Influence of Online Journalism on News Reach in Kenya

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Abstract
Online journalism is a type of journalism practised through digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo, Google, websites and blogs. It has transformed traditional journalism by enabling media practitioners to propagate news in real time to their audiences. However, online journalism and news access has not received enough research. This study sought to investigate the extent to which digital journalism platforms influence news access in Kenyan universities. The study employed descriptive research design. The target population of the study was 63,817. Random sampling was used to sample 381 respondents from the sampled four universities. Data was collected using a questionnaire. The data gathered was analyzed using descriptive statistics using statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.0. Frequencies and percentages were used for analysis. The study established that digital journalism platforms are to a larger extent is accessible to internet users for news purposes. The study recommends that media practitioners should conceptualize their audiences and adopt digital journalism platforms that are accessible and interest them. Media houses and the government to develop internet infrastructure, formulate ethical framework and policies to guide online journalism practice in Kenya. The study also recommended the review in online journalism curriculum in learning institutions to make it more current in line with online journalism digital developments.
Key words: Digital Journalism, Influence, Hyperlink, Online Audience

1. Introduction

The central argument of this paper is that digital journalism gratifies audiences by providing differentiable news products, and this in effect has positively influenced online news access.

Digital journalism in this context allows news to be accessible to internet users (Kawamoto, 2003). It is a type of journalism characterized by customization, interactivity, hypertextuality and multimediality (Scott, 2005). The use of internet by media practitioners in Kenya is a new phenomenon. Internet has been used by journalists for social interaction rather than for news purposes for many years in Kenya.

According to Zuckerman (2009) digital journalism manifested itself in Kenyan media during 2007/08 post elections violence when the government briefly outlawed live broadcast of the violence. Many bloggers increased their citizen journalism activities online to propagate what was ongoing on the ground (Mudhai, 2011).

Today, digital journalism has enabled new techniques of news coverage (Pavlik, 2011). Audiences go online targeting to access dramatic, entertaining, and comprehensive news highlighting different viewpoints. Furthermore, media industries in Kenya have developed downloadable internet applications to enable audiences to access their products online at any time. Audiences are gratified by regular news updates, still photos, videos, text, and audio capabilities of digital journalism.

Digital journalism banks on the internet platforms to reach their technological savvy audiences (Arango-Ferero & Roncallo-Dow, 2013). Platforms such as Face Book, Twitter, You Tube, and many others have opened up a new chapter to digital journalism. According to Lacy and Simion (1993) online news reaches people far and wide. .

These digital platforms attract and interests individuals to narrow their focus of their media consumption in pursuing individualized choices of interest (Sustein, 2001).

Truly, publishing tailor made news stories on internet platforms stitched together by journalists is an example of journalism done online, however it is arguably in the very basic form (Massey & Levy, 1999).

Digital journalism has divided media audiences into many fragments. According to Lippmann (1965) digital journalism functions as a spotlight, focusing only on areas relevant to their target audiences. Given that digital journalism audiences are quite selective in what news to access, they select what to watch, read and to listen to online (Katz, 1996).

This clustering of news is enabled by increased level of provision of differentiable news products by different digital journalism platforms. Looking at this concept broadly, audiences of news media are always acquire news that interest them and ignore the rest. Media practitioners have therefore, specialized in providing news that gratifies particular groups of audiences (Boczkowski, 2004).

Traditional media is embracing technological platforms of digital journalism at a very fast rate. There is a clear developmental signs showing how media cutting age technology is transforming the way media access, interact and propagate news to its audiences. Research in the area of digital journalism technology has pursued many pathways. Massey & Levy (1999) demonstrate that digital journalism has been used by media practitioners to fulfill the interests of internet users. And that because digital journalism is developed on the delivery system

of internet allowing technical capabilities for interactivity, multimediality, immediacy and hyperlink-ability, it has proffered a lot gratifications to news audiences. Digital journalism has transformed the way news is presented and accessed in Kenya for the last ten years. This is because audiences are able to get news as it breaks and interact with the reporters.

2. Literature Review

The development of online journalism is premised on the extent to which it has maximized the use of its technological platforms like Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Intagram, Google, Yahoo, News blogs and Websites (Steensen, 2011). The origin of online journalism began in 1970s with growth of electronic newspapers into Web internet newspapers that started in the mid-1990s (Gutner, 2003). The term online journalism was first used at the University of Florida's Journalism Department after the initiation of the first web browser in 1993 (Siapera & Veglis, 2012).

