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STUDENTS, INTERNET USE AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION IN NIGERIA: TOWARDS THE NEW MEDIA

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Abstract: *The 2015 MDGs report affirmed that new information and communication technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for data collection, analysis and dissemination. According to Ericsson study released in April 2015, eighty two percent of mobile phone users have access to the Internet with their device on a daily basis. Similarly, forty five percent of PC users and 44 percent of tablet users, the report said do the same (http://www.vanguardngr.com). Indeed the Internet has brought limitless opportunities and the traditional journalism model is almost turned upside down. Today, "journalism by the people" seems to be having a swell time all over the world. With a compliant phone in Nigeria, you can upload your information, and within minutes, could be shared worldwide. For instance, the amateur accounts of April 14, 2014, devastating bomb blast at the Nyanya bus terminal close to the Federal Capital Territory Abuja were freely shared on the Internet. So also was the sharing on July 13, 2015, information on the sacking of Nigerian Service Chiefs. Thanks to persistently emerging technologies, all these were impracticable a few decades ago. This paper assesses the use of new media in Nigeria as a growing tool of information acquisition by the emerging social community. The paper takes both qualitative and quantitative approach. Quantitatively, the paper submits that an average Nigerian student spends more time attending to cell phones more than TV and radio. Compared to the mainstream media, many students get hard information (breaking news) first from the Internet. Information is first received by more active users and later shared among friends and relations through popular social channels such as Facebook and whatsapp. Such information is also retransmitted within especially close circles. This paper observes that the traditional media are reinventing in line with the new medium and provides some advocacy on the need to harness the advantages of the new medium.*

Keywords: Social media, Free-based Journalism; Traditional Journalism; Internet, Gate keeping

INTRODUCTION

On July 13, 2015, information on the sacking of Service Chiefs in Nigeria was relayed through subscribing cell phones in Nigeria via the Guardian daily mobile news which costs thirty naira weekly. The information delivered through MTN platform: "President Buhari has sacked the Head of Army, Navy and Air force" (credited to http://wwngrguardiannews.com). This information was later retransmitted through the social media. This is an indication of where information management and journalism is headed. Today, you may ask questions bordering on who gets what, at what time, at what frequency and through what medium?

On December 25 2011, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the Christmas day bombing that led to the massacre at St. Theresa's Church Madalla, Niger State. More than 100 people were reportedly killed in the incident. The different accounts of the bombing were widespread on the social media. So also were the accounts of different newsworthy events such as the 2015 presidential election, campaign and manifestoes (characterized by unprecedented level of hate reports in both mainstream and social media), announcements of different versions of gubernatorial results, etc. It is worthy to note that some of these accounts are at variance with the time-tested journalism principles of accuracy, objectivity, balance, fairness, and truth. In some instances, the public had been clearly misled and people's reputation damaged. But the accounts go to prove that alternative instant sources of information have evolved. And the effects can be at a reasonably mass level.

Indeed, communication is in a flux of a break-neck change and the rules are changing rapidly. In fact one unique aspect of the mass media is their reliance on changing technology. Senam, Ntiene, Okorie (2012, p.99) captures the situation: "Just the medieval period was dominated by religion; the contemporary era is technology-driven. Information and Communication Technologies constitute the extended Information Technology." However, these innovative beginnings have set a stage for unresolved difficulties.

The Internet comprises computer network attached to one another via pathway that facilitates the exchange of information, data and files. The revolutionary elements of the Internet, as a pacifier to the hegemony of the traditional media are recognized worldwide. Indeed the Internet delivers a lot and promises good and bad. The Net promises a flexible delivery of information from newspapers, radio television, and in a seemingly endless scope that "tempt, entertain and tantalize" (Curan and Gurevitch, 2005, p.381).

