

Internet and Change in Newspaper Production, Distribution and Marketing: the Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

It is no longer argued that the Internet is related to changing pattern of newspaper production, marketing and distribution because there are considerable changes in the industry over the years. What then are consequences of these changes? What will happen to publishing industry as a result of the Internet? This study looks at the internet as an agent of change in the media industry in general, and in particular newspaper. It showcases the centrality of the internet in terms of its application by human beings in relation to the oversimplification of work. Specifically however, the work attempts to look at the internet as an agent associated with great changes that affect newspaper production, marketing and distribution. It uses two national dailies from Nigeria to identify major changes the internet has brought in production, marketing and distribution of information, its implications and possible further trends that may arise and equally what the future holds for the newspaper industry. The justification for selecting the developing country is that, while the new media revolution assists many developed countries to keep pace with the popularity of the internet, it still makes other nations fall further behind. The study employs New Media theory and the idea of Functional Displacement as theoretical framework. It suggests that the old media need to struggle hard and survive the stiff competition by harnessing the benefits of the new technologies.

Keywords: Change, Internet, Technology, Revolution, Production, Marketing, Functional Displacement, New Media.

Background to the Study

The revolution of media technology and the growing popularity of the Internet alongside computer application are greatly helping some media industries in their bid to keep pace with the current developments. However, this new trend is making it interesting for leading commentators to engage in argument about changes associated with the internet. The argument began right from the debut of the internet. This revolution seems to be taking place in a globalizing economy and society that further changes in a dynamic way.

The internet is basically, seen as an agent that has contributed immensely toward compounding the challenges of communicating about emerging trends in journalism activities. These activities include production, marketing and distribution of mediated information. Hence, the internet has also further brought a lot of changes in newspaper production, marketing and distribution.

In a way, the metamorphosis of technology has brought a lot of features that have shaped the world at different points in time; but, the most prominent among the changes of technology is the internet revolution, which has completely changed the way people perform both their public and private activities. Different areas of human life are touched by the internet revolution as an agent of change; media are not excluded then, in this regard. It is anticipated that the outcome of this study would be some set of summarised findings, suggestions or recommendations based on the presumed answers to the following questions:

1. What are the areas affected by the internet in the newspaper production process - from newsgathering, editing, to the point of printing work?
2. To what extent has the application of the internet brought changes in activities of the newspapers selected?
3. What will the future of the newspaper and printing in general look like maybe, in the next 10 years or so?

An attempt towards answering these and more pertinent questions will clearly show how the internet becomes a major agent of change or associated with the major changes in the production, marketing and distribution of newspaper information over the years. For the purpose of convenience and the need to narrow down the topic to a manageable scope, this study chooses to limit its findings within newspaper medium, because distribution of information may seem very broad and wide. In terms of literature, this work employs both primary and secondary sources of data in order to arrive at a desired confluence. Similarly, it is imperative to clearly state that, the piece adopts *New Media Theory* and the idea of *Functional Displacement* as approaches in an effort to situate the study within a suitable theoretical framework.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Internet, Scope and Application in Media Activities

The internet is a system of communication using a network of computers, says Dominick (2009), arguing further that there is no single internet company just like there is no single telephone company. This in essence means the information flow using the internet is handled by different companies for service delivery to the customers.

The internet has a wide range of applications, which according to Dominick include e-mail, World Wide Web, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, etc. Nevertheless, three of the more popular features Dominick mentions are the e-mail, newsgroups, and the World Wide Web. In fact, the wide range of internet application has resulted in major changes in media activities and the society in general.

The internet, therefore, as an agent of change has changed the process of production, marketing and distribution in the newspaper industry. It also, has made the traditional production process less relevant or entirely unnecessary. Likewise, marketing and distributing of the newspaper information. For example feedback is normally delayed in Mass Media but, is direct and immediate through the internet. Another leading commentator in Mass Communication studies, McQuail (2007:539) opines that with the internet as agent of change 'it is possible to exclude many editorial controls and gate-keeping in the production, marketing and distribution of mass mediated messages.'