Earlier before the initiation of the Netscape Navigator 1.0, the Star-Tribune based in the United States of America started a Web-based newspaper referred to as Electronic Sign Post in 1994. The production of first Web edition by the British newspaper, The Daily Telegraph, happened in 1994 (Gutner, 2003). This Electronic Telegraph was a static page with news articles placed on top of each other. According to Bishton (2001), Electronic Telegraph was explored for use as an online brand and in this way it marked the beginning of the history of online journalism, although in an uneventful and slow manner. This led to the development of a very different form of journalism from the traditional offline one that has not been significantly investigated in the case of recently internet mediated societies such as Kenya.

Studies have addressed the influence of changing technology in the media world. Cottle and Ashton (1999) have studied changing technology and journalist practices. They have looked at the redefinition of newsrooms and professional practices due to digitization, technological convergence and new communication technologies. Massey and Levy (1999) demonstrate notable developments in recent news technologies that have impacted enormously the process of news gathering and distribution. These studies have researched on changing technological platforms in the media industry, but have not looked at online news access and choice. Hence, the current study has focused on the extent to which new technological platforms of online journalism influence news access and choice.

Napoli (2011) has demonstrated how online news platforms such as Twitter, Face book, You Tube and Websites are used for spreading and sharing news. The general results showing technological changes have been the most dramatic in the history of mass media because of the increase in the social media sites (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). These online platforms have contributed a lot to the development of online journalism and its influence on media audience (Deuze, 2011). However, these studies have not looked at the extent to which online media platforms influence news access and choice.

Traditional media is embracing technological platforms of online journalism at an increasing rate. There is a clear indication of media cutting edge technology transforming the way media access, interact and present news to its audiences. According to (Okana, Kinga'ra & Waita 2017), research in the area of technological platforms of online journalism has pursued many pathways. Massey and Levy (1999) demonstrate the development of technological platforms of online journalism, that it is more than putting news stories into cyberspace. Online journalism is developed on the delivery system of internet allowing technical capabilities for interactivity, multimediality, immediacy and hyperlink-ability (Domingo, 2008). This study looked at how online journalism platforms capabilities of interactivity, multimediality, immediacy, hyperlink-ability and back up ability influence news access and choice.

Steensen (2011) shows how technological capabilities allow and encourage individuals to narrow focus of their media consumption to pursue the individualized choices and interests. Pavlik (2001) on impact of technology on journalism indicates that changing technology influences journalism in terms of content, structure, relation with the publics and other organizations. These studies have looked at the development of various platforms of online journalism and their usefulness to the media industries. The current study looked at how platforms of online journalism influence news access and choice.

Technology has changed a journalist's work. Since the start of the telephones finding their way into the news room at the start of 1900s, technology has been utilized by journalists to gather news interviews, to reach audiences through social media and websites (Pavlik, 2010). Pavlik shows how initially when a breaking story arrived, the first thing journalists tried to do was to contact the story source. However, today journalists turn to the company websites when live sources are not available (Mudhai, 2011).

Online journalism has improved news accessibility. The steady growth in the number of media outlets has increased audience news access and choice due to products competition for the attention of specific publics. Jordaan (2012) writes that the United Kingdom audiences between 16-24 year olds are fond of sharing news stories on social media networks popularly shared by family members, friends, and news organizations. This way, news access is easy and faster. Newman (2011) finds that Social media such as Twitter and Facebook

provide an avenue for at least 1 out of 5 online users to access news online. Thus, majority of young people are fond of using social media to access news. Online news sharing has become a common thing as those who access news digitally are likely to share with others. In the United Kingdom, Twitter accounts for 23% of the total news shared digitally, email 33% while Face book 55%. Bosch (2010) writes that Twitter has become part and parcel of newsrooms and is being used to source and break news. Many journalists are using Twitter to attract audiences, independently from the product of their mother news organizations. Twitter as any other social network has been adopted by many journalists and their audiences. Eye witness have become of much help, especially in reporting online news from places inaccessible to journalists or where reporters are restricted from reporting. For example, Thorsen (2010) determines that through reliable eyewitnesses, the United Kingdom news industries were able to access valuable reports on the Indian Tsunami in 2004 and the London bombings in 2005. These studies concentrated on how Facebook and Twitter are used for news access. However, they did not work on the extent to which Facebook and Twitter influence news access and choice.

