

Smartphone Use In Journalism: Assessing Its Effect On Reporting Practices And Content Quality

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Abstract: *This study investigated smartphone usage in journalism. The study made use of quantitative research design method using the survey research design with the aid of questionnaire which was used for data collection. The population of the study are journalists from Oyo and Lagos Chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalist. A sample size of 120 respondents were used for the study while data analysis was done with the aid of SPSS software 25.0 using percentages and frequency tables, mean and standard deviation. The finding revealed that smartphones enable journalists to report from anywhere, at any time, making it easier to cover breaking news and events. Also it was found that smartphones allow journalists to capture high-quality photos, videos, and audio recordings, enhancing storytelling and multimedia content creation. Furthermore, it was revealed that some of the challenges journalists face when using smartphones for reporting include data security which has to do with protecting sensitive information and sources from hacking, security risks. The study recommended that media organizations should invest more in new technology so as to stay abreast of the latest trend in journalism.*

Keywords: *Content Creation, Digital Media, Journalism, Smartphone, Technology*

Introduction

The exponential rise of the digital revolution redefined news collecting, news producing, and news consuming. Smartphones, in particular, became important equipment in the modern journalism arena. Hitherto viewed merely as personal communication devices, smartphones serve as cameras, voice recorders, editing suites, and news dissemination platforms. This phenomenon increasingly termed “mobile journalism” blurred the traditional newsdesk etiquette and brought into focus new opportunities alongside fears that journalistic principles would be compromised. Smartphone journalism allows reporters to cover breaking news on the ground even where it would be inconvenient to move bulky equipment. In Nigeria and other emerging countries, the affordability and pervasiveness of smartphones made them indispensable when describing fast-developing news events such as protests, polls, and disasters (Westlund, 2013). Experts attest that smartphones enhance immediacy and interactive availability because journalists produce and disseminate multimedia content in real-time (Blankenship, 2016).

At the same time that there were concerns voiced about the effect on content quality and professional standards due to smartphone dependency, others suggested that the convenience and speed inherent to mobile reporting would result in superficial reports, sloppy fact-checking, or too great an over-reliance on user-generated content (Goggin, 2020). Others posited that even though smartphones drive costs of entry down to facilitate wider democratization on news gathering, the technology would actually grow the divide separating professional from amateur journalism, thus increasing the risk of credibility and ethical violations (Borum & Quinn, 2016). For smartphones in the Nigerian context, the significance lies particularly therein that most media outlets suffer from resource limitations that prevent spending on conventional equipment. Reporters now use their personal smartphones to take their photographs, record video footage, or conduct live reporting. As the capacity of the newsrooms expands, the same widens the concern over low-quality editing, varying standards, accuracy concerns on the mobile-centric approach (Akinwale, 2018).

Thus, the debate on smartphone journalism isn't technological per se but instead concerns the effect on core journalistic values of depth, fairness, and accuracy. An understanding of the effect the use of smartphones is having on the practices of reporting and content value is significant, especially in countries like Nigeria where the mobile technology is essentially revolutionizing the media sector.

Statement of the Problem

Smartphone journalism has both advantages and challenges. While smartphones offer cheap, lightweight, and multipurpose equipment for news collection and dissemination, they also raise concerns about the impact on journalistic norms and content quality. Researchers warn that prioritizing speed over depth, accuracy, and fact-checking can lead to compromised professional gatekeeping (Goggin, 2020). Additionally, many reports lack editorial finish and critical context, a concern in Nigeria due to the proliferation of

citizen journalism and social media news reports. Additionally, media houses often lack sufficient training and editorial control for mobile reports, posing a risk of credibility erosion. This study aims to critically examine the effect of smartphones on reporting practices and overall journalism quality in Nigeria.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to examine the use of smartphone in journalism by assessing its effect on reporting practices and content quality. The objectives include:

- i. To assess the extent to which journalists in Nigeria use smartphones for news gathering and reporting.
- ii. To identify the advantages smartphones provide in the practice of journalism.
- iii. To examine the challenges journalists face when using smartphones for reporting.

