MAINSTREAMING THE SOCIAL MEDIA AS DEPENDABLE NEWS SOURCES

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Abstract
Despite the ubiquitous infiltration of information communication technologies (ICTs) into our lives, research on the use of the social media as alternate and dependable news sources is at a nascent stage. Today, Communication is witnessing a paradigm shift from conventionalism to modern social media, which includes varying social media platforms. The Tech-Determinist Theory has pointed, in the contemporary society, to a situation where mass media audiences are changing the outlets where they search for the news. This research adopted the survey methodological approach, with a study population of 3,682 comprising all the people in the contact of the researchers across the various social media platforms which include: Badoo, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, and Blackberry Messenger (BBM). A sample size of 348 was determined for the study using the Australian National Statistical Service online sampling calculator. Evidence from research data shows that besides being used for meeting their information needs, social media have been adjudged by the users as dependable news sources. Also, research finding shows that the more frequently a social medium is used, the higher perceived dependability of such medium as a news source. In consonance with the technological determinism theory, the advancement of media technology determines the media used in communication by the people. This, the researchers conclude, is responsible for the modern social media channels being used for news dissemination and reception. To effectively mainstream the social media as news sources, there is the need to train special corps of reporters to take over the business of news dissemination on the social media platforms. This is to guard against quacks from abusing the social media with deliberate dissemination of falsehood.

Keywords: Social media, Use, Dependability, Alternative and Pedagogy
Introduction

Though we do not yet have chips implanted in our brains to allow instantaneous mind-to-mind contact, a primary feature of many forms of ICTs, leading to the use of the modern media is their portable nature. Indeed, mobile phones or other mobile communication gadgets have become appendages. We can even talk, view, read, chat and stream on our mobile phones in the comfort of our homes, offices and any other place for that matter. Although it cannot be said that anyone can be reached at any time in Nigeria, widespread adoption of many ICTs is certainly making the news accessible more assessable. Even when asynchronous communication is the preferred mode, we still expect to be able to access asynchronous communiqués and expect others to do so and reply in a timely fashion.

No doubt, our society has grown into a global society, occasioned by the evolution of various social media. Years back, it was pretty difficult if not near difficult for the audience to get news outside the interpersonal channels. Before now, the conventional media like the radio, television, newspaper and magazines have monopolized the business of news. Today, various social media like YouTube, Skype, Blackberry, Facebook, Badoo, and Whatsapp have emerged and they have become sources of news dissemination, thereby breaking the monopoly of the conventional media of mass communication.

The social media trend is significantly repositioning the entire world of communication in a phenomenal pattern. Constant accessibility, availability and easy to use are the most visible advantages of the new media over the conventional ones. This accounts for their unprecedented popularity all over the world. Also, the ubiquity of the social media within their short period of arrival is unparalleled in the annals of media industry. Awake! (2011, p.24) buttress this point by noting that “Social networking has become hugely popular. Consider this: It took 38 years for radio to reach 50 million users, 13 years for television to attract the same number, and 4 years for the internet to do so. The social networking site Facebook gained 200 million users in one 12-month period!”

Social media have become very popular means of both interpersonal and public communication in Nigeria and the world at large. Social media are modern interactive communication channels through which people connect to one another, share ideas, experiences, pictures, movies, messages and information of common interest. They are social interactive networks which information and communication technologies (ICTs) bequeathed to the modern society through the instrumentality of the internet and the communication
engineered gadgets. The great influence of the ICTs on human communication was hailed by Edogor (2008, p.1) when he opines that “one of the monumental innovations which happens in this century is Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). These facilitate human communication in both interpersonal and mass communication levels”. The novel innovation gave birth to the various social media platforms that have come to challenge the mass media as information sources.

This, perhaps made Oyero (2007, p.169) to aver that, “the traditional lines between media are disappearing.” The internet has eroded the distinctions among media, thus merging them up into one.” Also, on the contribution of the internet to mass media messages, Agu (2011, p.131) succinctly asserts that:

The internet makes it possible to expand the networks and to increase the possibilities for communicating with wider audiences on the globe. The invention and the introduction of the internet…have allowed breaking news stories to reach around the globe within minutes. This has given rise to what is known as “cross-media” which means the distribution of some message through different channels.

