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HOW INTERNET HAS RESHAPED COMMUNICATION IN WAYS THAT ARE TROUBLING: A CASE STUDY OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM

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Abstract

Constant evolving of communication has given birth to internet based communication which makes use of digital and social media platforms to collect and disseminate news by both trained and untrained media personnels. This study therefore sought to determine how internet has reshaped communication in ways that are troubling with focus on citizen journalism. Secondary data was used for the study and the study also adopted Media Ecology theory as its theoretical framework. Findings from the study revealed that internet has reshaped communication in troubling ways because citizen journalist do not consider ethical values while reporting, violence has been normalized and people have no regards for empathy as long as they get views and likes. The study also recommended that government should tighten its reins on internet reporting and content creation to reduce its negative impacts.

Keywords: internet, reshaped, citizen journalism, communication.

Introduction

Communication has been proven to be an agent of civilization because no society can progress without adequate communication. The advent of internet changed communication in different ways because it placed the production and distribution of information in the hands of unprofessional media personnel. Among the most significant development is the birthing of citizen journalism which enables ordinary citizens/individuals to produce and report news in real time. All the person needs is a phone or a camera, access to internet and social media platforms, thereby jumping the protocol of traditional gatekeepers who ensure that news meet basic ethical standards before its dissemination. Li et al (2022) affirms that internet has change ways people communicate in the society, thereby changing human society in multiple aspects.

Internet has continued to change media landscape and at the same time keeping the conventional media on their toes. This new wave of communication saw the transformation of conventional communication channels such as print, radio and television digital forms like email, instant messaging and social media, Servaes (2025). This has reshaped communication in frightening ways that media consumers are exposed to details they do not need in news reporting. While this shift to citizen journalism has enhanced inclusivity and amplified diverse voices, it has reshaped communication in troubling ways that questions credibility,

ethics and authenticity of information made available to the media consumers. This has resulted to increase in misinformation and biased reporting which stand against what professional journalism is, as observed by Ahuja, (2023), that the proliferation of fake news and disinformation impacts negatively on democracy and public health. This raises a concern of the whole system being at risk because of the use of internet by citizen journalist to disseminate unverifiable news.

Statement of the Problem

Although the internet has improved communication in amazing ways, it has also affected communication in various ways that raises great concerns because of internet enabled citizen journalism. Citizen journalism poses great concerns for integrity and accuracy of information within the public domain. Lack of basic and professional training among citizen journalists has led to dissemination of misleading and unverified information has compounded the issue. In many cases, speed, likes, clicks, share and earning in foreign currency are prioritized over accuracy and professionalism thereby resulting to widespread of false narratives that are usually very difficult to contain.

The decentralized nature of the internet communication reduces accountability, and at the same time making media content difficult to regulate and control. This poses serious questions on what is laid out as media content and how authentic the information is. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the how the internet has reshaped communication in ways that are not only transformative but troubling, using citizen journalism as a lens to explore the subject matter.

Specific Objectives

The main objectives of this study is to determine how internet has reshaped communication in ways that are troubling using citizen journalism as a case study, however; the study will be guided by the following specific objectives. Therefore, the study sought to:

1 Investigate how internet has changed communication patterns
2 Identify the troubling ways internet has reshaped communication
3 Determine the impact of citizen journalism on communication

Literature Review

Concept of internet

The internet according to Yasar, (2024) is a worldwide system of interconnected devices that communicate with each other using an established order. The original goal of internet is to create a network that would let users of a research computer at one university talk to others at other universities. Today, internet is public and used by billions of people around the world. It is basically used by many as a source of information and this has led to the creation of social media and e-marketing. Internet has evolved over the years to what we have now, from U.S. department of defense ARPANET designed for secure, decentralized research sharing in 1960s to the development of email in 1971, to the birth of modern internet in 1983 through the adoption of TCP/IP enabling diverse network to connect, to the introduction of World Wide Web (www) by Tim Berners-Lee, to the commercialization of the internet through internet service providers in the 1910s, to the present social media and high speed mobile connectivity of 2000s that shifted the internet into a pervasive global, mobile and social tool we have today, School Software (2022).

Uses of Internet

The internet serves a lot of functions and they are as follows according to Techtarget (2024):

1. Communication and sharing of information: internet provides a platform of communication and information sharing. It is a primary source of information for a lot of people and also provide the platform for people to connect with family and friends through Facebook, WhatsApp, Email and other social networking platforms.
2. Social media and content sharing: internet has made it possible for people to share content in real time on social media. This has given rise to citizen journalism where the means of information production and dissemination is in the hands of a particular citizen,
3. Education and self improvement: the internet has made possible for people to access online degrees through distant learning programmes, workshops and conferences. People can learn and even bag a certificate without walking into an actual conventional classroom.
4. Entertainment: internet is a source of entertainment through streaming of TV shows, Netflix movies, videos and music. It is never a dull moment when you have internet connectivity.
5. Remote working platform: internet has made people to work remotely from different parts of the world. Someone can be one country and work for an organization in another country.
6. Searching for jobs: internet has created a platform where job seekers meet employers, an example is LinkedIn; where job seekers apply for jobs through their LinkedIn pages.