Meanwhile, Baran (2002) describes the internet as a form of communication system which is different from the traditional systems of communication. This means that with the internet, one person can instantly communicate with audiences and receive feedback quickly. Similarly, the internet has brought proliferation of different publications pasted on the Net for public consumption. It also, opens up several sources of information for users. In a bid to summarise the major changes brought by the internet in the media sphere, Chase (1997) says that the internet enables newspapers in particular to reach a wider audience, expand on news coverage, break news with speed, interact with audiences, and customize news to audience needs.

In addition, according to McQuail (2007:539) the presence and availability of the many products is made easier by the information revolution; likewise, 'in principle and practice, with internet, people may have ability to arrange their supply by entering into different internet networks to obtain, supply and exchange information of all kind,' (McQuail *ibid*: 539)

Commenting on living in the global village, Williams (2003: 213) observes that: 'since the early 1980s there has been an unparalleled growth and rise of the media and that media programmes are consumed all over the world.' Williams further argues that it is not because more media have proliferated. He however posits: 'the internet and other forms of digital communication are compressing time and space.' Putting this together Williams arguably says that 'the world is compressing.' The internet as an agent of change has made it possible for radio listeners to tune into different stations around the globe. For example Chantler and Stewart (2003) explain that in UK, many national, regional and local radio outfits send their programmes using the internet to be heard by millions of listeners all over the world.

Speaking from the same point of view, Huber and Runstein (2005) admit that the internet as an agent of change has eased research, describing the internet as: 'another mover and shaker of everyday life.' Nevertheless, Huber and Runstein (2005), found it harder to make prediction specifically 'in this fast-paced world' of internet revolution.

The internet major changes have already begun and made a lot of things in human behaviour and activities depend on it, so the greatest concern may also be in respect of intellectual and media property right which simply put means the necessity for

copyright protection: the fact that it only took a few seconds to copy a file, the intellectual copyright of songs, video, photographs, poems, books, or programmes and above all newspaper has a cost that must be acknowledged or paid for, (Library and Information Technology Association.

Theoretical Framework

Functional displacement according Anaeto et al (2003) explain that it is an idea which suggests the struggle for up - starting media industries to reap enormous profits on one hand, and on the other hand, the efforts of the old media to gain control of the new technologies. In this context, functional displacement is related to this piece whereby, the internet is seen as the up-starting medium that poses great challenges to the conventional system of information dissemination. In an effort to keep pace, the old media strive to have control of their relevance, since the new media try to render old media systems irrelevant. While in terms of new media, Ward (1989: 194) rightly argues that the new media technologies made television sets become not only the receivers of broadcast visual of entertainment and news but were also connected to video recorders and computers, becoming new media of domestic entertainment that hampers newspaper production, marketing and distribution. In relation to this essay, the internet could be described as a new medium of communication that can be used to simplify what earlier used to be difficult in terms of information dissemination in the society.

Summary of Results and Discussion

Relevant data were obtained from newspaper correspondents and editors in Nigeria regarding the major changes associated with internet and other new media through in-depth interviews. The data come from a field work that covers opinion and views of working journalists in Kaduna, Sokoto and Kano. They were majorly contacted at both their organisations and at Nigeria Union of Journalist, state chapters. From their responses, it has been discovered that mostly they use the new facilities offered by the internet in their activities.