The 2015 MDGs Report affirmed that new information and communication technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for data collection, analysis and dissemination. The report succinctly captures the situation:

> Today, 95 per cent of the global population is covered by a cellular network, while mobilecellular subscriptions have grown to over 7 billion. Internet penetration has increased to 43 per cent of the world's population, linking 3.2 billion people to a global

network of content and applications. New data collection technologies, such as Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) and mobile text surveys (SMS), and new data sources, such as social media posts, online search records and mobile phone call records, allow faster data collection and provide near real-time information.

In any case, the Internet has accelerated digital convergence with a range of players: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film, books. But the marriage of the traditional media to the Web may not have brought a financial success. One important feature of a typical Web user is the desire to operate at no fee at all. "In fact the newspaper industry recognizes that it must accept economic losses while it is building online reader's trust, acceptance and, above all regular and frequent use" (Baran, 2002, p. 163).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For about three decades, the turbulence in technology has resulted in times of media abundance and renaissance. Thanks to persistently emerging technologies, the mass media are operating in an atmosphere of change. Consequently, the paradigms continue to shift, the media continue to acquire new roles, and the relationship between the media and the people deepens. In this era, communication technologies have made complex, what used to be a simple understanding of a communication process. The aforementioned scenario has posed a challenge, and in view of this situation, there is persistent need to continue to conduct studies that would help create a better understanding of the new media.

Objectives:

i. To determine the extent to which people rely on different media for information.
ii. To determine gratifications on the Internet.
iii. To determine what people do with gratifications on the Internet.
iv. To ascertain popular social media among users.

Research Questions:

1. To what extent do the people rely on the various media for information?
2. What are the gratifications on the Internet?
3. How do the people apply information from social media?
4. Which social medium is most popular among users?

THE TRADITIONAL PARADIGM

Until the arrival of the Internet, the traditional mass communication situation was conditioned by the dominant features. When the medium is a technology that instantly transmits messages rapidly to a large number of heterogeneous and widely dispersed people, you are talking of the mass medium. McQuail (1969) asserts they

normally require complex formal organizations. However, Bittner (1989, p.11) supplies some other features:

- Medium: The technology that makes it possible for the message to reach far beyond the immediate proximity of the sender. The human voice can project to a few meters, but a mass medium is capable of taking a message around the world.
- Limited sensory channels: mass media have limited sensory channels compared to perhaps the interpersonal setting. After listening to a clergy, you may shake hands with him. But the vision affords you only what the director wants you to see.
- Impersonal: Because participants in mass communication process are largely anonymous, messages are more impersonal.
- Gatekeeper: The process of mass communication requires additional persons who are carriers of messages, a process of complex intermediaries described as gate keeping. The term was first employed by an Austrian psychologist, Kurt Lewin to refer to individuals or groups of persons who govern "the travels of news items in communication channels." Bittner explained it as any person or formally organised group directly involved in relaying or transferring information from one individual to another through mass medium. Compared to other kinds of communication, we now conclude that mass communication is a deliberate but a complex process.
- Delayed feedback: Even though delayed feedback is not exclusive to mass communication, it has its own uniqueness in the mass communication process because hardly can the editor or the film director get an immediate feedback. In relations to other kinds of communication, Bittner explains that delayed feedback can occur at interpersonal level, as when one person temporarily refrains from commenting about another's remarks or suggestion.

AMATEUR JOURNALISM TAKES ROOTS IN NIGERIA

Irrespective of the shadowy economic and political situation in Nigeria, more and more Nigerians are being more connected to the Internet. Much of the Internet connectivity among students, below- the-ladder and the middle class is via the use of cheap Internet compliant cell phones. An extraction has access through the computer and a modem. Currently, some private schools, religious organizations, corporate organizations, small scale industries, NGOs and most government central establishments are hooked up to the Internet.

Already, there are indications that Nigeria is in the lead in Internet connectivity in Africa. In Nigeria, more and more people are quick to join their global neighbours in the use of the Internet and this is readily available via cell phones. Today, the country's total number of subscriptions for fixed lines and mobile lines is put at 117 million, with a teledensity of 83 per cent, and it is expected to reach 98 per cent by 2015. By and large, Nigerians have over the years tended to spend reasonable time on

cell phone calls. Irrespective of poor PCI, the ordinary Nigerian wants to remain connected to a GSM network to the extent that even *okada* (commercial motorcyclists) riders charge their phones on their motorcycles while on duty.

