



Knowledge and Use of Facebook for News Gathering and Reporting among Members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Ebonyi State Chapter

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ABSTRACT

Background: The advent of social media has revolutionised the way people consume news, with Facebook being one of the most popular platforms. In Nigeria, Facebook has become an essential tool for news gathering and dissemination. The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Chapter, comprises professional journalists who play a critical role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. However, the shift from traditional news sources to online platforms poses challenges and opportunities for journalists. Facebook, with its vast reach and accessibility, offers journalists a unique platform to gather and share news. Yet, the effectiveness of Facebook as a news gathering tool among Nigerian journalists remains understudied.

Objective: This study investigates the knowledge and use of Facebook for news gathering among members of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Ebonyi State Chapter. The research aims to bridge the knowledge gap by exploring the extent to which journalists in Ebonyi State utilize Facebook for news gathering, the benefits and challenges they encounter, and the implications for journalism practice in Nigeria.

Method: The survey research design was adopted. The study was anchored on the Uses and gratification theory. The population of the study was 245 NUJ correspondents in Ebonyi State. The entire population was used as the sample size because it was manageable. The researcher used structured questionnaire to elicit responses from the respondents. The instrument was validated by experts in Department of mass communication. Frequency table and percentage were used to analyze gathered data.

Results: There was high level of knowledge and use of social media for news gathering and reporting among Journalists in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Conclusion: The conclusion of this study is that there is high online presence of Journalists in Ebonyi State, Nigeria on Facebook and they use the platform for news gathering and reporting.

Unique Contribution: This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on social media and journalism, providing fresh insights into the experiences of Nigerian journalists in Ebonyi State. Hopefully, the findings would be found useful in journalism practice, journalism education, and journalism policy.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that media outlets in Ebonyi State and beyond, should consciously through periodic trainings, equip their journalist with knowledge and tools for fact-checking social media generated news, to be able to separate fake from authentic social media news, particularly, the Facebook.

Keywords: Facebook, Modern Journalists, Fake News, Fact-Checking, NUJ.



INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media has changed the way people consume and disseminate news, transforming the journalism landscape. Facebook, with over 2.7 billion monthly active users globally, has become a very vital tool for news gathering and dissemination. In Nigeria, Facebook has become a vital platform for journalists to gather and share news. Facebook is a social networking site that makes it easy for individual to connect and share information with public, family and friends online. This network tools have impacted in promoting the work of journalist in the country, Users gets messages from the masses, without visiting a particular person's profile. By following other users, people automatically receive messages on their own Facebook home pages as communicate by those they are following. Even though some Facebook accounts are kept private, and some users require that they offer approval to people who wish to follow them, messages exchanged on this microblog are public by default, thus everyone can read and comment on a Twitter message (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media which are a form of electronic communication have become the highest activity on the internet. They refer to social networking websites developed which specifically help people to share their views and stay in touch with friends, relatives and well-wishers. Social media represents a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information content which brought about democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into content publishers. Collaborating (Barros 2009) observes that social media are internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, using a multi-media mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio.

Facebook was first introduced in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg while he was a student at Harvard University; it grew up rapidly about 2007. At first Facebook was solely for college and high school students, but Zuckerberg opened it to everyone, it encourages all types of member postings (Lauren 2010). Apart from Facebook platform, there are other platforms through which information can be shared, they include; Twitter, Youtube, BlackBerry Messenger, Flickr, Wordpress, Blogger, Badoo, Live Journal, Wikipedia, type Pad, Second Life, Lulu, and many others. All these social media appear in many forms including blogs and microblogs, forums and message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual works, social bookmarking, tagging and news, writing communities, digital storytelling and scrapbooking, data, content, image, video sharing, podcast portals, and collective intelligence (Chaney, 2009).

