



Social Media and its Credibility as a Source of News

Osong, Ubana Obeten

Department of Mass Communication
University of Calabar, Calabar
uoosong@unical.cd.ng
ubanaosong@gmail.com
07033749069

Egbe, Roseline Ntui

Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies
University of Calabar, Nigeria
roselineegbe1@yahoo.com
08035321178

Abstract

This study is an investigation into social media as sources of news and the question of credibility. Its advent and huge patronage daily by those who forage for news and consumers have generated a lot of concern for either its source credibility or medium credibility of this social media platform. However, we will beam our searchlight on medium credibility, using 150 students and lecturers of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Calabar, Unical, and Cross River University of Technology, Crutech, Nigeria. The survey method and questionnaire were used to gather data, which was collated, analyzed and presented in tables, yielding related percentages. The theoretical frame work adopted is the Technological Determinism theory. The theory is apt for this study as it relates to Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) explanation about the theory's belief that technologies have an overwhelming power to drive human actions and social change. The findings, among others show that social media have attracted more patronage and have become a potent tool to gather news sources and stories with less difficulty, enhancing medium credibility. We therefore recommend for its continuous use by people who source for news.

Keywords: Social media, medium credibility, source credibility.

Background of the study

Like the three basic necessities of life (food, shelter and clothing) information from friends, books, mass media and lately, from internet, has been much sought for by people around the world. For several decades, the mass media especially television, radio, newspapers and magazines have been major tools for foraging information and dissemination such that they assume the pivotal role of the fourth estate of the realm and also, the society's watchdog.

In recent years, new communication technology and the rise of the Internet have opened up a new vista of sourcing for news that has never been experienced before. The growth of the internet since 1980s has been faster than any other communication medium (Fogg et al, 2001). The emergence of a new medium often affects existing media (Liu, 2003) in several ways such as audience base, credibility and production.

Creeber and Martin (2009), Bennett (2003), have asserted that the new media have transformed people from being passive and at the receiving end one way mass communication, to becoming producers and transmitters of information. With this phenomenon, the internet and the new media have assumed great importance and popularity in the society as people are free to create their own news, current on issues and get the other side of a story (Rosenstein, 2005).

As the social media platforms are seen as sources of news, the level to which people place credibility in becomes an issue of concern and investigation. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the perception of credibility of social media.

Literature Review

Credibility

The study of media credibility is often approached from two dimensions. These are medium credibility and source credibility. The source credibility dimension investigates the expertise and trustworthiness of the person who initiates the message or

communication (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Kiousis, 2001; Seif, 1996). The medium credibility evaluates the credibility of media channels the communicator uses in sending a message (Graziano and McGrath, 1968; Metzger, 2003; Severin and Tankard Jr. 2001; and Nwanne, 2012).

Credibility is anchored on believability, trust and perceived reliability (Burgoon, Burgoon, & Wilkinson, (1981). Development messages and ideologies are often transmitted through various media, whether traditional, or through mass media. This imposes serious professional responsibilities on the various media to be credible. One major problem however in credibility research is answered by Nwanne (2012), asserting that “credibility is usually a function of the level of respect channels of communication enjoy among target audiences. It is important in order to effectively reach the target audience. A medium that suffers credibility crisis vitiates in important ways”.

Social Media

Social media, Nwosu (2012, p.30) is the latest phenomenon in information communication technology, ICT, and has revolutionized communication, as well as, enhanced business tremendously. Social media, continued Nwosu has taken over the globe by storm as the youth, adults, professionals and even the ‘lazy’ have embraced it as a daily routine.

Adeyanju (2016) posits that social media are the various internet based applications that build on the technologies of web 2.0 which allows for the creation and exchange of user generated content. Social media sites as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Goggle, internet, including Blackberry messages and other form of SMS interactions, are now some of the foremost online communication platforms (Pew Research, 2010). Gathering and sharing of information, as well as, maintaining and making friendships are some of the emerging dimensions of social media (Bonds-Raacke and Raacke, 2010).

Nwosu, earlier quoted, said, social media is transforming the way journalists break news. Many journalists claim that they can reach

their news sources, gather stories and make verifications about the authenticity of their stories with less difficulty through social networks. In fact, journalists and non-journalists are excited with the opportunities the social networks offer them in carrying out the task of news gathering. Today, news hunters will need to utilize many of these new tools in order to gather information, produce materials and engage their audience in new ways.