Gradually, the modern media systems emerged to close the obvious gaps of audiences’ inability to promptly get the news as they break. In fact, it is a common knowledge that breaking news has become synonymous with the Social media. Before the reporter gets his pen to paper, the social sites are awashed with the stories being reported.

Cases of election tribunals giving verdict, judgments deliveries from High and Appellate Courts or Supreme courts are delivered to the media audiences within second through the various social media channels. Unfortunately, issue of dependability, otherwise called credibility question has come to rub-off the beauties of the emerging media of information dissemination.

There was a time the social media reported the supposed deaths of Sullivan Chime, Olusegun Obasanjo, Liyel Imoke amongst other. The social media then carried catchy headlines and photos of such rumored deaths. Till date, these people are very much alive. However, there are stories reported by the social media that actually passed the credibility test.

Even when the issue of credibility greets the news items of communication, scholars have reported that even the professional media outfits still have issues of credibility starring them on their faces. Ownership factor and other interests led to the politicization and
commercialization of news items among the conventional media. Hence, the audience members took the news from these media with a pinch of salt, at one point or the other.

**Statement of the Problem**

To a large extent, Social media use in Nigeria has no doubt. Individuals have resorted to its use in meeting their individual communication or informational needs. There is no doubt also that the social media has emerged as a source of information generation and dissemination. To the professional journalist, the social media are channels for disseminating falsehood. Conversely, the users of the social media accuse the modern media as stooges of government and media owners.

However, the extent to which the social media are emerging as alternative news sources to the conventional mass media and their dependability in the information dissemination process prompted this research.

**Objectives of the Study**

To achieve the broad goal of establishing if the social media can readily be used as dependable alternative news sources, the following specific research objectives were conceived:

i. The extent to which the social media is used for news dissemination.

ii. To assess the credibility of the social media in the eyes of the audience members.

iii. To establish if the audience still depend on the conventional media systems with the ubiquity of the social media.

iv. To check the perceived dependability level of the varying social media channels.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this research:

i. To what extent are the social media used for news dissemination?

ii. To what extent are the social media credible in the eyes of the audience members?

iii. To what extend do the audiences depend on the conventional media systems in the midst of the ubiquitous social media?

iv. What is the perceived dependability level of the varying social media channels?

**Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on social media platforms such as Blackberry, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp where it is possible to broadcast information or newsy materials.
Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the technological determinism theory. Propounded by McLuhan (1962), who Baran and Davies (2012, p.273) cited as stating that “changes in communication technology inevitably produce profound changes in both culture and social order.” The bearing of this theory to this work stems from the fact that social media as technological inventions are making dramatic influences on the users’ communication today.

By and large, the forms, contents and uses of the social media ultimately have phenomenal influences on the users’ lives and their perception of contemporary human communication. The use of the social media has significantly redefined the information dissemination and consumption patterns among the audience as well as altered the services of the conventional mass media systems. This is quite different from what used to be obtainable before now, particularly in the realm of traditional journalism.

Social Media and Communication: An Overview

The news and information of the conventional media, according to the European Society of Professional Journalists (2001, p.1), are being increasingly circumvented by users who “use alternative media sources.” The social media mainly are part of the major alternative media sources in use in the world. The impact of the new media genre is yet to be equaled globally, particularly in Nigeria. The social media have indeed carved a niche for themselves in the realm of human communication.

The social media mingled with the internet have variously and tremendously impacted positively on the mass media, their audience as well as practitioners. A prominent communication media scholar, McQuail (2008, p.39) observes that “traditional mass communication was essential one-directional while the new forms of communication (social media) are essentially interactive.” The emergence of social media which are in vogue now with their unique characteristics in the communication field may be creating a distinct perception of what news is in the minds of the audience and ultimately how they make use of the media. This is very much in sync with the position of Nwammuo (2001, p.106) who stated that, “the primary channel of communication changes the way we perceive the world. The dominant medium of any age, no doubt, dominates the people.” The social media by their nature have the capabilities of educating, informing, entertaining and `inflaming’ the audience. Above all, they possess a `contagious and far-reaching influence’ which the
conventional media lack. This potential is what Osahenye refers to as “unstoppable power of the social media” (2012, p.52). While acknowledging the power of the social media, Onomo (2012, p.38) stated that they (social media) have become “a widespread tool for communication and exchange of ideas, helping individuals and organizations with just causes to reach a phenomenally vast audience that could hitherto not be reached by traditional media.” In line with the above reasoning, Aja (2011) argues that “traditional media organizations such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines seem to have lost prominence and their audience (p.4).