Journalism on the other hand is the deliberate and conscious efforts to gather information, collating and analyzing data for the purpose of informing, educating and entertaining the people with a view of making an appropriate decision (Chang, 2010). Journalism is also an investigation and reporting of events, issues and trends to a large audience. Though there are many variation of journalism, the ideal is to inform intended audience, about topics ranging from governments and business organizations to cultural aspects of society such as arts and entertainment. The field of journalism include; editing, photojournalism and documentary. Parr (2010) notes that the dominant focus in earlier studies of new media and journalism has been technologically themed based on the argument that new content is crucially determined by the available technology. There is no doubt



that technological innovation driven by internet technology pose a challenge to journalism profession. However, the rise of internet technology offers a platform for transformation, as new possibilities provided by the internet lend credibility to content. Hence, the importance of the internet as a news-gathering instrument is no longer questioned, since news accuracy is backed by new technology. This study addresses two key questions: Would the new technology improve the overall quality of news and the ensure credibility of the system? Earlier studies suggest that differences occur between journalists in terms of how, and to what extent, they use the Facebook in their daily work. While this has changed the daily practice of journalists but, are journalists positive about the changes brought about by the Facebook?

The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Ebonyi State Chapter, comprises professional journalists who play a critical role in shaping public opinion and disseminating information. However, the shift from traditional news sources to online platforms poses challenges and opportunities for journalists. This study investigated the knowledge and use of Facebook for news gathering among NUJ members in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of knowledge of Facebook's features and functionalities among NUJ members in Ebonyi State?
2. What is the level of use of Facebook for news gathering and reporting among NUJ members in Ebonyi State?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Evolution of Social Media (Facebook)

Social media have evolved through Web 2.0, a term coined to describe a new wave of Internet innovation that enables users to publish and exchange content online (Ofose 2010). Social media encompass a wide range of electronic forums, including blogs, microblogs (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), creative work-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), business networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn), collaborative websites (e.g., Wikipedia), and virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life). Among these social media, social networks and microblogs are the most popular, accounting for 22.7% of all time spent online in the United States AC Nielsen (cited in Ofose 2010).

According to Kur (2004, p. 283) Web 2.0 is the idea of a second-generation Internet that is highly participatory, allowing users to improve it as they use it. Social media contents are primarily written and published by their users and not owners or employees of the site. For instance, most adverts, videos and pictures on Facebook and Twitter are uploaded by visitors of the sites. Jenkins et. al (cited in Shepherd: 2009) observe that Web 2.0 has been growing tremendously as it facilitates the production and dissemination of information, allows for the involvements in participatory culture to share individual expressions or creations and bring people with similar



interests and goals to connect with each other on blogs, social networking sites and others (Ezike, Nwafor, & Imezue, 2016; Aligwe, Nwafor, Nweze, 2016).

Few years ago, websites were quite static and passive. There was no much interaction going on as they were mostly corporate websites. The only way an individual could participate online was to send an email or form to the owners or web master of the website and hope that they would get back to him. This type of arrangement was called Web 1.0, referred to as “first generation Web where users generally consumed content. The audience went to web pages and looked at content provided by the website owner”. But today, users have become producers which mean that they simultaneously consume and produce information. Amaefule (2011:26) explains that the first exploitation of the potential of the social media specially to spread a candidate’s message, gain support and get the public engaged was through the 2008 presidential campaign by the then Senator Barack Obama who eventually became American president. The Obama campaign reached five million people on 15 different social media platforms. As at November 2008, Obama had approximately 2.3 million Facebook supporters; 115,000 Twitter followers and 50 million viewers of his YouTube videos (Nyasha, & Nwafor, 2015).

Facebook is a social network for connecting people with those around them- friends, family, coworkers, or simply others with similar interests. Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 alongside his roommates and fellow computer science classmates Eduardo Saverin, Austin Maskovitz and Chris Hughes at Harvard University in the U.S (Locke cited in Amy 2010:15). Initially, Facebook membership was restricted to Harvard students but later extended to other colleges in Boston and Stanford University all in the U.S. “Since 2006, Facebook has expanded beyond Harvard to other schools, corporations, businesses and any user across the world”.