Literature Review

Smartphone Journalism

The capabilities of smartphones—camera, video recording, radio, network connection, GPS, messaging, mobile apps, and online browsing—converge. It quickly gains legitimacy as a mechanism for gathering and disseminating media. According to journalism scholars, mobile devices could increase a news organization's alternatives for gathering news (Quinn, 2011b). The news cycle flow was being altered by new media technologies, according to some (Westlund & Quinn, 2018). The tools, knowledge, and training necessary for journalists to work with mobile devices have been made available to them (Borum & Quinn, 2016; Kumar & Mohamed Haneef, 2018). The term "mojo" refers to mobile journalists, multimedia journalists, video journalists (VJ), backpack journalists, and journalists who handle all aspects of journalism (Blankenship, 2016). Mojo journalists, according to Borum and Quinn (2016), are reporters who use mobile devices to create multimedia stories. Mobile devices have evolved into superior journalistic instruments for producing and disseminating multimedia news. Although the word "mojo" has no clear origin, it seems to have been first used in a journalistic context in 2005 by employees of Gannett newspapers in the US (Quinn, 2011b). Smartphone journalism also involves gathering material that is widely shared online, working with different sources to edit it, and disseminating it to the public—all while maintaining a level of journalism quality, of course. According to Kumar and Haneef's (2018) research, Hindustan Times uses mobile devices for journalistic purposes. Both demonstrate that since multimedia is unavoidable in the modern environment, journalism needs to adapt and stop predicated on the medium.

Technological Determinism Theory

Technological Determination is one of theory upon which this work is anchored. According to the theory, as a society transitions from one technological era to the next, media technologies influence how its members think, feel, and behave. Technological determinism can take many forms. It begins with the introduction of newer technologies, which bring about a number of changes. Occasionally, these changes can also result in the loss of previously acquired knowledge. For instance, the use and purchasing of conventional media, particularly newspapers and magazines, has gradually decreased since the advent of new media technology, such as the internet. As a result, technology is also having an impact on how well a culture communicates and sources information.

Empirical Review

Perreault & Stanfield (2019) examined mobile journalism as lifestyle journalism. One of the fields of journalism that is expanding the fastest in the modern era is mobile journalism. However, mobile journalists are caught in a state of conflict between traditional journalism and lifestyle journalism, as well as between print, broadcast, and internet media. In this study, 39 mobile journalists from six nations across four continents were surveyed online about their perceptions of their work in the newsroom and their conception of their journalistic duty via the lens of field theory. The participants were journalists from local and national newsrooms working in print, digital, television, and magazines. Understanding how mobile journalists view mobile production as a component of their journalistic function and which field theory dimensions impact mobile production in their newsrooms were the goals of the study. Although other studies have shown that lifestyle journalism is becoming more and more common, the current study concludes that the rise of mobile journalism is indicative of the evolution of lifestyle journalism standards, such as audience-driven content, in even traditional media.

Social media and smartphones have altered how news is gathered, produced, edited, and distributed by the media. Prestianta, (2022) looks at how journalists at Kompas.com, one of Indonesia's first online media outlets, use mobile journalism in their job by applying the journalistic capital concept. The way that newsrooms and journalists react to the shift brought about by social media and mobile devices is examined in this article. According to the qualitative data analysis derived from in-depth interviews with journalists for Kompas.com and document analysis, the use of mojo on Kompas.com is still in its infancy and is still seeking a form. Kompas.com incorporates cellphones into journalism to create multimedia stories that satisfy evolving business and journalistic demands.