Social Media as Channels of Public Communication

Presently, there has been an upsurge in the availability of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) devices in Nigeria. This is particularly evident in the contemporary Nigeria, prevalent of internet services as well as the use of hi-tech mobile or smart phones. These devices have consequently promoted the use of the social media in the country. So, with the presence of internet which is the major driving of social media engines, the use of the social media in Nigeria has no doubt been enhanced. An empirical study conducted by Idakwo in 2011, among other things upholds the fact that the use of the social media as means of communication has been adopted in Nigeria. The study examines ‘the use of Social Media among Nigerian Youths’. From the title, it is obvious that some findings of the study shall be relevant here. In his study, Idakwo, among other things discovered that most people use Facebook more than other social media channels in Nigeria. Also, most respondents concurred to the fact that they use the social media especially Facebook, as an alternative to other conventional communication media. In the words of the researcher, “with regard to the use of Facebook as an alternative mode of communication, 74% admitted to using Facebook as an alternative to other kinds of communication.” In a nutshell, the author summarizes other key points of his findings as follows:

Social media have become a mainstream activity and have become a major mode of communication especially for youths, who form about 50% of the world population on Facebook. Social media have moved from being just interactive to a form of mass media. Social media have been predicted as a strong force in shaping public opinion especially in issues of politics, social causes and sexuality. Social media have also been an expression of the complexities between the media and society (dakwo, 2011, p.23)
Some of the few existing empirical studies conducted in Nigeria so far on social media, show that millions of Nigerians are users of the media: yet no scientific research has been conducted to ascertain the credibility of these social media and the possibility of assuming an alternative channels to the conventional media.

In Nigeria, Social media have been variously and popularly deployed as veritable instruments of communication. Regardless of the fact that it has not been long they emerged as channels of human interaction in the country. The level of their usage is quite incredible cutting across all strata of the nation.

Conventional media and Social Media systems: a Convergence

No doubt, one of the observed gains of using the social media and other new technological devices in communication is the ability to produce media convergence. Simply put, it mean the coming together of all media platforms, be it print, broadcast or electronic. With the current wave of convergence, media practitioners and non-practitioners as well as media organizations are coming together as partners in information dissemination.

Johnson et al see media convergence as “joining together of different industries in terms of product development (2008, p.67).” But for Fransman (2002, p.39), convergence means “the blurring of borders between telecoms, computing and media.” In the view of Ciboh (2005, p.148), Mass communication media in modern age are blurring and blending together into what is really a single system or set of interrelated systems. We are witnessing media convergence. Generally, the internet is the main engine that engineers the convergence. Today, the use of the social media is radically re-shaping and expanding the horizon of the convergence trend seen in the traditional mass media. Dwyer (2010, p.11) observes that media convergence arises because social networking is based on ‘sharing’ while media industries repurpose shared content.

In a bid to better reach their target audience effectively, most mass media organizations (broadcast and print alike) are presently connected to the social media in much similar manner like the individual members of the society. Conventioanl media systems value the new media technologies and use them as veritable tools for reaching their audiences, locally and internationally. The UNDP (2010, p.69) while looking at media convergence in Nigeria stated that:

There is considerable convergence in some media organizations in Nigeria. For instance, Radio Nigeria is available for listeners online; Next Newspaper
has a ‘Next TV’ – a set of video clips that can be watched online free. Radio Nigeria also features stories- much like print media stories- on its websites.

Several Nigerian newspapers are available online. As it is globally, the traditional boundaries are collapsing.

In Nigeria today, almost all the conventional media systems are connected to either one or more social media channels. For example, during the 2011 general elections, some of the traditional media utilized the social media. Asuni & Farris (2011, p.10) rated 234 Next Newspaper and Channels Television as being among the top ten media that used social media during the elections. They also added:

Channels Television features regular live coverage through their website, Ipod, Iphone, and other devices. During the April elections, it established a four-person social media team, with one each handling the website, Twitter, Facebook and the fourth feeding information from the newsroom to the other three members of the team. This enabled simultaneous presentation and television, Facebook, and Twitter. Viewers were asked to comment and the station aired social media feedback several times a day (Asuni & Farris 2011, p.10).