Internet use is boundless and is highly entrenched among school children, undergraduates and average Nigerians. It is a limitless world. Currently, it is possible for ordinary individuals to publish anything. And the reach is worldwide. Consequently, this has triggered an argument on whether journalism is, or has come to be a profession manned by trained people who have regard for ethics. Indeed, how can somebody without training freely manage a new site and post information on the Internet for public consumption? This "free to air" publishing style has been enhanced by the system which make it possible to publish anything almost at no fee. Publishing in the past was big business – and it still is – which required large investments. Such investments were managed by big business moguls. Many scarcely rich people who ventured into the business had their tales of misfortunes to narrate in Nigeria. Now, all you need to be a petty publisher who still can reach a worldwide audience surpassing your local newspaper is a computer and Internet connection. To ensure that you meet your dreams to publish, many organizations now offer free server space for web publishing. They can host your personal web site free with a motive of attracting advertisements to their sites.

With the traditional journalism model turned upside down, "journalism by the people" seems to be having a swell time. With a compliant phone, you can watch your favourite satellite channel and listen to high fidelity radio signals on your local FM. You too, can upload your information, and within minutes, could be shared worldwide. For instance, the demonstration in China over the lynching of an African in June 2009 was uploaded on the *Facebook* and was soon a matter of international discussion. All these were impracticable a few decades ago. However this kind of "citizen journalism" has also been a subject of controversy. Such an unprofessional account leaves a lot for conjecture. For instance, on the Internet, some Nigerians have published real or imagined academic records of a Presidential candidate, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari. The veracity of the publications stands challenged till date. Also, a Web account of an African roasted for a barbecue in China was controversial. In any case, these go to show that China has questionable human rights records.

We have seen that journalism is experiencing a renaissance. We are aware of "open source journalism," or "citizen journalism," which describes a process by which the ordinary citizens, acting as amateur journalists without pay, submit information to Web sites such as YouTube and *Facebook*. In addition, social activists have developed robust literature in the social media and this is where they have exercised their powers! If you were an eyewitness, you can as well act as a photojournalist and upload your pictures of Nyanya blast! In Nigeria, free media is thriving and the use of social media is growing. All you need to be an activist on the net is to have a simple compliant smart phone, or a computer and a modem with a valid bundle. Once you log on, and network is all right, you are in control and can remain there as king (Uwakwe, 2015).

Amateur journalism is taking roots, but how professional news managers will adjust to the situation is unclear as the information revolution has not gone full circle. For one, technology has changed the game and traditional journalists know that. So professionals must begin to set practicable adjustments for a more efficient use of the new media. Many scholars agree the Internet is a rapidly evolving mass medium different from the traditional media– radio, television newspapers, and so on, and is busy redefining the old process. In fact, the nature of the Internet has put a question mark on what used to be the traditional features of the mass media and examples abound. First, a single individual can communicate with a large audience – one-to-many model process – which traditionally is the function of an organization, or a corporation. Second, the traditionally delayed feedback has come to be possibly immediate on the Internet. Third, this Internet induced redefinition of the elements of the mass communication process is refocusing attention on issues such as freedom of "expression, privacy, responsibility, and democracy" (Baran, 2002, p. 83).

OVERVIEW OF ICT USE AND CONNECTIVITY

In 2013, there were almost as many mobile-cellular subscriptions as people in the world, with more than half in the Asia-Pacific region (3.5 billion out of 6.8 billion total subscriptions). As global mobile-cellular penetration approaches100% and market saturation is reached, growth rates have fallen to their lowest levels in both developed and developing countries. Mobile-cellular penetration rates stand at 96% globally; 128% in developed countries; and 89% in developing countries (http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Documents/ retrieved August 1, 2015).

