth is still at the core of journalism, but the tools and platforms have changed significantly.

INTERNET & INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES

Almost every element of modern life, including communication, commerce, entertainment, education, and social relationships, has undergone significant transformation thanks to the internet and internet technologies (Omondi, 2023).

The Internet is a global network of linked computers that exchange data using TCP/IP standards. It enables the sharing of resources and information among billions of devices globally. The U.S. Department of Defense launched the ARPANET project in the late 1960s to facilitate secure communication between military and research organisations. This effort is where the internet got its start. With the creation of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee, who also introduced the concepts of web pages and hyperlinks, the internet transformed from a research network into a commercial and public network in the 1980s and 1990s.

Key Internet Technologies

1. Networking Technologies

- **TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/ Internet Protocol):** the core set of internet communication protocols that guarantee dependable data transfer between networks.
- **DNS (Domain Name System):** converts domain names that are readable by humans into IP addresses, making it simple for visitors to visit websites.
- **HTTP/HTTPS (Hypertext Transfer Protocol/Secure):** the internet protocols that are used to send web pages. HTTPS uses encryption to provide an extra degree of protection.
- **Wi-Fi and Ethernet:** these are technologies that enable devices to connect to local networks and the wider internet, respectively. They are either wireless and wired internet connectivity.

2. Web Technologies

- **HTML (Hypertext Markup Language):** the common language used to create web apps and webpages.
- **Java Script:** a programming language that is necessary for front-end web development that allows for interactive web pages.
- **Web Browsers:** Web browser software programs such as Chrome, Firefox, and Safari enable users to access and browse the World Wide Web.

3. Communication Technologies

- **Email:** one of the first and most popular online services for electronic message exchange.
- **VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol):** permits voice and multimedia sessions via the internet (e.g., Zoom, Skype).
- **Social Media Platforms:** social networking and content sharing platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other websites and applications.

4. Emerging Technologies

- **IoT (Internet of Things):** a system of physical objects—such as wearable technology and smart home appliances—that are integrated with sensors and connections to communicate and gather data.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** technologies (such as chatbots and recommendation systems) that allow computers to carry out operations like learning, reasoning, and problem-solving that normally need human intellect.
- **Blockchain:** a decentralised ledger system (smart contracts, cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin) that safely logs transactions across several computers.

Impact of Internet Technologies

People all around the world are connected by the internet, which makes it easier to access information and communicate instantly. Social media platforms have revolutionised communication, information sharing, and community building.

The ability for businesses to offer goods and services online (via sites like Amazon and Jumia) has changed the shopping experience. Collaboration technologies and video conferencing have increased the viability and prevalence of remote work. Online courses and degrees are available through widely accessible educational platforms and resources. With the abundance of knowledge available on the internet, learning and research are now more accessible.

Our way of living, working, and interacting with each other has been completely changed by the internet and its related technology. These technologies will probably lead to more advancements and changes as they develop, greatly influencing how society develops in the future.

IMPACT OF INTERNET & INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES ON JOURNALISM PRACTICE

The way news is acquired, produced, distributed, and consumed has changed significantly as a result of the internet and related technologies. Both advantages and disadvantages have resulted from these shifts for media outlets and journalists.

Real-time information availability and sharing by journalists enables prompt reporting on breaking news as a result of the internet and its technologies. Nowadays, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are essential resources for obtaining firsthand information, analyzing popular opinion, and locating eyewitness stories (Tazeen & Mullick, 2023). Large databases have made it possible for journalists to use data analysis to unearth stories, providing previously unattainable insights. By enabling journalists to produce visually engaging data representations, tools such as Tableau and Infogram help the public better understand complex material.

Because of the internet, journalists can access user-generated content including images, videos, and first-hand stories (Tolmie et al., 2017). This is especially useful during significant events or natural catastrophes. Journalists can interact with communities and obtain information directly from posts and debates on sites like Reddit and specialist forums. Text, audio, video, and interactive elements are now all combined in modern journalism to provide richer, more compelling tales. Online interactive features on the internet make complicated stories easier to understand and provide viewers a more engaging experience.

Journalists can collaborate thanks to the internet. In order to cover big or complicated stories, journalists and media organisations now work together across platforms and geographical boundaries, pooling resources and knowledge (Fisher, 2018). Journalists use online crowdsourcing tools and publicly accessible data to carry out in-depth investigations.

News pieces are being produced, reader content is being personalised, and news dissemination is being improved with the use of automation and artificial intelligence. Routine reporting duties can be handled by automated journalism, freeing up journalists to concentrate on more intricate stories (Sergio, 2020). Technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are being investigated to produce immersive news experiences that give viewers a new way to interact with stories.

Through blogs, social media, and video platforms, the internet has enabled regular people to report news as journalists. In addition to bringing in fresh viewpoints, this democratisation of news reporting has sparked questions about accuracy and consistency. Numerous specialised and independent news websites have surfaced, providing contrasting perspectives frequently overlooked by the mainstream media. While diversifying the media landscape, this has also led to audience fragmentation.

