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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites have been sources of information just as the traditional mass media. This study aims at determining the implications of the rise in social networking sites on the newspaper industry. The objectives of this study in Nsukka urban area are to find out the level of awareness of people about social networking sites; to investigate the level of usage of these sites; and to examine the implications of the rise of these sites on the newspaper industry. This work uses survey research method. The study uses descriptive statistics for the analysis of the gathered data and the results show that people are very much aware of social networking sites and also use them; most of the respondents also believe that social networking sites are increasing. In addition, majority of the respondents prefer social networking sites to newspapers. Their preference of the social networking sites are due to their lower cost, prompt access to information, immediate feedback capability, unlimited access in the use of networks, access to real time recordings and a wider coverage. Also, the use of social networking sites has caused a decrease in readership and sales and is seen as credible source of information. Based on the above findings, it is recommended that the newspaper industry should reappraise their activities and operations to devise ways of making the newspaper relevant amidst the rise of social networking sites.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites (SNSs); Newspaper Industry; Nsukka Urban; Traditional media; Technology Determinism; Journalists.

INTRODUCTION

When the first social networking site (Six Degree) was launched in 1997, little did people envisage that it would usher in an era of more networking sites to come. This first networking site was based on the idea that everybody is linked with everybody else. It was referred to as “small world problem”. Then in 2004, Facebook was established and was closely followed by other networking sites. Since then social networking sites have been on the increase as people keep on establishing one social network or the other. Kuss and Griffiths, (2011) defines social networking sites (SNSs) as virtual communities where users create individual public profiles, interact with real-life friends and meet other people based on shared interest. Also, McQuail, (2010) as cited in Okunna and Omenugha (2012) states that; Social networking sites often known as ‘social media’ comprises of a number of internet websites that have been set up to enable and encourage users to create networks of acquaintances and also to share messages and audiovisual material, often available to a wider public. The current examples of internationally very popular social media are Facebook, Myspace, Youtube. They have become valuable commercial properties, especially for related advertising, cross-media publicity and generating content from users. (P. 161)

Moreover, it is observed that social networking sites are interactive, encourage interconnectivity among people of like minds and equally facilitate the sharing of pictures, audio and video among peers. However Facebook, Twitter and Youtube have generally remained the most popular social networking sites despite the fact that other sites are being launched too.
Prior to the emergence of the new media, people depended on the traditional media to get their information. If you wanted to be current, you read a paper, listened to radio or watched television. That is why the traditional media filter information and only report those ones they feel are good. The traditional media were then seen as merely gatekeepers. Explaining the system of communication that the traditional media employed, Dominick, (2010) said that:

The traditional model of mass communication was a “one-to-many” model. It suggested that information from the environment (both news and entertainment) is filtered through a media organization (newspaper, TV network, movie studio) where it is decoded, interpreted, selected and finally encoded into message that is reproduced many times over and distributed through the appropriate channel...Once through the gate, the paper is reproduced and physically distributed to readers. The readers, the receivers of the message, decode and interpret the message...Under the traditional model there is little direct interaction between sources and receivers. (P. 17)

Since the explosion of the Internet, the communication landscape has been undergoing rapid changes. The traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television) now have to compete with these new media. For instance, the traditional media thrive from a boost in advertising revenue and derive close to 70% or more of their income from advertisements. However, with the advent of the internet, advertisers, who are the main source of revenue for the newspaper, have also moved on with technology and now go online to reach their target audience as everyone is transacting business through the new media. They now advertise on social networking sites as they hope to catch their consumers there. Speaking on the transition by advertisers, Olaegbe (2013) said that;

This used to be the exclusive preserves of the traditional media (newspaper, magazine, television and radio), but not anymore. If a campaign breaks and it does not hit your Facebook page, it does not hit your Twitter handle, it does not hit your BBM anonymously, such campaign has not gone viral. If it had not gone viral, it has not succeeded. If it had not succeeded, it has failed. (Para. 8)

The evolutionary changes to news publishing on the internet invoke a different kind of response from readers. News consumers are encouraged by the internet to become interactive consumers who are more demanding of the news provider. News consumers are empowered by electronic publishing (Panda and Swain, 2011). Furthermore, with the increase in the use of the internet, interactivity is the order of the day. People can use different forum to air their opinion. We are now in tune with words like “blog posts”, “citizen journalism”, “Independent newspaper sites” and “social networking sites”.