Internet users by development level, 2003-2013*, and by region, 2013
In 2013, over 2.7 billion people were using the Internet, which corresponds to 39% of the world's population. In the developing world, 31% of the population is online, compared with 77% in the developed world. Europe is the region with the highest Internet penetration rate in the world (75%), followed by the Americas (61%). In Africa, 16% of people are using the Internet – only half the penetration rate of Asia and the Pacific (http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Documents/ retrieved August 1, 2015).

The gender gap: men and women online, totals and penetration rates, 2013
More men than women use the Internet: globally, 37% of all women are online, compared with 41% of all men. This corresponds to 1.3 billion women and 1.5 billion men. The developing world is home to about 826 million female Internet users and 980 million male Internet users. The developed world is home to about 475 million female Internet users and 483 million male Internet users. The gender gap is more pronounced in the developing world, where 16% fewer women than men use the Internet, compared with only 2% fewer women than men in the developed world. (http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Documents/ retrieved August 1, 2015).

Households with Internet access, 2013

In 2013, 41% of the world's households are connected to the Internet. Half of them are in the developing world, where household Internet penetration has reached 28%. In the developed world, 78% of all households are connected to the Internet. 90% of the 1.1 billion households not connected to the Internet are in the developing world (http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Documents/ retrieved August 1, 2015).

Households with Internet access, by region

Europe and Africa are the regions with the highest and the lowest levels of household Internet penetration, respectively: 77% in Europe, compared with 7% in Africa. The majority of households in the Americas are online (61%), compared with around one third of households in the Arab States and Asia and the Pacific. Between 2009 and 2013, Internet penetration in households has grown fastest in Africa, with annual growth of 27%, followed by 15% annual growth in Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States and the CIS (http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Documents/ retrieved August 1, 2015).

Active mobile-broadband subscriptions, 2007-2013

Mobile-broadband subscriptions have climbed from 268 million in 2007 to 2.1 billion in 2013. This reflects an average annual growth rate of 40%, making mobile broadband the most dynamic ICT market. In developing countries, the number of mobile- broadband subscriptions more than doubled from 2011 to 2013 (from 472 million to 1.16 billion) and surpassed those in developed countries in 2013. Africa is the region with the highest growth rates over the past three years and mobile-broadband penetration has increased from 2% in 2010 to 11 % in 2013 (http://www.itu.int/en/ITUD/Statistics/Documents/ retrieved August 1, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted the survey method. This is because survey method has the ability to measure beliefs, ideas, opinions, attitudes, and behaviours. This method has also the ability to allow for descriptive and inferential analysis and interpretation. The study centres on Federal Polytechnic, Oko Anambra State, Nigeria. The Population comprises students of Information and Communication Technology. A sample of 200 respondents was drawn for the study through random sampling technique. The researcher made use of a questionnaire. The researcher, with the help of research assistants, collected the responses. The data collected by the researcher was presented in tables and analyzed in percentages.

DATA ANALYSIS

From the findings, large numbers of people get information from Internet sources. This is consistent with Ericsson (2015) which holds that eighty two percent of mobile phone users have access to the Internet with their devices on a daily basis. Similarly, forty

five percent of PC users and 44 percent of tablet users, the report said do the same (http://www.vanguardngr.com).

Table 1: *Major Source of news from the media*

	Response	Percentage
TV	21	10.5
Radio	51	25.5
Newspaper	15	7.5
Magazines	9	4.5
Internet	104	52
Total	200	100

Businessday online, July 7 2014, reports that with a population of 170 million, 130 million active lines, 66 million of which are used to access the Internet, Nigeria is the biggest Internet market in Africa. Between 2000 and 2013, Internet penetration grew from a paltry 0.06 percent to 38 percent; teledensity is now 93 percent and there are indications that this trend will continue well into 2020. The site asserts that the country will remain the largest internet market on the continent in the near future because it has a large youth population (one-third of the population is between the 10-24 years age bracket) and a growing middle class (estimated at 23 percent – approximately, 39 million – of the population by Renaissance Capital in 2011). Nigeria has a large number of the two classes of individuals which traditionally drive Internet usage: the middle class and young people (http://*businessday*online.com/2014/07/how-nigerians-use-the-internet-1/ retrieved August 1, 2015).