Zuckerberg, cited in (Nweze, 2009) explains that advertising on Facebook is an opportunity for companies to reach their exact audience and connect real customers to their business. Facebook allow users to connect and share information in a variety of ways. Facebook allow users to post photos, videos and customize their profile content. Facebook has added a number of features over the past few years, including instant messaging/chat and apps (and their developer platform). Users communicate with one another through different methods, for instance, private messaging as well as writing on another user’s wall. Wall posts are visible to that user’s friends, but usually not to the general public. Users can also change their privacy settings to allow different users to see different parts of their profile, based on any existing relationships (the basic privacy settings are “only friends”, “friends of friends”, and “everyone”). Users can post notes that are visible to all of their friends. Users can also comment on or, more recently, “like” the posts of their friends, and conversations often occur within the comment sections among multiple people (Nwafor, Odoemelam, & Chibuwe, 2014).

Facebook pages are online location for businesses, organizations, public figures, entertainers, professionals of all types and individuals with the intention of marketing themselves to the Facebook community. Facebook Pages provide a powerful set of online tools for engaging with customers (or, as they are called in Facebook, fans). Every day, 3.5 million people become fans of a Facebook Page. According to eMetric’s February 2009 Facebook Usage Metrics Worldwide Study, although popular consumer brands enjoy large installed fan bases, smaller brands,



business-to-business (B2B) companies, consultants, and personalities can also build a loyal following by using Facebook Page (Dunay & Krueger2010:27). He notes further that if Facebook were a country, it would be the sixth most populated nation in the world. This is because the site has grown to be perhaps the most popular all over the world with a user base of over 660 million (Amaefule 2011, p. 20). The number of users continues to grow steadily. Tyler (2010, p. 3) explains that there are currently 1.7 billion Internet users worldwide, almost 57% of them have joined a social network, 66% of all Internet users visit social networks, Facebook is used more than 80 million hours daily and that close to 15million photos, wall posts, links, news, notes etc. are shared on Facebook every day.

According to Ofose, (2010) about 39.6 percent of all Internet traffic from Africa is from Nigeria and 29.8 percent of the population access the Internet. As at 2009, there were 30 million Nigerians on Facebook. Of this figure, 67% were males while 33% were females. These figures have changed since then. Lagos alone now has about two million subscribers to Facebook (Ogunbayo, 2011, p. 44). Supporting the above, Solaja and Odiaka (2010, p. 32) state that “such a large population naturally offers a good basis for the adoption of the platforms for marketing purposes”. Facebook offers targeted communication initiative to select customers groups for product development as well as service enhancement and also be able to engage their customers and non-customers on platforms they are comfortable with while recovery real-time feedback on what they have to say about their brand, products and services (Wmworia (2010, February 11). In Nigeria, President Goodluck Jonathan boasts of the highest fan base with 97,000 Nigerian Facebook users. Both local and international brands would consider placing an ad on the presidents Facebook fan page as traffic to the site is unbelievably high Adebija (cited in Ofose 2010, p. 4). Chiang (2011) explains that visitors increased by 1,382, to 7 million in February 2009, up from 475,000 in February 2008, “making it the fastest growing social media site for that month” (McGiboney, 2009).