Lee (2007) looks at the effects of internet on homogeneity of media agenda. In his school of thought he agrees that many media platforms cause targeting of specific groups in two ways: first, in terms of public opinion and second, in form of individual audience and in this way reducing the power of the media to give the public common agenda to think and talk about. In other words, the previous common agenda or public consensus has been diluted by many and varied media platforms. According to Katz (1996), traditional media is fast being displaced by specifically tailor-made utilization. The provision of differentiable news products by discrete media outlets allow audiences to choose what to access. These online journalism platforms allow and encourage individuals to narrow the focus of their media consumption to pursue their individualized choices of interest (Steensen, 2011). Online journalism technological features are presumed to be the major causes of media targeting. These studies have looked at how online news platforms have transformed homogeneity of media agenda into differentiable media agenda. The current study looked at how this transformation by online news platforms influences news access and choice.

Furthermore, on relationship between online journalism platforms news access, choice and advertisements, a study by Nyamu (2014) establishes that online advertising on Facebook, blogs, Twitter, websites and many other social media platforms has a huge influence on print media revenues. This is because audiences are moving away from the traditional ways of purchasing hard copies of newspapers to accessing news online. Nyamu concludes that online advertising will highly influence the performance of traditional newspaper print industries in the coming years in terms of business. And since a huge chunk of the Kenyan population is going online, Okuogo (2006) suggests that Kenya should increase the uptake information Communications technology. He finds that Kenya has made great strides in bridging the digital divide by installing digital infrastructure for ease of internet access. The current study focused on the extent to which online journalism platforms influence news access and choice by internet users.

3. Results and discussion

This chapter presents the results and discussions of the research findings on influence of online journalism on news access by internet users in Kenyan Universities presented in tables using frequencies and percentages.

Table 1. Online Journalism Accessible Platforms

Platform	Very often		Often		Rarely		Very	rarely	Not at	all
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Facebook	23	6.0	301	79	17	4.5	19	5.0	21	5.5
Twitter	7	1.8	101	26.5	176	46.2	11	2.9	86	22.6
News website	13	3.4	76	19.9	116	30.4	127	33.3	49	12.9
You Tube	49	12.9	197	51.7	100	26.2	35	9.2	0.00	0.00
News blog	3	0.8	57	15.0	199	52.2	76	19.9	46	12.1
Instagram	4	1.0	63	16.5	100	26.2	19	5.0	195	51.2
Whatsapp	70	18.4	99	26.0	100	26.2	111	29.1	1.0	0.3
Yahoo	26	6.8	51	13.4	36	9.4	77	20.2	191	50.1
Google	14	3.7	13	3.4	107	28.1	53	13.9	194	50.9

Table 8 summarizes data pertaining to research question number one, on the online journalism accessible platforms to internet users. The findings on the use of Facebook as online news platform were that 6 % very often use it, majority 79% of respondents often use it, 4.5% indicated that they rarely access news through Facebook, 5% said that they very rarely use it while 5.5% said they never use Facebook for news access at all. It is therefore adduced that majority students and staff members use Facebook to access online news. Students were the majority users of Facebook compared to staff members. Facebook is by far the biggest online journalism platform used by internet users to access news. Largely, Facebook users, just as many other social media users, are most likely to access online news by chance as they chat or scroll through their social media sites. Facebook has a huge consumer base that significantly influence their news reach compared to other online

news platforms. According to Okana (2017), Facebook remains a large source of news that is consumed in the society today. Majority of students sign in on Facebook to update their status and to chat with friends and families, but in the process of so doing stumble upon news stories from shared sources or on major news media Facebook official pages.

On the use of Twitter as an online news platform, 1.8% indicated that the use was very often, 26.5% of the respondents majorly use it for news, 46.2% rarely use twitter as a source of news, 2.9% very rarely use it for news, while 22.6% of internet users do not use Twitter at all as an accessible platform of news. Twitter users consume news heavily compared to other chat media platforms users. However, almost all the people who are on Twitter also subscribe to other forms of online news platforms with many regular users following opinion writers, individual journalists, news anchors and institutional accounts.