One major disadvantage of the internet and its technologies is that, the spread of false information and fake news is a result of how simple it is to produce content online. Information verification is a challenge for news organisations and journalists in a fast-paced setting. Additionally, the rush to publish can occasionally degrade the breadth and caliber of reporting. Maintaining accuracy and thoroughness while balancing speed is still a crucial problem.

Also, the internet has disrupted traditional revenue models for news organisations, as online advertising revenue often fails to compensate for declines in print advertising and circulation revenue (Athey et al., 2013). News organisations have had to adapt by exploring alternative revenue streams such as subscription models, memberships, and donations.

Overall, the internet has had a profound impact on journalism practice, offering new opportunities for speed, reach, engagement, and innovation, while also presenting challenges such as misinformation, economic disruption, and ethical considerations (Abbas & Ahmad, 2023). Journalists and news organisations must adapt to the evolving digital landscape to effectively serve their audiences and uphold the principles of quality journalism in the digital age.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

McLuhan's idea of technological determinism will serve as the foundation for the theoretical framework. The notion that the internet is transforming society and the economy is heavily influenced by this viewpoint, and the ways in which each technological age brings about changes in how people respond to their immediate surroundings (Tribal literate - print -electronic).

According to McLuhan's 1963 thesis, the area of information systems is predicated on the significance of information technology in human socioeconomic life. It holds that the messages we get through the present technology available to us determine how we learn, feel, and think. According to *Gutenberg Galaxy* – a book written by McLuhan in 1962 – we could only listen and hone our sense of caution when using the radio. The theory of technological determinism could also be taken into account while analysing shifts in the journalism industry (Bastos et al.,

2012). Though significant, this theory was never fully developed and was frequently disregarded in favour of models that more closely matched the notion of social construction (Bastos et al., 2010).

The study also acknowledges that journalists, through their detailed and ongoing interactions with the Internet in the context of their professional practice, and their interactions with the public and other actors within the social context, constitute a significant player in the construction of society.

When applied to the influence of internet technology on journalists and journalism practice, there are several disadvantages to this perspective:

Reductionism: Technological determinism tends to reduce complex social phenomena to simple cause-and-effect relationships, ignoring the multifaceted nature of human behaviour and societal structures.

Neglect of Social Factors: This theory often neglects the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which technology is situated. In the case of journalism, the influence of internet technology cannot be fully understood without considering factors such as media ownership, audience preferences, regulatory frameworks, and journalistic norms and values.

DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPANT THEORY

Democratic participant theory propounded in 1987 by Dennis McQuail is a political theory that emphasises the active involvement of citizens in decision-making processes within a democratic society. It suggests that democracy is not just about electing representatives to make decisions on behalf of the people, but rather it is about direct participation of citizens in the decision-making process. Democratic participant theory is highly relevant to the topic of the influence of internet technology on journalists and journalism practice. This theory suggests that in a democratic society, individuals should actively participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. In the context of journalism, it emphasises the importance of a diverse range of voices contributing to the creation and dissemination of news and information.

The advent of internet technology has profoundly affected journalism in several ways, aligning with the principles of democratic participant theory:

Citizen Journalism: The internet has enabled ordinary citizens to become content creators and distributors. Through blogs, social media platforms, and other online channels, individuals can

report news, share opinions, and contribute to public discourse. This democratisation of the media allows for a more diverse range of perspectives to be heard, challenging traditional gatekeeping roles of professional journalists.

Increased Access to Information: The internet has made vast amounts of information readily accessible to journalists and the public alike. Journalists can now conduct research more efficiently, access primary sources directly, and uncover stories that may have been previously overlooked.

Audience Engagement: Internet technology facilitates direct engagement between journalists and their audience. Through social media, comments sections, and interactive features, journalists can solicit feedback, answer questions, and involve the public in the journalistic process. This fosters a sense of community and collaboration, enhancing the democratic ideals of transparency and inclusivity.

Challenges to Traditional Media Models: The rise of internet technology has disrupted traditional media models, leading to the proliferation of online news outlets, digital-native publications, and alternative sources of information.

In summary, democratic participant theory underscores the importance of inclusivity, transparency, and active engagement in the practice of journalism. The influence of internet technology on journalism aligns with these principles by democratising access to information, empowering citizens as content creators, facilitating dialogue between journalists and audiences, and challenging traditional media structures.

CONCLUSION

People use the internet to search for information and updates on current events, which has forced journalists to look for every way to expand on their coverage of many topics. Unlike print publications, which have a limited number of pages, the audience may access more news on the internet in a timely manner and watch it through a sequence of images and video snippets that add to the news' vibrancy. Based on the current situation in Nigeria, it can be concluded that the government is not making any effort to address the problem. They exhibit apathy towards investing in the media to enable it to effectively serve the public interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that media organisations should train their employees through workshops so they are knowledgeable about anything related to the internet. Government should allocate funds for the construction of infrastructure in remote areas to enable journalists to send and receive reports more quickly and easily. It is also recommended that media organisations provide internet access, such as wireless networks, to all employees in their offices to remain competitive with their global counterparts.

The internet is still developing, and new innovations like block chain, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence will bring both opportunities and difficulties for media in the future.

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