Empirical Review

Nielsen (2010) conducted a study on Advertising Effectiveness through Facebook influence. Understanding the Value of a Social Media Impression,” analysed data from over 800,000 Facebook users and more than 125 Facebook ad campaigns across 70 different brands. This study used 3 criteria to determine the value of ad campaigns on Facebook; Brand Awareness, Purchase Intent and Ad Recall and also determined how paid media, “earned” and peer-to-peer advocacy contribute to ad campaigns. Nielsen defined “Earned Media” as advertising that is shared among friends and beyond. Nielsen looked at 14 Facebook ad campaigns that used “Become a Fan” as the engagement point, or call to action, and then determined the effectiveness in 3 ways: Lift from a standard Homepage Ad, Lift from Homepage Ads with Social Context and Lift from Organic Ads. The study showed some great insights regarding how peer-to-peer advocacy and recommendations affect social media ad campaigns. The findings revealed that people who viewed ads with social contexts had higher response rates than people who viewed the same ads without social context. Ad recall grew from 10% to 16%, awareness doubled from 4% to 8%, purchase intent jumped from 2% to 8%. The result proved that social media users had a direct impact on other users when it comes to ads, and that social media are fast and effective way to advertise products or services (Brooke 2010).



In another study, “The State of Small Business Report,” sponsored by Network Solutions, LLC and the University of Maryland’s Robert H. Smith School of Business, the study results showed that social media usage by small business owners increased from 12% to 24% in just the last year, and almost 1 out of 5 actively uses social media as part of their marketing strategy. Here is a breakdown of what the small businesses reported as the main uses of social media marketing. 75% have a company page on a social networking site. 69% post status updates or articles of interest on social media sites, 57% build a network through a site such as LinkedIn, 54% monitor feedback about the business, 39% maintain a blog, 26% tweet about areas of expertise and 16% use Twitter as a service channel. According to the study, different industries are adopting social media marketing at different rates, and while many industries have started using social media marketing in their efforts to reach more customers, many still have not positioned it as their top priority. The work also measured small businesses expectations of social media. While 58% feel that social media “met expectations,” 12% feel it has “exceeded expectations,” while 25% feel social media have “fallen short of expectations”. Some of the reasons given by respondents for social media’s shortfalls were that, 50% of the respondents feel that social media have used up more time than expected. 19% believe social media have lost them money while 17% feel that social media have allowed people to criticise their business (Porterfield 2010).

Another study by Invoke Solutions reveals that active social networkers find benefits of social media use beyond just staying connected with friends and family. Active social networkers say an important driver of social media use is sharing and gathering information and learning about new products. 63% of the respondents said that sharing information with network is very or somewhat important, 59% explained that gathering information from network is very or somewhat important, while 58% said that to learn about new products is very or somewhat important.

Given that active social media users are looking for information about products and brands online, how well do they think companies are leveraging social media to these ends? The study revealed a room for improvement, with 46% saying that companies are not doing well using social media to listen to customers. 46% said companies are not doing well using social media to deliver better customer service. 50% said companies are not doing well using social media to learn about unmet customer needs.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopted the Uses and Gratification theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory was propounded in 1974 by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch. “The theory was developed to explain why audiences do not passively wait for media messages to arrive, but actively and deliberately seek out forms of content that provide them with information that they need, like and use. Folarin (2005: 65) observes that the theory perceives the recipient of media messages as actively influencing the effect process, he selectively chooses, attends to, perceives and retains the media messages on the basis of his needs and beliefs.



This implies that “members of the public will actively select and use specific forms of media content to fulfil their needs and to provide gratifications of their interests and motives Defleur & Dennis (1994).

The uses and gratifications perspective takes the view of the media consumer. It examines how people use the media and the gratification they seek and receive from their media behaviours. Uses and gratifications researchers assume that audience members are aware of and can articulate their reasons for consuming various media content (Wimmer and Dominick 2003: 403). Consequently, when applied to this study, social media allow for participation as they give the advertisers and customers the opportunity to interact with each other on a one-on-one basis. The implication is that business organisations or entrepreneurs who use social media are active as they willingly create their Facebook page account. The business organisation chooses social media as a means to fulfil their wants and goals over other sources. Basically, the business organisation/entrepreneur sign up an account on Facebook for a particular purpose. That is, the need to connect with customers to promote a product/service. For other users, it could be the need to connect interpersonally with friends or the need to patronise a product/ service advertised on those social platforms or just to know an organisation they are interested in the better. The assumption is that those who decide to patronise adverts on Facebook may be doing so because of the gratification they hope to derive from those messages. While those who do not patronize the messages, may not have seen any gratification in the messages. Debatin, Lovejoy & Horn (2009:87) explain that social media users are found to expose higher risk-taking attitudes than individuals who are not members of an online network. It can therefore be assumed that the expected gratification motivates the users to provide and frequently update very specific personal data that most of them would immediately refuse to reveal in other contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