The accessibility of Twitter enables audiences to follow general news sites just as a way of passing time. Audiences become more interactive when they are pursuing particular breaking news; becoming more active by sharing news and commenting on news articles. Majority of respondents also say Twitter allows them to keep up with unfolding news stories because Twitter is able to alert them on the latest news. However, tweeter attracts many university staff members compared to students. In most cases, Twitter gives news in brief by simply giving the headlines rather than in-depth news coverage and similar to Facebook, many people stumble upon news items while tweeting.

Pertaining to online news websites, 3.4% of the respondents use it to access news very often, 19.9% use it often for news, majority 30.4% rarely use it to get news and 33.3% very rarely use it, while 12.9% do not use news websites at all to access news. Across the sample, majority of the respondents said that unless they are looking for particular news items they rarely subscribe to news websites. Staff members were more likely to use news websites to access news than the students. Internet users also use other platforms to share news articles from institutional websites to their friends and relatives. This enables online audiences that subscribe to different online journalism platforms to access news from various organizational websites. According to Harcup (2009), online media uses World Wide Web that allows for the transfer of news across the world.

On whether the respondents access news through Instagram, 1.0% said they very often do, 16.5% often access news on it, 26.2% reported that they rarely use it, 5.0% use it very rarely while majority 51.2% reported that they never access online news through Instagram at all. Different online journalism platforms attracts audiences differently, Instagram users are most likely interested in watching the latest videos, looking at photos of celebrities, and uploading their own photos. Across the sample, students were likely to use Instagram than staff members. For institutions, Instagram provided a very useful interactive channel with the audiences while at the same time giving a lot of news stories behind the photos posted. Instagram has developed a very close connection with the young audiences since it is so immediate and attractive.

Pertaining to whether respondents use You Tube to access news, the use was rated at 12.9% very often while 51.7% reported that You Tube often enhances news access. Those that indicated that You Tube rarely enhances news access were 26.2% and 9.2% reported that very rarely You Tube enhances news access. Students continue to report to You Tube at higher rates compared to staff members who are much older than them. You Tube provides multimedia type of news with components highly appealing to young adults than the older adults, by showing audio, text, photos, videos all together at the same time. The multimedia capability of You Tube makes it a rich media that is capable of providing efficient communication, therefore attracting many internet users to access it for news.

You Tube is one of the biggest online news platform in the world today that employs no journalists or news presenters and does not anchor news itself. It features news material from all news providers – news videos from media houses and individuals posted for viewers to watch. For example, eye witnesses are capable of developing news videos about worldwide occurrences by the use of inbuilt smartphones cameras and upload them on You Tube for viewing.

You Tube has grown over time to become online news platform competing highly with other news networks because it has created a unique type of visual journalism with wide array of news items. A lot of You Tube's news items remain viewed via the internet for a long period of time. When scrutinized further, the main reason why some people don't use video news, some respondents said that they find written news easier, faster to read and more convenient than viewing videos.

The results also show that among individual online journalism platforms enabling news access among respondents was online news blogs. 0.8% of respondents said that news blogs very often enables news access while 15% cited online news blogs as often used news platform and the majority 52.2% said that online news blogs rarely enables news access, 19.9% said that news blogs very rarely enables news access, and 12.1% indicated that online Blog does not enable news access at all. Blogs were found to be new online journalism phenomenon providing the latest news through personal sites capable of attracting thousands of audiences. Online journalism such as blogging is part of a wider digital news process enabling consistent flow of news in the wider society. Blogging has given the voice to the voiceless-one of the tenets of journalism.

However, when the older respondents were pressed to say why they always don't use blogs to access news, they said; first, they can't catch up quickly with the cutting edge technological developments of online journalism and secondly, they criticized the quality of news offered on blogs as incredible and lacking journalistic experience.

The findings on the use of WhatsApp as online news platform were that 18.4 % very often use it, 26% of respondents often use it, 26.2% indicated that they rarely access news through WhatsApp, majority 29.1% said that they very rarely use it while 0.3% said they never use WhatsApp for news access at all. In modern times, smartphone owners can access and choose the type of news they want to see, read or listen to as they share and chat with friends and relatives. WhatsApp is more popular with the university students compared to the staff members.