Journalists are expected to use mobile devices to create brief videos that cover current events in their communities. Thus, a new order in journalism was born: the practice of *mojo*. Kompas.com creates a multimedia division and trains journalists on every desk in the newsroom to enhance their abilities. In addition to creating brief videos for social media, journalists acquire new software and equipment.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a survey research methodology. The population of the study are journalists from the Oyo State Chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalist. The study made use of systematic and purposive sampling techniques and a sample of 120 media practitioners were selected for the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling techniques in which participants are selected because of the unique characteristics they possess that related to the subject matter. The Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size. The Yamane formula is denoted by:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+Ne^2)}$$

where:

n = number of samples

N = total population

e = error margin / margin of error

The study adopted research questionnaire and interview guide as research instruments. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 23.0 software. Descriptive statistics involving frequency tables, percentages, means and standard deviation were used to analyze the responses from the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Table 1: The extent to which journalists in Nigeria use smartphones for news gathering and reporting

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	\bar{x}	Std Dev
1	Smartphones enable journalists to capture and report news events quickly and efficiently, allowing for real-time reporting and live streaming	34 (28.3%)	69 (57.5%)	16 (13.3%)	1 (0.8%)	-	2.88	0.69
2	Smartphones are used by journalists to capture live footage and audio, submitting stories from traffic jams, to fact-checking sources online	46 (38.3%)	64 (53.3%)	6 (5.0%)	4 (3.3%)	-	2.42	0.60
3	Smartphones offer journalist the ability to multitask such as recording, live coverage, taking pictures and making calls using a single gadget.	74 (61.7%)	42 (35.0%)	4 (3.3%)	-	-	2.87	0.95
4	Smartphone is handy and is easy to move around with and journalism tasks easily	55(45.8%)	34 (28.3%)	23 (19.2%)	8 (6.7%)	-	2.06	0.76

Table 1 shows that 69 (57.5%) of the respondents agree that smartphones enable journalists to capture and report news events quickly and efficiently, allowing for real-time reporting and live streaming, 34 (28.3%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 16 (13.3%) were undecided while 1 (0.8%) of the respondents disagree on the statement. Also, 64 (53.3%) of the respondents agree that smartphones are used by journalists to capture live footage and audio, submitting stories from traffic jams, to fact-checking sources online, 46 (38.3%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement 6 (5.0%) of the respondents were undecided while 4 (3.3%) of the respondents disagree on the statement. In addition, 74 (61.7%) of the respondents strongly agree that smartphones offer journalist the ability to multitask such as recording, live coverage, taking pictures and making calls using a single gadget., 42 (35.0%) of the

respondents agree to the statement while 4 (3.3%) were undecided. Likewise, 55(45.8%) of the respondents strongly agree that smartphone is handy and is easy to move around with and journalism tasks easily, 34 (28.3%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement while 23 (12.4%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 23 (19.2%) of the respondents were undecided while 8 (6.7%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

Table 2: The advantages smartphones provide in the practice of journalism

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	\bar{x}	Std Dev
1	Smartphones enable journalists to report from anywhere, at any time, making it easier to cover breaking news and events	19 (15.8%)	84 (70.0%)	15 (12.5%)	2 (1.7%)	-	2.00	0.59
2	Smartphones allow journalists to capture high-quality photos, videos, and audio recordings, enhancing storytelling and multimedia content creation.	19 (15.8%)	64 (53.3%)	19 (15.8%)	18 (15.0%)	-	2.30	0.91
3	Smartphones enable journalists to report live, providing real-time updates and commentary, and allowing audiences to stay informed as events unfold	23 (19.2%)	81 (67.5%)	14 (11.7%)	2 (1.7%)	-	2.96	0.61
4	Smartphones provide journalists with instant access to online resources, databases, and social media, facilitating research and fact-checking.	79 (65.8%)	24 (20.0%)	13 (10.8%)	4 (3.3%)	-	2.13	1.05

Table 2 shows that 84 (70.0%) of the respondents agree that smartphones enable journalists to report from anywhere, at any time, making it easier to cover breaking news and events, 19 (15.8%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, 15 (12.5%) of the respondents were undecided while 2 (1.7%) of the respondents disagree on the statement. Also, 64 (53.3%) of the respondents agree that smartphones allow journalists to capture high-quality photos, videos, and audio recordings, enhancing storytelling and multimedia content creation., 19 (15.8%) of the respondents strongly agree and were undecided on the statement respectively while 18 (15.0%) of the respondents disagree on the statement. In addition, 81 (67.5%) of the respondents agree that smartphones enable journalists to report live, providing real-time updates and commentary, and allowing audiences to stay informed as events unfold, 23 (19.2%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, 14 (11.7%) were undecided while 2 (1.7%) of the respondents disagree on the statement. Likewise, 79 (65.8%) of the respondents strongly agree that smartphones provide journalists with instant access to online resources, databases, and social media, facilitating research and fact-checking., 24 (20.0%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 13 (10.8%) were undecided while 4 (3.3%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