According to Sunday Trust, September 9, (2012, p.36,) “social media tools have achieved the status of essentials for journalists. The web has changed everything, anyone with a blog can be a reporter, anyone with a cellphone can be a videographer, and anyone on facebook, twitter or a thousand other platforms can be newsmakers or news editors”. The social media serves as an easier, faster, and more liberal source of gathering information, devoid of the usual internal and external control of conventional media.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What is/are the reasons for your choice of social media tools in news sourcing?

RQ2. Does medium credibility affect source credibility? Justify your answer.

RQ3. What are the criteria for evaluating medium credibility?

Methodology

This paper has as its objective to investigate credibility of social media. The study therefore employed survey method in its research design. The questionnaire instrument was administered to 150 respondents, selected through simple random sampling technique and the population comprised academic staff of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Calabar, Unical, and the Cross River University of technology, CRUTECH, Nigeria. Also, media students of these universities are included in the study. For the analysis, data were collated, analyzed and presented, using simple percentages. The return rate of question administered was 150, as 50 of the questionnaire were not duly completed or cannot be accounted

for. The average age of respondents for the survey, based on the data collected from the field is 25 years. 50% of the sampled population consists of females while the remaining 100% are males.

Table 1: What is/are the reason(s) for your choice of social media tools inn news sourcing?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Easier/faster	110	73%
Sophistication	28	19%
Accessibility	12	8%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

According to this data from the survey, seventy-three (73%) of respondents choose social media tools for news sourcing because they believe it is easier, faster and more liberal source of information devoid of the usual internal or external control of conventional media.

Nineteen (19%) of the respondent agree that they choose social media for news sourcing because of their sophistication. As a result, the communication gadget reaches a very wide audience. In the view of these respondents, its sophistication is transforming the way journalists reach their news sources, gather stories and make verifications about the authenticity of their stories, with less difficulty through social media.

Eight (8%) of the respondents' advanced accessibility, is the a reason for their choice of social media tools for news sourcing. The web, in the view of the respondents, has changed everything as anyone on facebook or twitter can be news editor.

Table 2: Does medium credibility affect source credibility? Justify your answer.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	120	80%

No	30	20%
Total	150	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

From the data analysed, eighty (80%) of the respondents agree that medium credibility can likely affect source credibility, or vice versa. They reason that any medium that suffers credibility crisis vitiates in important ways, citing examples that the messages that pass through it becomes ineffective. The result, according to the respondents is that such messages be treated with suspicion by the audience. However, twenty (20%) of the respondents do not believe that medium credibility can affect source credibility because each reflects the public perception, and of course what an individual wants to believe in.

Table 3: What are the criteria for evaluating medium credibility?

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Accessibility	40	27%
No internal/external control	60	40%
Function/respect media tools enjoy among target audience	50	33%
Total	150	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Table 3, suggest that twenty-seven (27%) of the respondents feel “accessibility” is the criteria for medium credibility of social media. Forty (40%) feel social media as sources of news have no internal or external control unlike, the conventional media. Thirty-three (33%) are of the view that the criteria for evaluating medium credibility is usually a function of the level of respect media tools enjoy among targets audience. They all agreed that all the criteria is what have made social media popular among its users. The trend is increasing as more and more youths and even the elderly are engrossed in social media, thereby, increasing medium credibility.

Conclusion

This study revealed that part of the reasons why most people use social media tools to source for news is because it is easier and faster;

its level of sophistication and accessibility. These criteria support Nwosu, (2012), who put forward certain reasons for social media usage. Another interesting finding in this study, which of course supports Nwanne's (2012), is that medium credibility affect source credibility. Medium credibility is very important if the messages that pass through it must be believable. This study has established that social media popularity generally, and medium credibility in particular is due to its accessibility, no internal or external control and the function and respect these media tools enjoy among target audience. All the views of the respondents in this study makes medium credibility of social media widely acceptable among its users.

Despite the controversies that range on the shortcomings of social media. the number of its audience members keeps increasing geometrically by the day. It is a new mass medium and a forceful one which has become an integral part of other mass media. This paper argues that social media is not just a channel of mass communication but a unique mass medium that serves as a veritable tool for news sourcing and has challenged, if not altered some of the fundamental and traditional concepts earlier use in gathering and monitoring news.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, we make the following recommendations:

1. Since medium credibility has enhanced social media credibility in the area of news sourcing, its use by journalists and non-journalists is encouraged.
2. The medium is the message hence, more youth and the elderly are advised to patronize social media tools for news sourcing.
3. Given take instantaneous delivery of news sources the social media tools should continue to be used for information gathering.

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