Other mainstream media like the print media organizations in Nigeria applied the services of the social media. Tell magazine being a weekly publication put up its websites in 2010 for the 2011 general elections.

Their reporters around the country submitted reports through blackberry messenger…Daily Trust newspaper has been on Facebook since June 2010. Its number of fans has increased from 32,000 before the election to 65,000 immediately after the elections. Now up to 89,000 fan base…This compares with the paper’s total print distribution of 50,000 (Asuni & Farris, 2011, p.10).

Most importantly, some other media organizations in Nigeria link up with the social media channels especially the Facebook. In Nigeria, most news media organizations understand how social media work and have therefore integrated Facebook into their digital media/content strategy.

Presently, most of the media organizations in Nigeria are also connected to other social media like Twitter, beside their creation of account on social media platform to enable their users to access them through the social media channels’ link.
The commingling of the social media channels with other related modern communication devices has not only aided the efficiency of sourcing information, but has equally revolutionized the information gathering, assembling and dissemination systematically globally, and Nigeria in particular.

Research has begun to focus on how news practices and professional identify are changing in the wake of new technological capacities. Robinson in 2006 carried out an empirical study ‘The Mission of the J-Blog: Re-Capturing Journalistic Authority Online’, findings of which firmly support the above submission. He examined non-journalists’ and journalists’ use of blogging in reportage nowadays. The result of the work depicts that the use of internet blogs has changed news format. The study upholds that Perhaps, social media are forming another structure of realism in what news is today to the psyche of the media audience (Robinson, 2006, p.68).

Through the use of these social media channels, the people (non-journalists) could cover an unfolding newsworthy episode and report via the same channels, even before conventional journalists could have a hint of it. People can report to a journalist who is on their social media friend list about an incidence they witnessed, it behooves the pressmen to nose more and unearth more facts that could aid their publication.

The social media gateways make the audiences ‘producers and disseminators’ of information.’ According to Ciboh (2005, p.146) “anybody with a computer can now become a reporters, editor and publisher.” So, the use of the social media has democratized information assemblage and delivery, more than any other innovation. This brings to the fore and realism of the averment of Habermas, a communication philosopher, who stated that “free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Everyone can therefore speak, write, and print freely… (2008, p.70)” .In support of the above views, Akpan and Nnaane (2011, p.34) enthused;

Some of the latest mobile phones allow users to take still pictures or video clips. For instance, when breaking news occurs, people in the area can take video and still pictures, before the media arrive on the scene. In no distant time everybody will become a reporter.

Nowadays, modern mobile phones like Ipods, Androids and Blackberries and other 3G (Third Generation) phones are powerful media gadgets in the present whirlwind of information and communication revolution. This trend has now altered the mass mediated communications’
feedback which have been traditionally known to be delayed in time past. Today, the audiences respond to media messages almost instantaneously, as virtually all the mainstream media are linked to one social network or the other which the audience themselves are connected to. This encourages the audience to have more input in the content of media. This was confirmed by UNDP (2010) study which discovered, among other things, that “41.8% and 47.5% of Nigerian audience participate actively and very actively in the media content production” (UNDP, 2010, p.34).

The use of the social media, besides creating a platform for the people to inform themselves, also, empowers the people (the audience) to involve themselves in packaging the contents of even the conventional media.

**Related Studies**

Credibility, according to Johnson and Kaye (2004) is the worthiness of being believed, accuracy, fairness, and depth of information. To judge the credibility of a social media, a Recipient must have prior reliance on the different news outlets.

An empirical study as related to this research was conducted by Sutton, Palen, and Shklovski (2008). This study was conducted by first operationalizing the various social media outlets used, including photo sharing websites, personal blogs, web discussions and forums, and mobile phones. They then gathered information from respondents via an online questionnaire about information and communications technology use before and during disaster situations, and the perceived legitimacy of the social media and backchannel media outlets. The independent variables for this study (Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008) were the respondents’ use of backchannel communication and the use of other social media outlets. The dependent variables were the prominence of social media and backchannel media outlets and the perceived legitimacy of the information gained using these types of media, both of which were measured using open-ended response questions on the online questionnaire. Similarly, this research focused on the perceived credibility of various social media outlets. The overall results of their study (Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008) showed that the use of backchannel media outlets and social media channels, including web forums, blogs, photo sharing websites, etc. is increasingly popular during times of disaster. The accessibility of these outlets encourages citizens to use and rely on information gained from backchannel media sources. The backchannel media outlets seem both credible and reliable in disaster situations because the information is current and personal. Respondents complaining of incorrect
information being broadcast through typical, larger media channels were appeased by the “close to home” nature of backchannel media. Backchannel media appears to be a credible source for spreading information during disaster situations, and may be an important tool in spreading news and other information quickly to a large number of people in various situations. This study (Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008) indicates that backchannel and social media outlets are perceived to be reliable by the general population. They also appear to be an accessible and current source for breaking news and updates which can be an explanation for the reason as to why people may perceive social media as a credible source for news which is pertinent to this current study.