Various researches have also been conducted to define the roles of the modern journalism and gauge the impact social media have on them. In a recent study by Poeli and Borra (2010) titled “Twitter, Youtube, and Flicker as platforms of alternative journalism: The social media account of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests”, the authors wanted to find out the particular use of social media in the light of the history and theory of alternative journalism, using the G20 protest. They discovered that “as with many previous alternative journalism efforts, reporting was dominated by a relatively small number of users. In turn, the resulting account itself has a strong event-oriented focus, mirroring often-criticized mainstream protest reporting practices”. Another researcher, Nobil (2010) conducted a study titled “Is twitter a useful tool for journalists?” based his study on close observation of the Guardian's coverage of the G20 protests and other activities in 2009. He came to the conclusion that “Twitter is a useful marketing and research tool for newspaper websites-one that supplements the traditional role of journalist as investigators and producers of timely news”.

Consequently, it can be seen that the social media offers opportunities for creating friendship and social connection globally. People can now make friends in other countries around the world, share pictures and videos, meet their life partners or even their friends for life. With the successes of the major social networking sites (Facebook, twitter, MySpace, Youtube, etc), there arose the need to create more networking sites by individuals who want to attract people of like minds to discuss and relate with their peers. Anybody can launch a social networking site anywhere around the world without much stress. All you need is a computer and internet access.

But what effect does the social networking phenomenon have on the newspaper industry in urban areas of Nigeria? Has its rise caused a decline in readership since these sites also see to the information needs of people? Consequently, the aim of this research is to examine the effects of the rise of these network sites on the newspaper industry viz-a-vis their role as sources of information in Nsukka urban area. The interconnectivity made possible by the internet is one of the advantages it has over the traditional media. It has so impacted the lives of people that these traditional media have deemed it necessary to establish a presence in the new media. They now own websites where people can read (for newspapers and magazines), watch (television) and listen (radio) to their contents online. The power the social media wield has also made the traditional media to establish a presence on those networking
sites. Currently, you can find most traditional media on Facebook and Twitter where you are asked to comment by liking their page (Facebook) or follow them (Twitter). What is the fate of the traditional media especially in Nsukka urban area? In seeking answers to this question, the objectives of this study in Nsukka urban area are to determine the level of awareness of social networking sites; to ascertain how they are being used by people; and to determine the possible effect the rise in social networking sites have on the newspaper industry.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study area which is Nsukka urban area is the headquarters of Nsukka Local Government Area (LGA), Nigeria. Nsukka LGA is located between latitude 6° 51' 24" N and longitude 7° 23' 45" E. The University of Nigeria, which is the first indigenous university in Nigeria is situated in Nsukka urban area. Based on the 2006 population census, Nsukka LGA has an area of 1,810 km² and a population of 309,633 persons comprising of people from different parts of Nigeria and beyond.

Theoretical Framework.

This study is guided by the Technological Determinism Theory. This theory was propounded by Marshal McLuhan in 1964. Chandler, (2000) explained this theory as;

"...the idea that technology shapes and alters basic things about behavior and society like the way we think and act, the way we conduct our interpersonal relationships, our values, and the way we learn. "Technology" includes such things as basic tools, codes and structures for interpersonal behaviors and social institutions, and modern computer and Internet technologies. In essence, it "includes the whole of our material culture."

The theory sees media technology as having the power to influence how individuals in a society think, feel, act and how society operates as we transit from one technological age to another. It argues that characteristics inherent in a new technology govern the direction of its development and set the conditions for social change and that technology such as writing or print or television or the computer changes society. The rise in social networking sites is a technological invention and as such, has changed how society communicates and receives information. Since the launching of the first networking site, people’s need to interact and make new friends has caused more sites to spring up. This change has also affected the newspaper industry as they are struggling to cope with this particular innovation. This theory is seen as a cause-and-effect relationship between technology and its effect on society.

Data Collection

The data used for this study was obtained via two sources; primary and secondary sources. However, the major data for the work was collected through the use of structured questionnaire randomly administered on selected respondents. The secondary data used in this study were obtained from internet sources, library, books and journals. A total of 120 respondents who are aged 15 years old and above make up the study population. This study population was selected using the systematic random sampling method. The sampling was systematically chosen to ensure gender, marital status, age, educational and occupational distribution balance. For instance, the respondents comprises of 60 males and 60 females distributed across 60 single and 60 married persons who were randomly selected in the study area. The data for this study was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of charts as appropriate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(a) Awareness and Perception of Social Networking Sites.

The results of the awareness of the existence of social networking sites are presented in figure 1 below. From the results, it is discovered that 99% of the respondents are aware of social networking sites while only 1% of the respondents are not aware of the existence of social networking sites. This results shows that there is a very high rate of the awareness of the existence of social networking sites in the study area.
In addition, figure 2 represents respondents’ awareness of specific social networking sites. From the results, 87% are conversant with Facebook, 30% are conversant with Twitter, 16% are conversant with MySpace, 9% are conversant with Bebo, 40% are conversant with Youtube, 2% are conversant with Last.fm, 23% are conversant with LinkedIn, 56% are conversant with 2go and 9% are conversant with Watsapp.

