

Influence Of Digital Journalism's Gratification On News Access And Choice In Kenyan Universities: A Case Study Of Chuka University

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ABSTRACT: The aspect of digital journalism on news access and choice has not received proper empirical research. The question whether digital journalism gratifications influence news access and choice is an area that requires additional research. This study sought to explore the extent to which digital journalism audiences' gratification has influenced news access and choice among university students in Kenya. The study was carried out in four selected Universities. The study employed descriptive research design. The target population of the study was 64,497. Purposive sampling was used to sample the universities. Random sampling was used to sample 384 respondents from the sampled universities. Data was collected using 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 found that diversified digital journalism products gratify the interests and demands of internet users. The study recommends that media practitioners should conceptualize their audiences and digital journalism platforms that gratify them. Media houses and the government to develop internet infrastructure, formulate ethical framework and policies to guide digital journalism practice in Kenya. The finding of this study would provide knowledge on how digital journalism content is packaged and styled to appeal to the audiences.

Key words: Digital Journalism, Influence, Gratification, Multimedia

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital journalism has transformed news communication since the early 1990's in the mass media world (Domingo, 1998). Production of news has tremendously improved due to revolution in the way news is gathered and propagated. Many news media practitioners have diversified their online outlets in order to suit the needs of their audiences (Prior, 2005). Social media platforms used by journalists to report news play key roles of informing, educating and entertaining media audiences (Jordaan, 2013). Digital technology has not spared any section of the media. From print to broadcast media, transformation feature prominently due to prominent due to the convergence of print, audio and video news products on digital platforms for ease of access by online audiences (Napoli, 2011). According to Cottle and Ashton (1999) on changing technology and journalist practices, there is a critical redefinition of news rooms and professional practices due to digitization, technological convergence and new communication technologies. This has continued to cause notable developments in recent news technologies that have impacted enormously the process of news gathering and distribution.

Digital journalism has embarked on publishing tailor made news stories on internet platforms stitched together to attract a particular segment of audiences (Massey & Levy, 1999). Technological changes have been the most dramatic in the history of mass media because of the increase in the social media sites and are becoming more common for news reporting. Hand held gadgets like iphones, ipad, the mind blowing blog spots, plus many other user developed contents together with the internet platforms such as Twitter, Face Book, You Tube and websites for spreading it has led to an interesting configuration of how media relates with its audiences Napoli (2011). Deuze (2004) looked at digital journalism in the form of media formats such as video, audio, graphics and text. Such multimedia capability of digital journalism enabled eye witnesses to report on the Multimediality offered an opportunity for eye witnesses to cover the Asian Tsunami of 2004 by using photos, videos and stories on blogs and news Asian Tsunami of the year 2004 by using videos and story blogs (Meek, 2006). This enabled the world to access news about the devastation caused by Tsunami at the time. According Deuze (1999) hypertext ability of digital journalism has no limitation of space; consequently, it provides unlimited space for in-depth coverage and deeper analysis of news stories. Quandt et al. (2006) found that the online journalists in Germany and the United States valued immediacy as the most important gratifying feature

of online journalism. Immediacy was touted to be the biggest strength in online journalism due to the ability to make frequent updates (O'Sullivan, 2005). According to Meek (2006) digital media was able to report in real

time when terrorist bombed the twin world trade center in United States of America on September 11, 2001. Consequently, due to the overwhelming request to access by audiences, some websites carrying the story crushed for failure to contain the capacity to respond to enormous requests. Chishala (2015) work analyzed and measured Zambian citizens' perception on whether digital journalism helped to counter the traditional public media that propagated the interests of the ruling government. He found that many people trusted digital media to be more credible source of news than the traditional media.

News media continues to inform their audiences about information that is outside their reach. According to Lippmann (1965), media works as a spotlight, lighting on only particular areas of the world at a certain point in time. In many occasions, audiences would like to select which information they need as they make choices out of various parts of the world shone by online media outlets that they read, watch or listen to (Zillman& Bryant, 1985). Digital journalists have realized this and the recent online technology have allowed them to provide differentiated products from one another and more importantly on different platforms. Today therefore there are finite set of news information from which to select (Tewksbury, 2005). According to Google Consumer Barometer Survey (2015), the number of internet users in Kenya that goes online for news, weather updates and sports stands at 66%.