The design used for this study is survey research design. Survey design technique are used to gather contemporary data either by direct measurement or by solution from others. Survey is a form of descriptive research that studies both large and small population, it studies a group of people, considered to be representative of the entire group.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Ebonyi State which is located at the South-East geo- political zone of Nigeria. The state has thirteen local government areas. The State is known as the ‘Salt of the Nation’, named after its extensive, huge salt deposits located at the Okposi and Uburu Salt Lakes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015). The State shares territorial boundaries in the north with Benue State, in the west with Enugu State, in the east with Cross River State and south with Abia State. Ebonyi State lies approximately within longitude 7^o30’ and 8^o 30’E, with latitude 5^o 40’ and 6^o 45’N. Ebonyi state has many radio stations operating in the state.



Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised two hundred and forty-five (245) registered members of Nigeria Union of Journalism Ebonyi State Chapter. (Source: NUJ Office Ebonyi State, 2022).

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

No sampling techniques was adopted because of the small nature of the population, the whole population were studied. A sample size according to Nwodu (2006) is part of the entire population that is selected for investigation. The sampling is one of the fundamental strategies in survey research.

Validity of Instrument

After construction and critical study of the questionnaire. It was passed to the experts for proper modifications of the questionnaire.

Reliability of the Instrument

For the objective of this study, test and retest method were used to test the reliability of the data collectively, questions were given to the respondents and after a week the same questions were given to the same respondents. The first set of questionnaires was served to their respondents were marked „X“ while the second set of the questionnaire were marked „Y“. The correlation, see two answers were determined by using co-efficient correlation to arrive at the degree of liability of two set answers from the selection.

Method of Data Collection

Data was collected using the questionnaire which the researcher administered face to face to the respondents. Out of 45 questionnaires to the respondents, total copies were collected. This represented a response rate of 100%.

Method of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data collected tables and responses were grouped and their percentage was calculated. Research questions were answered and analyzed using responses from respondents.



RESULTS

Research Question One: Do journalists in Ebonyi State are exposed to Facebook networking tools?

Table 1: Responses as Regard to whether journalists in Ebonyi State are exposed to Facebook networking tools

Option	respondents	percentage
Yes	185	75.5
No	60	24.5
Total	245	100

Source Data: Field Analysis, 2023.

Table 1 above shows that majority of respondents are in agreement that journalist in Ebonyi State are exposed to Facebook networking.

Research Question Two: Do journalists in Ebonyi State utilizes Facebook networking tools in their news duties?

Table 2: Responses as Regard to whether journalists in Ebonyi State utilizes Facebook networking tools in their news duties

Option	Respondents	percentage
Yes	154	62.9
No	91	37.1
Total	245	100

Source Data: Field Analysis, 2023.

The Table 2 above agrees with research question two that journalists in Ebonyi State utilized Facebook networking tools in their news duties; this is evidence as only 62.9% of the persons who responded that they effective utilized factbook while the remaining 37.1% of persons who responded no indicating that journalists in Ebonyi State do not utilizes Facebook networking tools in their news duties.

Table 3: Responses as regard whether Facebook enhanced the productivity of journalists in Ebonyi State

Option	respondents	percentage
Yes	150	61.22
No	95	38.77
Total	245	100

Note. Source Data: Field Analysis, 2023.