Likewise, the least among the newspapers in Nigeria that have been applying the internet and facilities offered by the new media spent nothing less than five year using them. There is therefore, great change according to majority of them in their various newspapers as a result of the use of the internet. The responses of the respondents on the areas affected by the new media technologies can be summarized thus:

1. The internet has facilitated communication between reporters and editors, while paper design and pictures have improved;
2. The use of the internet facilities has really assisted in ensuring the dissemination of information;
3. Production process is faster than before, because the old technologies were more time-consuming; the newspaper layout is now more beautiful and more appealing;
4. Writing, and gathering reports are fast and more accurate;

5. In terms of newsgathering for instance, there is accuracy and updating, effective reportage and turning the larger world into a global village;
6. In the past years, reporters sent their stories to their editors through fax machines, landlines, road transportation but, now they send their stories through the internet with available facilities provided at their disposal in their branch offices;
7. The newspaper industry is now more vibrant, effective, while the production is faster, there is also increase in readership;
8. Online printing, online collation of stories from correspondents are all possible with the internet;
9. Filing of reports without hitch;
10. Fast sending of newspaper's end product, that reaches the public in good time;
11. There is reduction in delay and cost;
12. Use of the internet enables organizations to get enough news and other materials;
13. No time for cross-checking facts; only few hands are required to work instead of large number of people (workforce reduced);
14. Wire service providers largely rely on the internet to extend their service to their clients, for example News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) extends services to over 300 clients in Nigeria and others;
15. The entire job made easy as reporters can easily file in their stories and the paper can be printed simultaneously in different locations;
16. The new media technologies have revolutionized the art of newsgathering and dissemination with an overall resultant improvement in the way information is consumed;

The internet has brought global changes in terms of printing, colour separation, themes and the improvement in networking etc.

In the past, newspapers used difficult system and large equipment that occupy space and very difficult to handle such as lithographic machines, large computers, photo-enlargers, typewriters, hand-composition (known as longhand) etc.

The respondents mostly agree that there are no problems in terms of applications of the internet. Meanwhile, they also submit that their various newspapers have to a great extent experienced major changes in the process of production, layout and designs, distribution, summarily:

1. Newspaper industry has greatly improved in terms of layouts and designs;
2. Improved in all of the newspaper process – production, distribution and marketing;
3. The internet has assisted on process of production;
4. Wire services are extended to all the newspaper industries through internet and there is no need for personal contact.

However, some of the correspondents who share their belief, believe that some stories are not correct but, because everybody wants to be first with news, mistakes usually occur. However, the internet has greatly enhanced sending products to designated sales outlets, sending products to vendors for direct sales to readers reaching the end users.

Production costs in other words, had increased despite the fact that the internet had modernized the industry. The internet also made distribution and circulation excellent and general improvement in advertising and revenue generation. Most of the correspondents concur that the internet has no threats to the future survival of newspaper, despite stiff competition from various media outlets. As a result of the need to compete favorably, most newspapers have online edition which might pose threat to the print copy because it is not everything one can get from the online edition.

In a way, there is a challenge in maintaining the online edition as a result of the need for updating it regularly. Particularly in Nigeria, therefore, most of the newspaper correspondents fear that the main challenges of the internet may include:

1. Network problem;
2. Power failure;
3. Last minute replacement of stories, which is why production is most of the time delayed;
4. Stories that are highlighted online may not necessarily appear on the print edition for that day;
5. Fast assembling of reports or stories before others which can lead to avoidable errors;
6. Non-sales of hardcopies, low sales;
7. Limited revenue generation;
8. Time factor in sending bulletins into the internet;
9. Lack of technological know-how by many reporters; leads to high cost of maintaining the internet;
10. There is continuity as a challenge, for example, one of the national dailies in Nigeria namely New Nigerian was offline from 2004 up till around 2008 before picking up again;
11. Timeliness, justifiability, readership, feedback are all affected in some ways;
12. Getting people to subscribe;
13. Problem associated with updating stories online; there is cost involved with updating the newspaper content regularly.

Conclusion

In essence, the internet is assumed to be an agent for change as it makes things simple and easier than before in the media industry. The changes are also seen in all facets of human endeavour such as academia, government, private sector and even in the media. Consequently, this paper looks at the internet as an agent of change in society with a particular reference to the media activities of some selected areas in the north. It identifies internet as associated with major changes in terms of production, marketing and

distribution of information most especially based on various arguments by leading commentators. Most significantly, the paper reveals that so many changes are noticeable in the way journalists carryout their media work subsequent to the application of the internet.

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