Online journalism is a new phenomenon in the history of journalism, especially in the countries like Kenya where the growth of internet is only a recent initiative. To a larger extent digital journalism has redefined the traditional journalism and its audience (Mabweazera, 2013). This is because online news audiences are quite demanding, selective and more customized than the traditional news audiences. They need the news in real time and they want to see videos, pictures and text. In most cases, online audiences narrow down their focus on particular news stories that interest them and ignore the rest. Traditional media has a long tradition of audience dissatisfaction about information accessibility and lack of choice (Habermas, 1962). Such format capabilities have been big concerns for media audiences for many years before the launch of online journalism (Habermas, 1962). In contrast, digital journalism has improved the way news audience access and choose the information to read, watch and listen to. This means that the technological advancements into many media platforms have been spread (diffused) to many audiences that have adapted the practice of concentrating on accessing and choosing the news material they needfor satisfaction (Chyi, 2009).

II. DISCUSSION

The study sought to establish gratifications respondents gain from accessing digital news. A total of 381 respondents participated in the study. Responses on various factors were captured on Likert'sscale and presented in Table below.

Responses on Gratifications Internet users gain from Online Journalism

Gratifications	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Unconcerned		Dissatisfied		Very dissatisfied	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Style of news presentation	41	10.8	171	44.9	50	13.1	76	19.9	43	11.3
Timeliness in updating news	99	26.0	187	49.1	33	8.7	47	12.3	15	3.9
Different points of view	119	31.2	111	29.1	53	13.9	41	10.8	57	15.0
The level of drama in news	99	26.0	102	26.8	59	15.5	62	16.3	59	15.5
The level of news analysis	44	11.5	54	14.2	90	23.6	101	26.5	92	24.1

Data on Table 9 reveals an array of variables that were explored regarding whether internet users gain gratification from online news. 10.8% of the respondents indicated that they were very satisfied with the style of online news presentation, with a majority 44.9% of the respondents indicating they were satisfied. The unconcerned respondents formed 13.1%, and 19.9% dissatisfied. 11.3% of the respondents were very dissatisfied with the style of online news presentation. Across my sample, the finding is that digital journalism technology has influenced the way news is packaged, styled and displayed to impress audiences. In many ways digital news platforms give a list of news headlines on their websites and home pages and they also provide links to related stories using hypertext. They also have live news streaming sites as well as pictures and graphical stories in high definition formats that attracts internet users to access them for appealing news stories.

The study also sought the respondents views on whether they were gratified with timeliness of online news updates, and 26.0% of the respondents were very satisfied with timely update of digital news. Majority (49.1%) respondents were satisfied, 8.7% were unconcerned, 12.3% were dissatisfied, and 3.9% were very dissatisfied. The study therefore reveals that majority (47%) of the respondents were satisfied with timely digital news update. Respondents who were satisfied said that the ability to access real time news saves them time and money because at the click of a button you receive news of your choice from anywhere around the world.

Regarding digital journalism provision of news using different points of views, majority, 31.2% of the respondents, were very satisfied, 29.1% were satisfied, 13.9% were unconcerned, and 10.8% of the respondents were dissatisfied with 15.0% being very dissatisfied. It is significant because it gives audiences and reporters a chance to give their varied opinions on issues affecting people's lives. Majority (60%) of the respondents go for online news in search of different opinions on news issues. Online journalism's ability to allow individuals, analysts, experts and journalists to be opinionated about various news items gratify many audiences appetite for various view-points. This plays in the demands of the uses and gratifications theory by West and Turner (2000) that says that people choose news items that fulfill their interests and demands. Those internet users not ready to explore online journalism for different thoughts remained less pleased by its ability to provide various views from different people.