Way back in 2007, Salako and Tiamiyu (2007) surveyed the use of search engines for research by postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Three hundred and twenty-seven copies of a questionnaire were analyzed and it was found that most of the responding postgraduate students were aware of, and had become familiar with the Internet before the start of their postgraduate courses. On how they learnt to use search engine, more than half of the respondents were taught by friends, less than half learnt to use it by trial and error while a few were taught at a computer school (cited by Fasae and Aladeniyi 2007 on http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/763/, retrieved August 1, 2015)

Table 2: *Gratifications on the Internet*

	Response	Percentage
News/ information	62	31
Academic/research	50	25
Communication/Send email	23	11.5
Entertainment/ Chats	53	26.5
Business/Profit	12	6
Total	200	100

According to Table 2, information and news form the biggest chunk of need for Internet use. This is followed by chats relating to *Facebook* and *whatsup*, etc. This result corroborates with an online survey which captured the behavior of respondents drawn from Lagos, the FCT, Delta, Edo, Ekiti, Imo, Kogi, Ogun and Rivers. Here, the results show that the main reason respondents browse the Internet is to search for information. Other reasons include sending emails and work. As many as 84 percent are online for information gathering purposes, 81 percent use the platform mainly to send e-mails, while 76 percent said it was part of their work tools. Though social media is important to users, only 45 percent of those sampled see it as the major reason why they go online (http://businessdayonline.com/2014/07/how-nigerians-use-the-internet-1/ retrieved August 1, 2015)

Table 3: *Type of access to Internet*

	Response	Percentage
Modem subscriptions and PC	27	13.5
Cybercafés	41	20.5
Mobile handsets subscriptions	132	66
Fixed wireless lines	Nil	0
Wi-Fi/Wireless network	Nil	0
Total	200	100

We conclude from the results in Table 3 that mobile Internet is popular among the users. Users rely more on mobile subscription data for access to the net. This is followed by the use of modem which also attracts subscriptions.

Table 4: *How the Internet is used*

	Response	Percentage
Daily	98	49
1-4 times weekly	64	32
Once a week	22	11
Once a month	16	8
Total	200	200

Results in Table 4 indicate that 49 percent of the respondents log on to the Internet on a daily basis.

Table 5: *Use of information obtained from social media*

	Response	Percentage
Shared among	114	57

friends/relatives on line		
Kept privately	13	6.5
Verbally discussed	63	31.5
Discarded	10	5
Total	200	100

There is the suggestion in Table 5 that users retransmit information to friends and relatives and they also discuss developments verbally. This could account for why information on the Internet spreads rapidly.

Table 6: *Access to mainstream media on the net*

	Frequency	Percentage
TV	48	24
Radio	11	5.5
Newspaper	141	70.5
Magazines	Nil	0
TOTAL	200	100

Table 6 indicates that newspapers have strong online followers. Television also has some followers on the Internet. No respondent confirmed accessing magazine on the Net. Some scholars put the idea of ICT journalism replacing the mainstream media of radio, TV and newspapers to the distant future. This does not mean the challenges against the mainstream media are not there. Mainstream journalists understand this and they aim at reinventing and not being caught off guard.