The findings reveal that 6.8% of the respondents said that very often they use Yahoo to access news, 13.4% said this often enables them access news. 9.4% of the respondents said that they rarely use it for news, 20.2% very rarely use it for news and the majority 50.1% never used Yahoo at all to access news. The findings show that majority of the staff members relied so much an aggregator brand like Yahoo for online news as they use Yahoo to carry out their mailing communication. Yahoo has become a news power house by providing large amounts of online news articles from around the world and by so doing it has managed to gain audiences trust as credible news source. It carries a lot of news items on its homepage from the latest to the oldest. It is also possible for online news audiences to access any news they want by simply doing a simple search on Yahoo.

Further results show that Google is an accessible online news platform. The respondents who were in agreement with this assertion and felt that they very often use Google to access news were 3.7%. 3.4% said that they often access news on Google, 28.1% rarely use it for news, 13.9% very rarely access news through Google, and the majority 50.9% never embrace Google at all as an online news platform. Google and Yahoo are slowly becoming more trusted online news sources than other online journalism platforms. Google search engine serves as the fastest method of accessing online news. It provides a link to news stories on a blend of multiple sites that internet users can access from the Google aggregator. Search engine aggregate news from Facebook, blogs, Twitter, advertisers and traditional media outlets making it easier for internet users to just choose and access the sites they are interested to watch, read or listen to. However, verification of credible news sources was found to be the critical challenge pushing away some internet users from accessing news through Google platform.

These results implied that Facebook is the most widely used online journalism platform for access of online news as follows, Facebook 85%, followed by You Tube 64.6%, WhatsApp 44.4%, Twitter 28.3% Websites 23.3%, Yahoo 20.2%, Instagram 17.1%, and news blog at 15.8%). In addition, the Google site was the least used at 7.1%. However, Intagram was more popular with the students and was rarely used by the staff members. According to Okana (2017) in his study on influence of digital journalisms' gratification on news access, online news platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, You Tube and Websites are currently highly used for spreading and sharing of news. Further, Anderson and Schudson (2009) indicate that alternative news sources such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube have improved the rate at which news is propagated and helped to open up a range of news that is reported. Online journalism news consumers continue to access news in relatively various online platforms. For example, a large majority of Facebook users also access news from other online journalism platforms, such as Tweeter, You Tube, WhatsApp and many others.

4. Conclusion and recommendation
These results implied that Facebook is the most widely used online journalism platform to access online news

The study established that (Facebook, at 85%, is the most widely used online journalism platform to access online news, followed by Whatsapp at 44.4%, You Tube at 64.6%, Twitter at 28.3%, Websites at 23.3%, Yahoo at 20.2%, Instagram at 17.1%, and news blog at 15.8%). In addition, Google site was the least used at 7.1%. However, Instagram was more popular with the students and was rarely used by the staff members. This is because Twitter is so much engaging and also creates awareness about new brands through photos.

Yahoo and Google were used mostly by staff members compared to the university students. These results are supported by the elements of Media Richness Theory that explain the reasons why internet users prefer to access online journalism platforms for news. For example, the richness of Facebook is higher than that of Skype interface. Daft and Langel (1986) says that media richness is the ability of medium to offer variety of its capabilities such as interactivity, immediacy, hypertextuality and back up capability to enable efficient communication.

The respondents said that they go for online journalism simple because it enables interactive discussions and provides many news channels such as audio, video and text. Take Twitter for example, its users access news so easily by scrolling through their Twitter timelines and by following other peoples' or organization's Twitter handles. This means that they are to reach breaking news by accessing trending topics on Twitter.

Online journalism platforms such as Facebook, Website, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, Yahoo, Google, You Tube, and news blog are the main online journalism platforms majorly accessible to internet users for news

purposes. They update breaking news that informs audiences about global happenings at any time. This study found that online journalism news platforms are simple to use, consequently providing ample atmosphere for news access all day and night.

Media practitioners should adopt online journalism platform that attracts internet users. These online journalism platforms provide much more appealing videos, photos, text and high quality audio to the audiences. This study further recommends that the government install fiber optic cables throughout the country to enable online journalism audiences to easily access news at lower cost and also device ethical policies on digital journalism.

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