In the study area, the results from the analysis in Fig 3 show that 92% of the respondents believe that social networking sites are increasing while only 8% of the respondents are of the view that there is no increase in the number of social networking sites. In other words, the results are emphatic that the number of these networking sites has remained on the increase.
In conclusion, the results presented above show that most people in the study area are aware of social networking sites. Specifically, 99% of the respondents are aware of social networking sites, 92% of them are of the view that the number of these social networking sites are increasing while about 87% of the respondents are aware of the existence of Facebook as against just 2% of the respondents who are aware of the existence of Last FM.

(b) Uses of Social Networking Sites.

This study further examined the various ways these social networking sites are utilized in the study area. With regards to the way these social networking sites are utilized in the study area, figure 4 shows that 96% of the respondents make use of social networking sites while only 4% do not.

![Figure 4: Proportion of Respondents that Use Social Networking Sites.](image)

This study reveals that there are different reasons for the uses of these social networking sites by the respondents in the study area. It is evident from Figure 5 that 2% of the respondents in the study area use the sites to as sources of news, 30% of the respondents use the sites for entertainment, 46% of the respondents use the sites for educational purposes, 16% of the respondents use the sites to access advertisements, 22% of the respondents use the sites to get jokes and cartoons, 76% of the respondents use the sites for chatting and 71% of the respondents use the sites to hook up with friends.

![Figure 5: Respondent' Purposes of Using Social Networking Sites](image)

In addition to the various uses of social networking sites in the study area, the findings of this study indicate that the respondents also read newspapers via social networks. Fig 6 shows that 69% of the respondents do not read newspapers via social networks while 31% either read the printed version or go to the newspapers website and read papers online.
This section examines the implications of the rise in social networking sites on the newspaper industry. The results in figure 7 show that 70% of the respondents prefer social networking sites to newspapers as sources of different categories of information.

In justifying their preference for social networking sites, the respondents cite several predisposing reasons for their preference as depicted in Fig 8. About 40% of the respondents prefer to use the social networking sites due to prompt access to information. Concurrently, more than half of the respondents refer the social networking sites because of lower cost, while 37% are of the view that these sites provides immediate feedback capability. These reasons provided by respondents are some of the services that printed newspapers cannot render to them and since these networking sites can render such services, they offer the networking sites an edge over the newspapers.
Consequent upon the various services rendered by the networking sites above, Figure 9 shows the impacts of networking sites on the newspaper industry. The results show that 81% of the respondents see social networking sites as credible sources of information; 58% agreed that social networking sites have decreased the rate at which they read hardcopy newspapers; 71% agreed that it has decreased the rate at which they buy newspapers while 43% believes that social networking sites can make the printed version of newspapers go into extinction. Since up to 71% of the respondents are of the view that use of networking sites decrease the rate of buying of printed newspapers, it is very obvious that the rise in these networking sites has a negative impact in the fortune of printed newspapers. Of more importance is the fact that almost half of the respondents believe that with time, the printed newspapers will become extinct.

![Respondents' view of impacts of networking sites on newspapers](image)

**Figure 9: Impacts of networking sites on newspapers**

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is evident from the analysis that people are aware of social networking sites. Interestingly, a great majority of respondents make use of social networking sites and are conversant with Facebook. It is also discovered that 92% are of the opinion that social networking sites are increasing. As such these networking sites are fast replacing the newspapers as the traditional media. The rise in social networking sites has therefore led to a decrease in both readership and sale of the newspapers.

As noted earlier, advertisements are the economic lifeblood of the newspaper industry and if there is a loss in advertising revenue, the newspaper industry will suffer economic setbacks. Advertisers are not sentimental; they are business people who are looking for the right channel to reach their target audience, so as people move technologically, advertisers move with them. Many advertisers have gone online and are always found on social networking sites. This has brought about a huge loss for the newspaper industry. This study has therefore shown that the rise in social networking sites have far reaching implications on the newspaper industry viz-a-viz advertising. Most newspaper organizations also have online presence, a website where people can read news stories but they have so many competitors. Bloggers and independent newspapers publish on their websites and ask people to share their online presence. They can also include interactive activities and real time publishing of information so as to remain relevant from the rise of the networking sites. Moreover, newspapers should endeavour to reduce their service charges especially for online advertisements to get more patronage. The newspaper is the oldest form of mass media and has survived the invention of radio and television.

**REFERENCES**