The above Table 3 further buttressed the fact that Facebook enhanced the productivity of journalists in Ebonyi State; this is reflected in the presentation above as 61.22% of respondents



agrees that Facebook enhances productivity of journalists in Ebonyi State while 38.77% do not now adherents indicating that Facebook does not enhanced the productivity of journalists in Ebonyi State.

DISCUSSION

Findings show that majority of the respondents agreed that journalists in Ebonyi State are exposed to Facebook networking tools. It is important to note that the level of media practitioners' knowledge and exposure on Facebook media is relatively high, Information and Communications Technology, and the various media that publish information relating to journalism profession is quiet encouraging. A Facebook page improves a company's search engine rankings. This is made possible because, Facebook pages are publicly available to everyone, (personal profiles can also be made available to public search engines via search engine privacy, regardless of whether the viewer is a Facebook member or not. This last point is important because public availability of Facebook pages means that search engines, such as Google, can find and index these pages, often improving a company's positioning in search results. In line with the findings Amy (2010) opined that Facebook Pages are used by brands and are equivalent to user profiles. A page is the location on the site where entrepreneurs/companies write all about themselves. Some of the most powerful social targeting features become useful when such companies have a large number of Page members or users".

The findings also revealed that journalist in Ebonyi State utilized Facebook networking tools in carrying out news duties. Based on the high percentage recorded, it implies that Facebook devices are effectively utilized, thereby providing a basis on which media professionals may engage in their practices. Sandberg (2010) assert that on Facebook, people do everything from remembering their friends' birthdays to reuniting with old classmates. This gives individuals the chance to connect to the companies and brands they like and learn more about their products and services. Online media enable businesses and other organizations to nurture and develop relationships with their customers and other stakeholders, in a way never before available on a global scale at very efficient cost".

Findings also indicates that Facebook enhanced the productivity of journalists'. This implies that many media practitioners in Ebonyi State are influence positively in carrying out their normal journalism duties and this increase their productive. According to (Zarella & Zarella, 2011), Facebook pages are publicly available to everyone, (personal profiles can also be made available to public search engines via search engine privacy), regardless of whether the viewer is a Facebook member or not. This last point is important because public availability of Facebook pages means that search engines, such as Google, can find and index these pages, often improving a company's positioning in search results. Facebook Pages are used by brands and are equivalent to user profiles.



CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this paper, it was concluded that employment of online Facebook networking organizing instruments has made journalistic exercises less demanding and acceptable for reporters, even though some reporters still require the fundamental computer training to enable them to embrace and familiarize themselves with online networking organizing instruments, the dominant parts of journalist are utilizing the online networking organizing devices. These have colossally improved their journalistic abilities and emphatically impacted their journalistic exercises. The findings of this study demonstrates that an extraordinary number of reporters in Nigeria have admittance to the web and are presented to online networking organizing apparatuses and larger part of writers in Nigeria favor Facebook as their systems administration devices for various reasons, one of which was its wide scope. Based on the findings, the study recommended that: Modern Technologies should be made available to media practitioners for effective discharge of their duties. Journalists ought to conduct research on the accessible online networking organizing apparatuses to check which one of them is more dependable and solid, keeping in mind the end goal to guarantee the validity of sources. Additionally, institutions, media associations, press bodies, and the government ought to provide facilities for preparing and retraining of reporters on the new media and Information Communication Technology (ICTs) with a specific end goal to guarantee demonstrable skill and offer of professionalism and good services to modern media consumers.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants of this study, which were members of Nigerian Union of Journalists, Ebonyi State Chapter. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest

There was no conflict of interest.

Authors Contributions

Ajiogu James Egbeoku, conceived the study, including the design, Dr, Sam Nwamini and Dr. Blessing Ewa-Ibe joined him in collecting the data, Anayo Chukwu analyzed and interpreted the data, while Ajiogu James E. and, Dr, Sam Nwamini and Dr. Blessing Ewa-Ibe wrote the initial manuscript. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication in its current form.

Availability of data and materials.

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.



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