Haridakis and Hanson in 2009 examined one of the social media, YouTube, in a study entitled. ‘Social Interaction and Co-Viewing: Blending Mass Communication Reception and Social Connection’. The major finding of the researchers is that, “…while people watch videos and YouTube for some of the same reasons identified in the studies of television viewing, there is a distinctly social aspect to YouTube use that reflects its social networking characteristics” (Haridakis and Hanson, 2009, p.317). Therefore the study reveals that the viewers of the YouTube medium perceived it as sharing certain features with television but in addition it has some social media properties. According to Haridakis and Hanson (2009, p.330)

But there is also a distinctly social aspect of YouTube. That social component was reflected in two specific motives: social interaction and co-viewing. The underlying elements of the co-viewing motive suggest that people watch, share, and discuss videos they like with family and friends. (Focus group discussions with college students prior to the data collection indicated that they sometimes called friends, roommates, and others in their dormitory to watch videos with them).

The finding above showing the various social reasons for people’s use of YouTube supports some prior studies. Co-viewing has been studied in the context of parents helping their children to understand and to be more literate (e.g. Nathanso, 2001) cited by Haridakis and Hanson, (2009, p.228). According to these researchers, “the result of this research suggest that co-viewing is a means of sharing content with others, and supports Lull’s (1980) research regarding the social uses of television.”
Research Methodology

In this study, the descriptive research design which has proved effective in similar past studies, was adopted for this study. Questionnaire was utilized in the collection of primary data for this study. The population of the research is the people, who are social media contacts of the researchers like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Badoo, Whatsapp, Blackberry Messenger (BBM) and other social media platforms wherein the researchers are also users.

Population of the Study

Kane (1987, p.90), defines population as “a group in which all the individuals or items are singled out for study”. To this end, the population for this study comprised all the people in the contact of the researchers across the various social media platforms which include: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Badoo, Whatsapp and Blackberry Messenger (BBM). The statistics, as collected from the various gateways have been broken down in the table below;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>1495</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badoo</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatsapp</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackberry Messenger (BBM)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,466</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,216</strong></td>
<td><strong>3682</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table A: Contacts in the Social Media Platforms*

Source: Respective Social Media Contacts, August 14, 2015.

The population of 3,682 defines the limits within which the research findings are applicable. The Australian National Statistical Service online sampling calculator, assumed to have wide usage among researchers in the West, particularly researchers in Europe was adopted in determining the sample size for this study.

Sample Size Calculator

At confidence interval level of 95% and confidence interval of 0.05, the sample size was 348. The sample size for the study is therefore calculated below:
The number of questionnaire allotted to each social media Platform was randomly administered to the contacts. That is, all accessible Contacts that have functional internet service as of the time of this research received the web link to the e-questionnaire. This way, all the contacts had the equal opportunity of having the e-questionnaire.

Since the research method adopted for this work is the survey approach, the researcher used the e-questionnaire (electronic questionnaire) as its measuring instrument. The rationale for this adoption is borne out of the researcher’s desire to obtain reliable and valid information and to ensure that the results obtained conforms to certain scientific principles such as systematic, objective and general reliability of information.

The e-questionnaire was constructed and arranged to elicit honest, sincere and authentic information from respondents. An electronic copy of the questionnaire was made and hosted at www.elijahresearchcentre.com. A web link of the e-questionnaire was therefore sent to the respondents wherein they were to open the link and use their mouse to fill in the questionnaire. After filling the questionnaire, they were requested to click the submit button at the bottom of the page, and the questionnaire automatically returned to the hosting site.