Concept of Communication

Communication is basically the sharing of information and ideas between two or more people. Communication according to Schramm (1954) is a two-way process where participants alternate as sender and receiver, encoding, decoding, and interpreting messages. This means that in communication, the sender can become the receiver especially in interpersonal communication. Communication is usually made up the source, message, channel, noise and feedback. There exist various types of communication according to James (2025) and they are listed below: verbal communication, Non verbal, written and visual.

1. **Verbal communication:** this includes all exchange of ideas and information through spoken words. It is the basis of human interaction which enables human beings to express their thoughts, feels ideas emotions promptly. Forms of verbal communication are:

(a) **Interpersonal communication**: this happen as people interact with one another on daily basis.

(b) **Intrapersonal communication:** this is the type of communication that happens inside someone's mind, or within a person.

(c) **Group communication:** this happens as an individual communicates within a group, here small group of people interact within the group setting.

(d) **Public communication**: this happens when one person addresses a larger group of people.

(e) **Mass communication:** this is the use of different channels of communication to reach a very large and usually diverse audience using various mass communication channels like radio, television, newspaper, magazine and even the social media.

2. **Non verbal communication:** this is the type of communication that involves the use of gestures, signs, facial expressions and body language to communicate with another person or people. During this type of communication, the sender can receive his/her feedback through the body language of the receiver.
3. **Written communication:** this involves the type of communication done through written materials. This includes all written words aimed at communication. Example:

(a) **Email:** this is usually used for personal, business or professional communication used by both personal and corporate organizations.
(b) **Text messages:** this otherwise known as Short Message Service (SMS) used for quick and informal communication widely used by different people in this modern era.
(c) Social media: this is a form of communication where people use the internet to create, share, form online community engage in two way communication using apps and websites.
(d) Memos: this is also as memorandums used to disseminate information, announcement, and directives within an organization.

4. **Visual communication:** this is the type of communication that makes use of pictures, images, and graphics to convey information to another person or different people; this includes the use of infographics, charts, pictures and graphs in communication.

Concept of Citizen Journalism

The debut of internet and social media gave wings to citizen journalism; this is an aspect of journalism where the tools of information production and dissemination are in the hands of media consumers or ordinary citizen. Oyeniyi, (2024) opined that citizen communication happens when individuals who are neither contracted to any media organization nor had any professional training in the field of communication collect and distribute information to the general public. This can also be seen as open source and freelance journalism.

According to Study.com (2026), citizen journalism is news gathered and disseminated by everyday citizens not employed by traditional media organizations, often using internet platforms and social media. This is when ordinary people that are not employed any media outfit or bound by any media training engage in the act of collecting and distribution of information by posting on social media pages for people to view and like. Although citizen journalism is flawed by misinformation and uncalled exaggeration, it can come in handy during disaster and conflict reporting where people in disaster zones report events in real time.

Empirical Review

Amelia et al (2023) in Changes in Communication Patterns in Digital Age, studied the changes in communication patterns in the digital era with focus on the influence of social media on social interaction. The method used was qualitative approach and findings revealed that social media has changed communication patterns. The study concludes that social media has driven a paradigm shift in the way human communicate and interacts.

The study under review studied the changes in communication patterns in digital era while the current study is focused on the how internet has reshaped communication in ways that are troubling with special focus on citizen journalism. Both made use of qualitative research approach and both studies also studied internet and digital communication.

Hang (2024) did a study on The Impact of Social Media on Modern Communication: Evolution and Future Prospects, to explore the evolution of social media, its influence on communication practices and its implication for the society. Findings from the research revealed that social media has transformed communication in profound ways and concludes that understanding how social media evolve with new technologies is crucial in navigating the ever changing landscape of digital communication.

While the study under review studied the impact of social media on modern communication, the current study sought to determine how internet has reshaped communication in ways that are troubling. Both studies used secondary data for analysis.

In Segun (2024) in the study titled Exploring the Impact of Citizen Journalism on Traditional Media, the study was done to investigate various impacts of citizen journalism on traditional media within the current media landscape. Secondary data was used for the study and it revealed that the evolution of citizen journalism has transformed the media landscape and recommended that media literacy and digital skills should be promoted among citizens to empower citizens to discern credible news from misinformation.

The study under review studied the impact of citizen journalism on traditional, while the current study sought to determine internet has reshaped communication in ways that rae troubling. Both studied citizen communication and its impacts and both studies also employed the same methodology.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Media Ecology theory which was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in the 1964 later introduced by Neil Postman in 1968. Media ecology theory posits that technology, media, and communication techniques shape human perception, interaction and societal structure far more than the content the content they deliver. This theory sees the media as the message and as environment that has great impact on the society. Akpan and Ogude (2018) agreed that technology controls and influences virtually all works of mankind, including communication, perception, feeling and understanding.