Table 3: The challenges journalists face when using smartphones for reporting

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	\bar{x}	Std Dev
1	Data security which has to do with protecting sensitive information and sources from hacking, surveillance, or data breaches	69 (57.5%)	27 (22.5%)	24 (20.0%)	-	-	2.63	0.80
2	Journalists may face security risks when using smartphones in the field, such as theft, confiscation, or surveillance	73 (60.8%)	25 (20.8%)	20 (16.7%)	2 (1.7%)	-	2.71	0.65

3	The multifunctional nature of smartphones can be distracting, potentially affecting focus and productivity	45 (37.5%)	68 (56.7%)	4 (3.3%)	3 (2.5%)	-	2.95	0.88
4	Journalists may be vulnerable to online harassment, trolling, and abuse, particularly when reporting on sensitive or contentious topics	53 (44.2%)	50 (41.7%)	9 (7.5%)	8 (6.7%)	-	2.75	0.73

Table 3 shows that 69 (57.5%) of the respondents strongly agree that data security which has to do with protecting sensitive information and sources from hacking, surveillance, or data breaches, 27 (22.5%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 20 (16.7%) of the respondents were undecided while 24 (20.0%) of the respondents were undecided on the statement. Also, 73 (60.8%) of the respondents strongly agree that journalists may face security risks when using smartphones in the field, such as theft, confiscation, or surveillance, 25 (20.8%) of the respondents agree to the statement, 20 (16.7%) of the respondents were undecided while 2 (1.7%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

In addition, 68 (56.7%) of the respondents agree that the multifunctional nature of smartphones can be distracting, potentially affecting focus and productivity, 45 (37.5%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, 4 (3.3%) of the respondents were undecided while 3 (2.5%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

Similarly, 53 (44.2%) of the respondents strongly agree that journalists may be vulnerable to online harassment, trolling, and abuse, particularly when reporting on sensitive or contentious topics, 24 (20.0%) of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, 8 (6.7%) of the respondents were undecided while 8 (6.7%) of the respondents disagree on the statement.

Discussion of Findings

This study is on smartphone use in journalism: assessing its effect on reporting practices and content quality. The findings of this study showed that smartphones enable journalists to report from anywhere, at any time, making it easier to cover breaking news and events, allow journalists to capture high-quality photos, videos, and audio recordings, enhancing storytelling and multimedia content creation and smartphones provide journalists with instant access to online resources, databases, and social media, facilitating research and fact-checking. Also, some of the challenges journalists face when using smartphones for reporting include data security which has to do with protecting sensitive information and sources from hacking, security risks, multifunctional nature of smartphones can be distracting, potentially affecting focus and productivity and online harassment, trolling, and abuse, particularly when reporting on sensitive or contentious topics. This finding supports the study of Perreault & Stanfield (2019) who reported that the rise of mobile journalism is indicative of the evolution of journalism standards.

Conclusion

The evolution of technology has transformed journalism as the use of smartphone has revolutionized journalism. Smartphones make it easy and faster for live coverage, live streaming, recording, taking picture and all manner of tasks involved in journalism. Therefore, the use of smartphone has add value to journalism as it makes work faster and smarter. This study shows that some of the challenges journalists face when using smartphones for reporting include data security which has to do with protecting sensitive information and sources from hacking, security risks, multifunctional nature of smartphones can be distracting, potentially affecting focus and productivity and online harassment, trolling and abuse when reporting sensitive information or matters.

Recommendations

- i. Media organizations should organize consistent training for media professionals on new media technology especially smartphone journalism.
- ii. Media organizations should invest more in new technology so as to stay abreast of the latest trend in journalism.

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