

An Era of Journalism Transition in South Africa: Traditional Media versus Online Media

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ABSTRACT Reading newspapers and listening/watching news on television is gradually becoming a thing of the past, while attention is shifted to internet media. This has become a trend not only in developed countries but also in developing nations like South Africa. The increase in web visits is a problem that has led to vast decline in newspaper circulation, putting the future of the latter in a state of uncertainty. This paper studied the changes that were brought into journalism in South Africa through web media while the traditional media continue to feel the heat. Media-morphosis and technological determinism are two theories that underpinned this study. Media-morphosis supports the alliance between a current institution and changes that were introduced by new technology, while technological determinism advocates that a societal change is determined by technology. Hence, the traditional media operation could better be promoted by online journalism instead of it being banished, if infrastructure should be provided for media houses.

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception and the spread of internet service, the use of traditional media continues to decline, and thereby nourishing a universal trend of inexorable choice of using internet for disseminating information and news publishing. Consequently, this new style has affected the traditional media banefully and continues to promote e-news and online journalism positively. The development and practice of this new media style is also undeniably evident across developing nations like South Africa where the advent of online media is gradually wiping out the existence of the print media (Nnanyelogo and Nwafor 2013). Following the shift of television broadcast and newspapers to internet, the audience also have shifted their focus to the online news.

Similarly, media houses and journalists have come to realise that embracing this new-fashioned form of media could be the only way of being active and relevant in the race of journalism competition (Eke et al. 2014). This is clearly shown on the account of newspaper organisations migration to the internet. For example, with its online press, the Daily Sun news and City

Press provides the readers both home and abroad the chances of accessing online news as well as interacting with the press via social network where readers can even comment on news through their mobile devices. Most of these online news outfits allow the readers to upload news, reports or events happening in their various environments. In addition, the availability of search engine on the Daily Dispatch website (DispatchLive) allows the readers to quickly retrieve information on the current events. Readers who are fun-lovers also enjoy the services of these online media as most of the press offers dating services. These are praiseworthy advancement, which are occurring in the world of media that made media experts to continue to nurture their commitment for the progress of the fast-growing online journalism in South Africa. From the look of things, this development guarantees a continuous success and survival of online media in the country.

There are over 268 radio stations in South Africa (South African Advertising Research Foundation 2012), majority of which are active on internet, for example Radio SA and University of Cape Town (UCT) Radio provides live streaming programmes on the internet, that en-

ables their listeners to listen and download several programmes (radiosa.org; radio.uct.ac.za/live). Similarly, photo gallery, original videos are few of the enticing features on Algoa FM web, while its presence is maintained on twitter and Facebook respectively; It also provides a feature that allows the audience to share their opinions on sports related news. Television stations have also embraced the acts of transmitting programs on internet. ENCA is also a predominantly news channel which now produces news videos and linked its operation to YouTube. In addition to its frequent presence on twitter and Facebook, its subscribers can also get breaking news via emails.

Online/Digital Media

The digital media (online journalism) is a modern method of journalism that uses the internet technology to disseminate editorial subjects, which differs from the traditional method of press where broadcasting is done via paper printing. Research intellectuals have debated the cause for digital journalism, although current affairs and news which are the chief products of media are usually disseminated in the form of text and audio-visual combination using online media. The extensive adoption of online journalism is attributed to the stress-free access, affordable cost of distribution as well as diversity in computer technology. Unlike the traditional era of journalism, which was dominated by magazines, television, radio and newspapers, online journalism has made information easy and accessible for everyone. More than the traditional media, lots of creative exercises can be performed in the online journalism.

According to Deuze (2013), the hope and strength of online journalism is associated with three main features. Interactivity is the first one which Deuze described as the ability of the online-content readers to respond and interact with the presented news contents. In this case, the online comment section serves as the main instrument. The second feature is multimodality, which means the technical proficiency through which news can be disseminated in multiple form such as into audio, text, video and graphics. Textual content that are static are not multimodality. Hypertextuality is the third feature – a situation where the broadcasting site is able to connect more than one story together

through hyperlinks. Whenever readers are connected to like-materials in same site, or audience are re-directed to other sites that provide relevant information needed, such processes are said to be hypertextual.