**Data Analysis**

Having administered the 348 copies of questionnaire across the 6 social Media platforms through the web link sent to them, 312 responded, while 36 did not respond to the
questionnaire. Therefore, 312 copies of the questionnaire representing 89.7% were analyzed, giving room for 32 or 10.3% mortality rate.

Research data as presented on Table I shows that 304 or 97.4% of the respondents depend on the social media channels in meeting their information needs while 8 representing 2.6% of the respondents differed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Field data, 2015*

It therefore means that the social media have been effectively used for news dissemination. This finding is in congruence with the empirical study ‘the use of Social Media among Nigerian Youths’ conducted by Idakwo in 2011. In his study, Idakwo, among other things discovered fact that the use of the social media as means of communication has been adopted in Nigeria. Also, most respondents concurred to the fact that they use the social media especially Facebook, as an alternative to other conventional communication media. In a nutshell, the researcher summarizes other key points of his findings as follows:

- Social media have become a mainstream activity and have become a major mode of communication especially for youths, who form about 50% of the world population on Facebook. Social media have moved from being just interactive to a form of mass media. Social media have been predicted as a strong force in shaping public opinion especially in issues of politics, social causes and sexuality. Social media have also been an expression of the complexities between the media and society (Idakwo, 2011, p.23)

Another empirical research that gives credence to this finding is the Robinson’s 2006 study. Robinson in 2006 carried out an empirical study ‘The Mission of the J-Blog: Re-Capturing Journalistic Authority Online’, findings of which firmly support the above submission. He examined non-journalists’ and journalists’ use of blogging in reportage nowadays. The result of the work depicts that the use of internet blogs has changed news format. The study upholds that Perhaps, social media are forming another structure of realism in what news is today to the psyche of the media audience (Robinson, 2006, p.68). All these are pointers to the fact
that the social media have been effectively used for news dissemination in modern times. From the test conducted on the hypothesis one, it is obvious that the social media have been effectively used for news dissemination. The fact that 304 or 97.4% of the respondents depend on the social media channels in meeting their information needs, is an indication that the social media have been effectively used for news dissemination.

Research data as presented on Table II shows that 62 or 19.9% of the respondents maintained that the social media channels are very credible news sources; 218 or 69.9% claimed that the social media channels are credible news sources; 6 representing 1.9% believed that the social media channels are minimally credible as news sources, while 26 or 8.3% maintained that the social media channels are not credible news sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very credible</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimally credible</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not credible</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field data, 2015

It therefore means that the social media have been seen as credible by audience members to a large extent. An empirical study that supports this research finding was conducted by Sutton, Palen, and Shklovski (2008). The overall results of their study (Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008) showed that the backchannel media outlets seem both credible and reliable in disaster situations because the information is current and personal. Respondents complaining of incorrect information being broadcast through typical, larger media channels were appeased by the “close to home” nature of backchannel media. This study (Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008) indicates that backchannel and social media outlets are perceived to be reliable by the general population. They also appear to be an accessible and current source for breaking news and updates which can be an explanation for the reason as to why people may perceive social media as a credible source for news which is pertinent to this current study. It can therefore be deduced, that to a large extent, the social media have been seen as credible by audience members. The fact that 62 or 19.9% of the respondents maintained that the social media channels are very credible news sources; 218 or 69.9% claimed that the social media...
channels are credible news sources; 6 representing 1.9% believed that the social media channels are minimally credible as news source, makes the social media channels as alternative news sources. The 26 or 8.3% of the respondents that maintained that the social media channels are not credible news sources is not statistically significant to decide otherwise.

Presentation of research data on Table III indicates that 42 or 29.5% of the respondents agreed that to a great extent, they still depend on the conventional media (Radio, Television, Newspapers and Magazines) for their information needs; 231 or 74% agreed that to some extent, they still depend on the conventional media (Radio, Television, Newspapers and Magazines) for their information needs; 29 or 9.3% agreed that to a little extent, they still depend on the conventional media (Radio, Television, Newspapers and Magazines) for their information needs, while 10 or 3.2% of the respondents were indifferent.

Table III: Dependence on the Conventional Media (Radio, Television, Newspapers and Magazines) For Information Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To a great extent</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To some extent</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To a little extent</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t say</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field data, 2015

It therefore means that the audiences largely depend on the conventional media systems with the presence of the social media.