Thus in Nigeria media convergence is blossoming. Most first rate newspapers have online editions. Even at that, mobile phone news highlights are sent to subscribers every morning. The following creates insight into the situation: What we are going to experience is a shift in newspapers, radio and television business models. Newspapers are already availing their content online and this offers newspaper companies an opportunity to cross-promote their online content with hard copy content (e.g. you click on an online news story and the “read more” link directs you to the hard copy version for a full story). It will also be cost-effective for news makers to update changes, online, when such changes are necessary (i.e. ICT will make it possible to correct and update facts online).
Radio stations are already broadcasting over Internet through streaming audio. This means that the use of ICT will enable broadcasters to reach wider audiences. It also means that listeners will have an opportunity to choose the broadcasting content which appeals to them (i.e. freedom of information consumption)
Television also broadcasts over the Internet , offering the audiences a complete communication package (converged communication solution) (Humbulani Rambau, on http://mediaictrain.blogspot.com/2007/05/death-of-newspapersradiotv-class-debate.html, retrieved August 1 2015).

Table 7: *Relative access to information from the social media*

	Frequency	Percentage

Whatsup	48	24
Facebook	78	39
Twitter	14	7
Yahoo	10	5
Imo	12	6
Personal Blogs	18	9
YouTube	20	10
Total	200	100

Data in Table 7 show that, *Facebook* accounts for the main source of information from the social media. This is an indication that the site is popular among users. This is followed by *whatsup*, and YouTube respectively.

In any case, some studies suggest that when Nigerians go online (predominantly with their mobile phones) they spend much of their time on social media platforms (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and so on). Sending and reading e-mails, reading news and posting research queries have become less important activities for Nigerians.

According to recent studies, Facebook users in Nigeria have increased with over 1.4 million new users representing +83 % change in the last 3 to 6 months. *Facebook* — the major social media platform worldwide and currently the most visited website in most of Nigeria — has seen massive growth on the continent. The number of Nigeria *Facebook* users now stands at over 7 million, up from 6 million in 2009. An online 2013 report puts the figure at over 11million ahead of South Africa with 9.4million users. Egypt is leading the continent with about 16.8million users (http://www.cp-africa.com/retrived August 1 2015). More than 15 per cent of people online in Nigeria are currently using the platform, compared to Asia. Two other social networking websites, Twitter and YouTube, rank among the most visited websites in Nigeria (http://www.sealworld.com.ng/amazing-social-media, retrieved August 1 2015).

The social media platform have proven to be an effective market to reach out to target audience as popular brands, celebrities, the media, politicians have taken advantage to improve on their presence, brand and products.

In Nigeria, *Guranty Trust* Bank with over 1.2 million facebook 'likes', leads as the brand with the highest number of facebook fans, followed by *MTN* Nigeria with 1.1 million *Facebook* fans while *Airtel* Nigeria and *Nokia* Nigeria follow with 609,054 and 529,413, respectively. For celebrities, Pastor Enoch Adeboye leads with over 1.1 million *Facebook* fans, while Omotala Jolade follows with over 1 million fans. Popular Artist Wizkid and Tope Alabi have 663,438 and 539,381 fans, respectively (http://www.sealworld.com.ng/amazing-social-media, retrieved August 1 2015).

SUMMARY

- Even though the Internet has brought some challenges in terms of credible information management, rising number of people are getting Internet connectivity and are making use of it. Thus, the Internet has become a strong medium of information.
- Information and entertainment are greater reasons why users log on to the Internet.
- Access to the Internet is more by cell phones more than other modes such as cybercafé links. Use of Wi-Fi is uncommon.
- In terms of frequency, users put the Internet to great use.
- Information from the Internet is retransmitted among friends online and verbally.
- Newspapers are mostly accessed on the Internet more than any other mainstream media.
- *Facebook* remains a strong social force and the most popular social media among users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The mainstream media in Nigeria should reinvent properly in line with technological changes. Already online editions are a measure in this direction. To ensure minimal loss of profit and continued circulation of hard copies, a tie between the soft copies and hardcopies must be consolidated. The industry must design how the two could play complementary roles.
- Soft editions must find ways of offering sufficient gratifications which online users seek.
- In view of the persisting importance of the social media as medium of information, the mass media should devise ways of benefiting from this dominance.
- It is advocated that an international synergy be formed which should aim at simulating some quality control measures on Internet journalism. In this regard, national, regional and international ethical considerations should be fashioned as a means of fostering more qualitative information dissemination.

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