Influence of Online Media on its Audience

Connection and discussion in the online media is offered at a level, which printed newspapers cannot offer. There is an avenue for audience to comment after reading a news article, and such comment may lead to a forum of discussion among people who have not met before. This was impossible before the invention of online media. The most amazing aspect of the online journalism is that the audience are able to add to stories and communicate with other readers who are also interested in dialogue. Through this modern method of information dissemination, various opportunities are created for people to choose what they desire to read or view. Its technical components create chances for journalists to produce several media like digital photography, video and audio. It also shows how the society at large consumes news. Faster, accurate and efficient breaking news and reports that narrates actual event occurrences to the users within seconds are provided through online media, which is another loophole in traditional form of journalism.

METHODOLOGY

Traditional Method of Journalism

Habitually, traditional journalism or traditional media are less-technology based press. Simultaneous information dissemination is involved, but audience opinions are not easily gathered due to delay in feedback. A long channel of distribution is involved in the traditional media before vital news can be circulated, resulting to a prolonged news thirst of the audience. This slow-natured media system necessitates change.

In the context of this paper, a significant transformation in appearance or form of journalism is referred to as the change. Media-wise, transformation is tagged “mediamorphosis”; process of news collection, its processing procedures and dissemination method which involve media technology. Fiddler (1997) argued

that the need for a complex relationship between socio-political pressures and technological innovation calls for media transformation.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Academic Framework

Basically, an academic framework (theoretical framework) is a philosophical foundation upon which research is built. As far as this study is concerned, two theories are adopted: mediamorphosis and the theory of technological determinism. Fidler (1997) sees mediamorphosis as a method of unifying evolution of technology in communication media. The concept of complexity, convergence and co-evolution are amples where Fidler fabricated his principle of mediamorphosis. Fidler's (1997) arguments advocate that when new media is emerged, they develop, and the effects gradually become apparent to certain degrees, then the convergence of the former media and the emergent one is crucial for operation enhancement rather than using the latter to displace the former. The mediamorphosis theory acknowledges that like other systems, media spontaneously respond to external pressures.

On the other hand, the philosophy of technological determinism theory is that societal change, and development is made possible through technological advancement while social organizations are also shaped through technology (Chandler 1995). In relation to communication, technological determinists deduce the basis (be it past, present or future) of any society is technology. For instance, television, prints, radio and computers are examples of technology devices that changed the world. With a critical examination, it could be agreed that the world has been transformed by new technologies; this transformation may be at various levels like social interaction level, institution/organization level as well as within or among individuals. Primarily, technology nurtures an extensive collection of cultural and social phenomena, while social arrangement and human factors play the secondary roles (Chandler 1995). The researcher found the two theories appropriate for this paper because of their clarification on how the daily deeds of traditional media has been affected by the online media.

Observations from this study considered some media houses report as evidence on how online media has claimed a vast record against the traditional news even though the latter still exists. Currently, 39 million people – seventy-five percent of South African population accesses news via internet (South African Advertising Research Foundation 2012). This large statistics could signify that the online media forum in South Africa is mostly dominated by youths, because the population of old-aged people (60 years and above) in the country is more than four million (Stats SA 2014) who probably could not access internet but only stick to news papers or listening to news on radio and television. Although, the above results is a proof that online media has gained more subscriptions than the traditional media, yet the its climax has not brought the traditional media to its end but unified the operations because more some people who access news via internet still read news papers, and this was the major argument of the theory of mediamorphosis.

Also, the results connect with the idea of technological determinism theory, which advocates for societal change and development with technological advancement in which social organizations are shaped through such advancement.

The Current Media Site in South Africa

In the advanced communities, news, education, plus other several data are obtained from print and electronic media. Through its vibrant strength to expose detailed documentaries, memories are easily gathered from media. Meanwhile, traditional media have been undermined due to the popularity of online media. The online sources are very interactive and universally accessible, they have become information banks and interaction forums all over South Africa and the entire globe. With this dominant ability of the online media, this paper solicit for the co-existence of online journalism and traditional media.

Consequently, the changing face of communication has provided journalists with modern ways to package and disseminate their stories to the populace. However, most journalists may not have personal access to internet, yet it is accessible in most of their work places, while others visit libraries, internet café as well as media resource cubicles to send emails. Press men also sell their stories to both the local and for-

eign media houses via internet, which have made the world a global village and easeir to explore. While a new form of market is created through the modern journalism, jounalists are now obligated to acquire the modern knowledge and skills like photographic skills, that could enable them to upload digital pictures and other contents online via internet. Researches on particular subject matter are easily done, acronyms are fully defined, writing skills are also improved with the help of internet resources.

There is no doubt that, the espousal of global internet and online media has facilitated the digitalization and conceptualization of this twenty-first century media and lubricating its wheel for a speedy move. For example, magazines, newspapers and journals are becoming interesting, and eased business with the use of word processing and desktop publishing packages like page maker (Agba 2001).