The theory is suitable for the current study because it explains how internet technology has reshaped communication and how people view the medium used in digital communication as the message. The theory also explains how communication has been affected by internet, because people can actually produce and disseminate news without been affiliated to any media organization or have any professional training.

Discussion

How Internet has Changed Communication Patterns

Internet has changed communication in different ways because the advent of internet created a more immediate way of communication and information consumption which the traditional media channels fell short of. The following according to Carlow University (2021) are various ways internet/digital media changed communication patterns:

1. **Instantaneous communication:** internet has drastically changed communication patterns of waiting to listen or read the newspaper for news to instant messages on the internet. The internet provides arrays of information that the information consumers

are only a click away to the information of their choice. The kind of urgency by which the internet communicates is alarming since news are reported as they are breaking.

2. **Content creation and sharing:** the advent of internet created a room for content creation and content sharing. A lot young people today are content creators with accounts on TikTok, Instagram, X, WhatsApp, Facebook and other internet based social media platforms where they post contents for likes and clicks.
3. **Citizen journalism:** the most glaring part is this changes is citizen journalism where the production and dissemination of media content is in the hands of ordinary citizens. Citizen journalism has changed communication here because these citizen journalists are usually without professional training produce news without fact checking it. And because there is no traditional gate keeping, a lot of things not fit for public domain end up there thereby raising ethical concerns.
4. **Decreased privacy:** the rise of internet usage has led to decreased privacy in the society. A lot of people film things and upload to the internet without privacy concerns, people's privacy have be invaded because of the way people seek content and this has left so many people in embarrassing situations.
5. **Increased ways of interpersonal relationship:** internet has increased ways of interpersonal relationships in ways that are negative and positive. A lot of people today have lost their lives because they went to visit their internet friends. It has also created a room where people upload their details on the internet to find love and friendship. This has led to loneliness and depression because; those chatting on the internet may millions of miles away from each other.
6. **Improved workspace and remote job opportunities:** internet has provided a room for remote job opportunities and improved workspace where an employee works from the comfort of his or her home. While this commendable, it can make the person working from home not to learn basic social skills.

Troubling Ways Internet Reshaped Communication

Not only did internet changed communication patterns, it also reshaped communication in different troubling ways, and they include the following according to Mehta and Dixit (2015):

1. **Lack of privacy**: internet has reshaped communication through invasion of privacy while filming media content, a lot of people have faced legal battles because they filed what they are not supposed to film. A lot of content creator do not seek permission before posting media content and this has always produced negative outcomes.
2. **Acceptance of violence as a norm:** because of the way people watch violence media content, internet has greatly made people to see it as a norm. a lot of people would rather video tow people fighting and upload the video than de-escalating the fight.
3. **Lack of empathy:** the most troubling aspect of internet communication is lack of empathy. People view everything as content and rush to use a scene of accident as content rather that rendering help to victims. It is worthy of note that when people stop caring, there is nothing left in this world.
4. **Fake news and misinformation:** the use of internet based news channels have increased the rate of fake news and misinformation. A lot of citizen journalists do not verify their source of news before uploading to the media pages and this has increased the rate of fake news and misinformation.

5. **No regards for ethical values:** because citizen journalism has become so popular, ethical values is gradually becoming the things of the past. And this has pose serious question of future journalism in the media landscape.

Impact of Citizen Journalism on Communication

The impact of citizen journalism cannot be ignored; it affects every sphere of modern communication. It includes the following:

1. **Democratization of information:** the upsurge of citizen journalism has encouraged individuals to venture into news reporting thereby bypassing the traditional media gatekeepers. This has made hews production to decentralized since a lot of people are doing it.
2. **Immediate reportage of news**: citizen journalism has led to increased immediate news reports which are good for the society, especially in crisis prone areas. People report news as they are breaking in real time.
3. **Rise Ethical issues:** this has become one of the most troubling aspects of citizen journalism. Because the people involved the news gathering and dissemination are not professionally trained, ethical issues always arise in the course of doing what they are not trained to do.
4. **Media literacy:** citizen journalism has made media literacy a growing concern. A lot of people are forced to undergo media literacy training in other to perfect in the act of using emerging technologies in news reporting and gathering.

Conclusion

This study has found that internet has indeed reshaped communication in ways that are troubling because of citizen journalism, where ordinary citizens gather and disseminate information without being attached to any media organization. This trend has encouraged no regards to ethical values and privacy, lack of empathy, seeing violence as a norm and proliferation of fake news and misinformation. This needs to be checked in order not to endanger conventional media practitioners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should tighten its reins on internet reporting and content creation in Nigeria to reduce its impact.
2. Media literacy and ethical awareness should be encouraged among citizens to enable see ethical pitfall of journalism.
3. Bloggers and citizen journalist should be made to work in tandem with the traditional media houses to reduce the negative impact of citizen journalism.

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