On whether entertainment gratified online news users, 26.0% of respondents were very satisfied with online news, 26.8% were satisfied, 15.5% were unconcerned, 16.3% were dissatisfied and 15.5% were very dissatisfied. The implication is that entertainment provided by online news gratifies internet users. Across sample, respondents said that they were able to access entertaining news online. For example, news about music and sports celebrities are more popular with students than staff members. The study also sought to establish whether the level of drama on digital news gratifies internet users. The results show that 3.7% of the respondents reported that they were very satisfied with the level of drama on online news, 29.7% were satisfied, a majority, 45.1%, were unconcerned, 20.7% were dissatisfied, and 0.8% of the respondents were very dissatisfied with the level of drama on digital news. These results implied that audiences are more likely to watch news unfold, which is dramatic and very interesting. But, 21.5 % of the respondents who were not gratified by dramatic news said that they are normally fulfilled by edited news with very little drama if any. This is because dramatic news, in many occasions are always raw without any editing failing to meet the test of journalistic ethics. The results further sought to establish whether deeper analysis of digital news gratifies audiences of online journalism. 11.5% were very satisfied with online news analysis, 14.2% were satisfied, 23.6% were unconcerned, and 26.5% were dissatisfied, while 24.1% were very dissatisfied with the level of online news analysis. Students who responded to the questionnaire said they mainly browse through online news headlines, contrary to the majority of staff members who said they like going for in depth news after seeing the news headlines by clicking on online journalism's hypertext interface to open up the story. Implication of these results was that 55% of the respondents were gratified with the style of news presentation, majority 75% were gratified with timeliness of online news updates, 60.3% of the respondents reported to be gratified with presentation of different points of news views, 33.4% were gratified with the level of online news drama, and 52.8% were gratified with entertainment level on online news while 25.7% of the respondents were gratified with news analysis provided by online news. However, the results agreed with Seib (2002) on getting the news in real time. Online journalism's real time coverage of news and showing the story unfold is dramatic and exciting. And with the news available anywhere at any time, many people will rush to receive online news through internet. According to West & Turner (2000), Uses and Gratifications Theory says that media audiences actively choose the medium they want that will satisfy their specific needs. It gives the audiences power to decide what media to consume, assuming that the audiences have apparent intentions of use for particular contents. Further, Katz (1996) indicates that the coming of online journalism has provided news audiences with opportunity to select news that gratifies their needs and interests. Digital journalism propagates differentiated content, varying from entertaining news, comprehensive news covered from different points of view to timely news updates.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results in the study show that 55% of the respondents were gratified with the style of news presentation. A majority, 75%, were gratified with timeliness in the level of digital news updates; 60.3% of the respondents reported to be gratified with presentation of different points of news views; 33.4% were gratified with the level of online news drama; and 52.8% were gratified with entertainment level on online news while 25.7% of the respondents were gratified with news analysis provided by digital news. The popularity of digital journalism is due its global reach. Individuals, groups of people, journalists and institutions are able to create and post news videos, comments and images at no cost. Majority of the respondents said that Facebook has become more attractive because it increased its video capability which in turn increased audiences' appetite to log on to it regularly. Younger internet users, particularly students, consume a lot visual news via smartphones and computers. The finding is that these high level video consumptions also depends on the number of times one accesses the internet; that is, the more the number of times the frequent online news access and vice versa. Anderson (2006) observes that the impact of digital media on audience has emerged in a way of putting more information on their sites providing more choices on demand and enabling the availability of variety of consumable news materials far and wide. Digital media was found to be able to gratify audiences by combining news together with other internet needs such as email news alerts and social media news alerts. This means that

the provision of real time news for 24 hours is very important aspect of digital journalism. This study concludes that the ability of news to inform, educate and entertain people, and its importance as such, should influence the government and media stake holders to increase investment on digital media developments in the country. Audiences of media are increasingly becoming more selective in their news demands. Therefore media practitioners in the media industries should conceptualize their audiences' demands so that they can provide online news that gratifies their appetite. Finally, Kenyan universities offering journalism courses should open up official digital news sites to provide necessary platform for media students to practice news gathering and online reporting.

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