The stress of using old-fashioned manual typewriter for typesetting has been reduced to desktop publishing – using computer and advanced software for the combination of graphics and text for the creation of printable document using laser printer. Cost of magazines and newspapers are reduced and accuracy is enhanced while using computer for layout and printing; the possibility of accurate forming, proofreading, electronic editing, spell checking are most enticing functions of electronic computer that also enhances the means of gathering news and disseminating it.

Similarly, technology convergence has bridged the space between electronic media and print media – news and messages from online sources were transferred into print via electronic devices. Although, Felix (2011) only highlighted the ability of teletex, but nowadays teletex transfer text between teleprompter and teleprinter using computer, media houses and private homes receives data via compatible decoders. For example, a media organization having its headquarters in the Gauteng province, with its branches all over the country can possibly typeset in Gauteng and simultaneously print hardcopies in other provinces. This modern system confirms that we now live in the new era of technology.

In addition, this new era of journalism reflects a ground-breaking ability of world wide web which creates opportuniteis for media organizations and individuals to access, manipu-

late and download a vast hypertext-linked files/ materials from anywhere in the world via internet; advertisement can be made, messages can be sent and received anytime, anywhere at the ease through the use of internet. This could have been the reason behind the notion of Ende and Udende (2001) that the explosion of online media and its incessant offers production of information varieties is the only reason why the world is becoming a global village. This therefore shows that the internet remain the most noticeable device as far as media production is concerned.

As a result, social media has also been spread through the use of internet websites that allows a smooth interaction among people using picture-sharing applications, video and audio calls and other multimedia mix. With these globally recognised websites, millions of online groups have been created, contents have been shared and conversions are freely made among individuals. The following are few of the several online activities: video sharing, image sharing, news sharing and tagging, digital storytelling, data sharing and many more, these activities are usually carried out on websites like twitter, facebook, flicker, badoo, facebook, LinkedIn among several others. These tools are called social networks because the users can communicate among themselves spontaneously, even while they are not in the same geographical locations. Base on that, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argued that it is through the powerful functions of a software application called WEB 2.0 that permits information exchange on social media. People are now mass communicators due to the advent and the usage of online technologies. While moving in the car or sitting in the room, people can communicate, read news and access multitude of information with just a click. The whole universe can get the most recent news just by pressing a button. The social media has been so useful to the public, and that has made its global users to rely heavily on it as it has become a powerful tool for news updates.

Importance of News Redefined

The importance of news has been redefined by online journalism. The combination of political stories, government deeds and public matters is what journalists considered as news in those days. News could be defined in diferent

ways depending on people's opinion and experiences; sport fans could define it as teams scores but it could be information about financial activities when it comes to business. Generally, to all, news is about timely information to the audience but it is now a different case as far as online media is concerned. Nowadays, news are disseminated immediately while the audience expect news every minute as they remain on internet everytime to read and post the latest occurrences in their environment. It has now become an act that news disseminated one hour ago are considered dead news. While the news lines are kept updated every second for twenty-four hours, in most cases it is those who are not internet literates and lack access to internet who still rely upon printed news.

Online Journalism as a Universal Tool

A critical observation on the alliance between media and internet shows that the new style of journalism is universal. With the availability of cell phones, the possibilities of journalists gathering news have been guaranteed, even though it is not possible for some people to assess online news because they have no access to internet.

Summarily, the then traditional journalism dominance has been threatened by the modern technology, competitors and the shifted attention of its audience. The online media users continue to be more active in disseminating news and spreading information with their various high-tech cell phones and several technology-enhanced publishing devices that facilitates internet connectivity. The demand for online news by the audience is increasing because of its efficiency which has rendered the traditional media less significant. It is very interesting that through various links that are provided by online journalism, numerous subject matters have led to national debates.

CONCLUSION

The online audience spend more time using the internet, looking for several information that could make it an obligation for newsmen to provide further information about a particular topic. Unlike the traditional news, online news offers more than readable text but also provides information in the form of colourful pictures and vid-

eo clips. Internet offers a multimedia podium for journalists to upload audio, video and data relating to a subject matter. This is because one of the objectives of online media is to capture its users' attention globally in a broader sense.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The strength of online journalism lies in the process of truth-validation which was lacking in the traditional media system. Therefore, the researcher suggests that, media houses should strive to sustain and promote their online sites; staffs must be trained on the proper usage of the internet; all branches of media houses should have access to internet for carrying out efficient tasks that will place them above their competitors.

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