Presentation of research data on Table IV indicates that 215 or 69% of the respondents agreed that consistent exposure to a specific social medium over the years enhances their perceived credibility of such medium; 64 or 20.5% disagreed, that consistent exposure to a specific social medium over the years does not enhance their perceived credibility of such medium, while 21 representing 6.7% were so indifferent.
Table IV: If Consistent Exposure to A Specific Social Medium Over the Years Enhances Perceived Credibility of Such Medium

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of course</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somehow</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t say</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field data, 2015

It therefore means that the more frequently a social medium is used, the higher perceived credibility of such medium as a news source. This finding also agrees with Johnson and Kaye (2004) study where they investigated how traditional media and Internet reliance influenced the way blog users perceived the credibility of weblogs. Johnson and Kaye’s (2004) study relates to this research, in that understanding how different users of media sources view credibility and what prior experiences can shape their view of the news outlet. The key finding of the (Johnson & Kaye, 2004) research was that a participants’ reliance on Weblog use was a strong and positive predictor for the perception of Weblog credibility. Most Weblog readers viewed the medium as moderately or highly credible. Evidence from that research makes one to believe that the more a person uses a source the more likely they are to view the source as credible. It can be observed, higher the frequency of exposure to a social medium, the higher perceived credibility of such medium as a news source. The differing voices are not statistically significant to decide otherwise.

Research data presented on Table V shows that 101 or 32.7% of the respondents adjudged Youtube channel as the most credible social media in terms of news dissemination; Next on the credibility scale is Twitter channel (97 or 31.1% of the respondents), Facebook channel (48 or 15.4% of the respondents), Blackberry Messenger channel (39 or 12.5% of the respondents), Whatsapp channel (20 or 6.4% of the respondents).
Table V: Respondents’ Judgment of the Most Credible Social Medium Based On Individual Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Channel</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badoo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatsapp</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackberry Messenger (BBM)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>312</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Field Data, 2013*

It therefore means that the credibility of social media as a news source will not be highest for Twitter. Rather, Youtube channel is adjudged as the most credible social media in terms of news dissemination.

Based on the hypothetical test, it was evident that Twitter is not the most credible social media; Rather, Youtube channel is adjudged as the most credible social media in terms of news dissemination. Next on the credibility scale is Twitter, followed by Facebook, Blackberry Messenger and Whatsapp in the order of succession.

**Summary of Findings**

Based on analytical of research data, the following key findings have been summarized:

1. Evidence from research data shows that users depend on the social media channels for their information needs.

2. It was evident that the social media have been effectively used in news dissemination in our contemporary society.

3. It was evident based on hypothetical test that Youtube channel is adjudged the most credible social media in terms of news dissemination. Next on the credibility scale is Twitter, followed by Facebook, Blackberry Messenger and Whatsapp in the order of succession.

4. Statistical evidence from data analysis reveals that the more frequently a social medium is used, the higher perceived dependability of such medium as a news source.

5. Research data indicates that social media have been adjudged by the users as credible news sources. Falsehood disseminated on the Social Media Channels did not affect
their dependence for credible news; since they have had similar false news stories from the conventional news media in the past.

**Conclusion**

Following the discussions of results and observations in the field, the researchers have come to the reasoned conclusion that, the social media have emerged as alternative news sources. This in congruency with the technological determinism theory that holds that the advancement of media technology determines the media used in communication by the people. This, the researchers conclude, is responsible for the modern social media channels used for news dissemination and reception.

**Recommendations**

Premised on the above research findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made;

1) Since the social media have been adjudged by the users as dependable news sources to a large extent, such credibility must be sustained.

2) The social media have provided an alternative platforms or channels for news transmission. This should not be seen as threats to the conventional media; rather, it should be seen as a way of advancing the course of mass communication.

3) Mass communication practitioners must look at the possibility of hooking on to the internet in their quest to reach the large segments of the society. It is therefore expedient for them to package their programme and disseminate same through the social media.

4) To effectively mainstream the social media as news sources, there is the need to train special corps of reporters to take over the business of news dissemination on the social media platform. This is to guard against quacks from abusing the social media with deliberate dissemination of falsehood.

5) Operators of the social media must endeavour to observe the core ethics of conventional journalism, that is, accuracy and objectivity.
References


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Haridakis, P. & Hanson, G. (2009). “Social interaction and co-viewing with Youtube:


