INFLUENCE OF ONLINE JOURNALISM PLATFORMS ON NEWS ACCESS AND CHOICE IN SELECTED KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Online journalism has enabled the speedy access and easy choice of informative, educative and entertaining news around the globe. This study sought to examine the extent to which online journalism has influenced news access and choice among students and staff members in selected Kenyan universities. The study employed descriptive research design. The target population of the study was 64,189 subjects comprising of 60,389 students and 3,800 staff members. Purposive sampling was used to sample four Kenyan universities. Random sampling was used to sample 358 students and 23 members of staff from the sampled universities. Data was collected using questionnaires. A pilot study was carried out among four universities that were not included in the actual study to establish reliability and validity of the research instruments. The researcher used Cronbach Alpha co-efficient to test reliability of the instruments. A reliability coefficient of 0.985 was obtained for the questionnaires. The data gathered was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.0 was used for data analysis. The findings were presented in form of frequency tables. Online journalism's provision of 24 hours news service, storage of news for later use, provision of timely comprehensive news and regular news notifications, to a large extent are the factors that influence online journalism audiences' choice of news to access to read, watch or listen to. The study recommends that media practitioners and the government should develop the internet infrastructure; formulate ethical frameworks and policies to guide online journalism practice in Kenya. The study recommends that media industries increase investment in developing online journalism so as to be in a better position to attract more audiences. Universities, media industries and individual journalists should embrace digital journalism the earliest because there is a potential growth in the field of online journalism.

Key words: Online journalism, Influence, News access and Choice.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Online journalism, also referred to as digital journalism, has influenced news access and choice (Deuze, 2001). It is a contemporary type of journalism in which editorial material is distributed through the internet differently, from traditional publishing on broadcast or print (Scott, 2005). This has enabled the speedy access and easy choice of informative, educative and entertaining news around the globe. The use of online newspapers has tremendously increased due to rapidness, timeliness, accessibility to their sites and the ability to select particular news to reach their technologically savvy audiences (Arango-Ferero & Roncallo-Dow, 2013).

Platforms such as Websites, Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Blogs and many other digital online platforms have opened up a new chapter to online journalism. According to Lacy and Simion (1993), online news goes beyond geographical boundaries to reach audiences at far distances. Similarly, print media companies that have embraced online journalism are operating in dual geographic market, satisfying both the local and long distance audiences (Thurman, 2007). However, online news audiences narrow their focus on their media accessibility based on individualized goals and interests. Thus, they lack knowledge about other news materials (Katz, 1996). Katz argues that these audiences are rarely able to embrace the same diet of news as offline news audiences.

Internet based digital journalism gives audiences an opportunity to focus on the news of their choice since these internet outlets such as websites and news blogs, are relatively specialized (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Some of these online news outlets offer products that are differentiated. The audiences' need for selected news items is a driving factor for digital media online selection. According to Singer (2001), different newspapers in the United States of America came up with different versions of news for online and print. Thus, a lot of sport and local news were increased online compared to national news that was more reserved for print (Barnhurst, 2002).

By 1995 in the USA, there were barely 5% online news seekers; however, by 2002 that number went up to 35% (Siapera & Veglis, 2012). Online audiences for newspapers skyrocketed to a high peak totaling 179.3 million readers in 2015. The explosion in the interaction between the audiences and the digital newspaper material is due to the digital technology of mobile devices such as tablets and smart phones, leading to newspaper digital audiences growing as fast as those of the internet in the past 12 months of the year 2015 (Conaghan, 2015). Since Singer (1998), wrote about search engines in the United States of America, the most widely used popular websites initiated by traditional media outlets employees are the Matt Drudge, pseudonymous online scribe and the Wall Street Journal (Cohen, 2002).

Great transformation is now taking shape in the arena of journalism that could be the most important since the time of the Penny Press in the mid-19th Century (Pavlik, 2013). In the 21st Century we are witnessing a kind of journalism with characteristics such as high level of content specialization, ubiquitous news, worldwide news access, speedy coverage of news, interactivity, multimediality and hypertextuality (Scott, 2005). Traditional media has been full of gatekeepers that choose relatively all news that they themselves think are worth reporting disregarding the needs, feelings and wishes of their audiences (White, 1950). And now with the advent of online media, the gatekeepers have been reduced considerably and users are at liberty to find any news material they want without anyone choosing and picking for them (Mudhai, 2011). The upsurge of web newspapers then took place across the world with newspapers in Spain, Singapore, and Australia plus many other European countries (Gutner, 2003).

In Africa, digital journalism has been practiced in South Africa as a supplement to traditional media (Scott, 2005). Digital journalism has caused many changes in the way news is consumed and produced by many traditional media industries. According to Mavhungu and Mabweazara (2014), out of 10 million web browsers every month, in 2012, online consumers of news in South Africa were 3.3 million. South African media industries have given much attention to Twitter and Facebook thus bringing a shift to the social media and accepting it as a truthful journalism tool in this digital age (Jordaan, 2013).

According to Chari (2009), news consumption in Zimbabwe gives citizens the opportunity to be conversant with and maintain social, cultural and political network by redefining traditional media through the adoption of social media which has changed the interaction between journalists and their audiences. Mabweazeras (2013) argues that social media has been appropriated within the environment of mainstream media in Zimbabwe.

Kenyan media is seen to be opening its doors to online journalism with unfettered euphoria provided by many new ways of accessing news as it breaks 24 hours each day (Ndonye & Khasandi-Telewa, 2013). However, the Kenyan media industry is struggling to adjust to fit into the new era of digital journalism by embracing online journalism to help it produce and avail digital content to a lot more technical savvy audiences (Mudhai, 2011).

Online journalism is a new phenomenon in the history of journalism, especially in African countries like Kenya where the growth of internet is only a recent initiative. To a larger extent online journalism has redefined traditional journalism and its audience (Mabweazera, 2013). Kenyan government has improved the technological infrastructure, which has helped many people to access internet broadband (Mudhai, 2011). Fiber cables have been installed throughout the country with an aim of ensuring the availability of cheap and faster internet. The aspect of technological advancement of internet that has brought about online journalism itself and how it facilitates news access and choice has not been explored. By employing the theory of Media Richness, this study attempts to provide a new pathway to understanding how online journalism has influenced news access and choice in Kenyan universities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Technological development of the internet has brought about online journalism. Online journalism targets audiences differently from the traditional media journalism. Studies about online journalism have focused on how its technological capabilities such as multimediality, hypertextuality, immediacy and interactivity have influenced the traditional media. However, little is known to what extent online journalism has influenced news access and choice, especially in newly internet-mediated societies such as Kenya. This is because the technical aspect of digital media itself in how it facilitates news access and choice has not been explored (interphase, colour, design, style, etc). It is on this premise that this study sought to examine the extent to which online journalism has influenced news access and choice.

2. Literature Review

With the coming up of online journalism and increased barrage of news updates for 24 hours each day and night, getting abundant news speedily seems indispensable in this modern days of internet technology (Deuze, 1999). The two leading newspapers in Kenya, Daily Nation and The Standard were studied in the analysis of dramatic change in practice of journalism and culture in Africa. Mudhai (2011) in his review of new media between the years 2002-2010 focused on Daily Nation and the Standard as they struggle to fit into the cutting edge online news delivery. The object here was to determine the extent to which the coverage reflects openness and immediacy in a networked and converged context. The current study examined the extent to which openness and immediacy in online journalism influence news access and choice.

With regards to media facilities continuously embracing newspapers in digital and online formats, Ndonye and Khasandi-Telewa (2013) looking at how the internet is enabling the traditional media to incorporate online media, shows that with the origin of the internet, print journalism is facing a downward trend, consequently print journalism is enlarging to other digital platforms. These new forms of journalism are quite interactive, real time, and further more easily accessible. While Harcup (2009) finds that the digital media uses World Wide Web that allows for the transfer of news all over the world through the internet. These studies have looked at the influence of internet on the old traditional media. However, the current study focused on the extent to which internet capabilities of online journalism influence news access and choice,

New media brings with it customized content and this development allows publications to personalize their products. Thus, it allows the audiences to make preferences in relation to their needs (Hiebert & Gibbons, 2000). Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo, Google and most recently, WhatsApp have enabled media audiences to access news for 24 hours day and night and that way, ensuring the availability of news every time. The only worry is that one has to spend money on electricity and internet connection to get to the networking sites.

Today, both online journalism and print media complement each other and somehow the press that fails to embrace new media might find it difficult to survive in isolation. Ndonye and Khasandi-Telewa (2013) in their study of the history of online journalism and the future of the press, realize that Kenya's most popular newspapers are quickly incorporating on-line journalism. For example, the Standard Group and the Nation Media Group are embracing the use of multimedia channels to disseminate information backed up with audio and video images on their online platforms. The two newspapers have also picked up in earnest the use of social media networking sites to interact with their audience. According to Pew (2010), the online journalism provides quick real-time updates of news continuously, and therefore online news source remains more favourable in relation to the print media. These studies have looked at the history of online journalism and its importance as compared to the importance print media. However, the current study looked at the extent to which online journalism influences news access and choice.

On development, the Kenyan government has improved the technological infrastructure, which has helped many people to access broadband internet (Mudhai, 2011). Mudhai shows that fiber cables have been installed throughout the country with an aim of ensuring the availability of cheap and faster internet. Market forces such as mobile companies like Orange, Safaricom, Airtel and Yu are providing easy access to entertainment and news sites. Therefore, taking up of internet news sites by media outlets such as the Standard, the Nation, KBC and Capital FM is making it easy for Kenyans to access news digitally. Kenyans abroad are also able to get news through such websites. Other platforms such as Twitter, Face book together with news sites have given rise to a lot of news and many new platforms that Kenyans can access at a low cost due to competition among local network providers. Even the youths with little income to spend can choose and access outlets of news they prefer through mobile phones. Mudhai looked at the capacity building of online journalism technology through internet installation in Kenya. The current study looked at the extent to which online journalism technology influences news access and choice in selected Kenyan Universities.

A research by Obiero (2008) looks at the impact of the Internet on newspapers in Kenya. He notes that the Nation Media Group has embraced online media platform and by so doing, the company has employed internet technology in complementing traditional journalism. In the current study the researcher has looked at the extent to which online journalism influence news access and choice.

A study by Obare (2011) evaluates the ways online social platforms were utilized by Kenyans and media in the 2007 presidential elections. His findings were that social media helped in propagating hate messages, negative ethnicity and propaganda leading to hatred among citizens along tribal lines. It also improved political participation in the 2013 general elections. However, his study did not work at the extent to which online journalism influences news access and choice leaving a knowledge gap to be filled by the current study.

2.1 Factors that Influence Online Journalism Audiences' Choice of News Content

The widespread adoption of significantly hypertextual, interactive, immediate, multimedia, online journalism with ability to store news (back up) by media practitioners has to a large extent influence news access and choice by internet users (Deuze, 2001). These broad factors of online journalism significantly draws the attention of news audiences to go for online news for the benefit of what satisfies there interest and demand at the click a button. Contemporarily, with technological improvement of internet strength and the availability of portable internet enabled gadgets; the attractiveness of online news is scaling up by the day. Many audiences are now able to choose the types of news they want to read, watch and listen to. This kind of study has not carried out in Kenyan universities.

Hypertext capability is one of the most useful factors in online journalism. Nelsion (1965) defines hypertext as a computer based nonlinear group of texts that are linked together by hyperlinks. Deuze (1999) highlights on how hypertexts used innovatively provide many advantages over print media. He explains that hypertext has no limitation of space and it offers variety of perspectives, direct access to source, no finite deadline, personalized paths of news reading and perception, and also the simultaneous targeting of different groups of readers such as those interested only in the headlines as well as those interested in deeper analysis of news. Deuze's study did not look at how hypertext capability of online journalism influences news access and choice. Hence, the current study has focused on that gap.

Interactivity is also an important factor of online journalism. Steensen (2011) demonstrates that interactivity is one of the biggest strength of online journalism due to its ability to make frequent updates. His research shows that editors are becoming more eager to interact with readers. According to Sambrook (2005), the citizen's contributions cascades exceptionally a notch higher, such that news reporters' interaction with their audiences has tremendously improved. The work of Domingo (2008) on Interactivity in the Daily Routine of Online Newsrooms across Europe argues that many online print media aim to create discussion platforms, giving their audiences opportunity to participate by providing their views to the topics of media debates on current issues. This is done either by giving the users an opportunity to comment just below a news story or forming debate spaces from chosen stories felt suitable for discussion. In this era, photos, videos and comments on stories and discussions forums are allowed in the mainstream media and users are allowed to select or filter news. These studies have examined the extent to which online journalism utilizes new technological capability of interactivity more than previously. It is much clearer that much more research remains to be done to establish the influence of online journalism interactive capability on news access and choice.

Immediacy plays a major role in online journalism. Fortunati, Raycheva, Harro-Loit & O'Sullivan (2005) write on how the world today wants news fast and furious, how the immediacy of online media was tested when majority of people turned to the internet to find out what had happened in United States after the terrorist bombing of the world trade center in New York on September 11, 2001. They say that some websites collapsed, for failure to contain the capacity to respond to the overwhelming search for news

requests. In this sense, audiences were able to access the on-goings online via Websites, blogs and Twitter. Farhi (2011) demonstrates that Andy Carvin of the United States National Public Radio, by use of Twitter to report on the Tunisian Arab Spring had about 15,500 followers in December 2010. Carvin proceeded to other countries like Libya and Egypt in 2011, as the protests escalated across the northern Africa. By April 2011, his followers surged to 42,000 and fully blown to 70,500 in June, the same year. He used to tweet for 16 hours each day doing an average of 400 tweets in a day. These studies concentrated on how Websites, blogs and Twitter complement traditional news media but there were no conclusive findings available on the extent to which immediacy in online journalism influence news access and choice.

Similarly, the multimedia feature of online journalism is a driving factor that attracts news audiences. The understanding of online journalism according to Deuze (2004) is in two ways: first, in form of media format such as text, audio, or graphics and secondly, the packaging of stories in different media such as newspapers, radio or television. This research emphasizes on multimediality in online journalism with the first understanding. For example, multimediality offered an opportunity for eye witnesses to cover the Asian Tsunami of 2004 by using photos, videos and stories on blogs and news sites to the whole world (Meek, 2006).

Back-up ability of online journalism has led to the permanent availability of published news online. The storage ability of online journalism makes it easy for audiences to find and choose which news to watch or listen to (Ward, 2012). This type of flexibility enables audiences to seek out video, audio or written news that interests them at their own pleasure. According to Poteet (2000), portable technological devices such as smart phones and computers that include wireless connections to the internet offer extensive storage capacity for published news. He notes that technological platforms of online journalism store all news published online providing easy access and choice of news needed. For example, any news posted on yahoo, Facebook, Twitter, Google or You Tube remains stored there unless pulled down by the publisher. However, the literature has not indicated the extent to which back-up capability of online journalism influence news access and choice, leaving a gap to be filled by the current study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design
In this section the researcher presents the methodology that was used to carry out the study. The section consisted of the research design, target population, sampling procedures and sample size, research instruments, reliability and validity of the instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis.

3.2 Research Design
The study adopted descriptive survey research design. According to Lockesh (1984) survey studies are conducted to collect detailed descriptions of existing phenomena with the intent of employing data to justify current conditions and practices or to make more intelligent plans for improving them. The descriptive survey design was appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to describe the influence of online journalism on news access and choice by gathering facts to determine the status given without manipulating variables.

3.3 Location of the Study
The study was conducted in four Campuses of selected universities in Kenya namely, Kenyatta University, Chuka University, Kenya Methodist University and Daystar University. These universities were chosen because they are located in different counties in Kenya, and provided the researcher with a large population of internet users who have adequate access to news online. The research participants from these universities were representative of diverse groups. Therefore, data generated from them yielded results that were generalizable to the entire population.

3.4 Population of the Study

The target population was 64189 subjects comprising of 60389 students and 3800 staff members in four selected universities in Kenya. The universities were purposively sampled. According to the Registrars of Academics and Students Affairs and the Registrars Administration and Planning in the four selected universities, there were 32896 male and 27493 female students and also 2211 male and 1589 female staff members in the four campuses of the selected universities.

3.5 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Simple random sampling was used to obtain the sample. Kathuri and Pals (1993) recommend that sample sizes should be the largest possible to allow accurate interpretation of the results and at the same time ensure that the data is manageable. The minimum sample size for survey research is 100 subjects (Borg & Gall, 1996). The statistical report of the four universities was sought as shown in Table 1. The list provided the researcher with the following information:

1. Name of the university
2. Category of the university i.e. Public or Private
3. Gender of the respondent
4. Target Population

Table 1.

Distribution of the Total Population of Students and Staff Members in the selected Universities

University type	University	Target Population				Total
		Students		Staff Members		
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Public	1. Kenyatta University	17409	14591	1238	862	34100
	2. Chuka University	7465	6324	358	322	14469
Private	1. Kenya Methodist University	5021	4479	378	222	10100
	2. Daystar University	3001	2099	237	183	5520
Total		32896	27493	2211	1589	64189

Source: The offices of the Registrars of Academics and Students Affairs and Registrars Administration and Planning of the selected universities

A sample is a proportion of population selected for observation and analysis (Hayes, 2000). From all the selected four universities under investigation, the researcher got an approximate sample size of 381 students and staff members from both the public and private universities according to the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970)'s recommendations for a study population reaching between 50, 000 and 74, 000. This sample was therefore a representative of accessible population, of 64189 students and staff members, and it was used to generalize the whole population.

The sample size of the students and staff members was distributed among the four (4) universities using proportionate sampling as shown in Table 4. The selection of the students and staff members who participated in the study was done using simple random sampling of students registered for the academic session during the time this study was conducted. Records of registered students from Registrar of Students Academic Affairs and Registrar Administration and Planning's offices of selected universities were used to provide the said sample.

Table 2.
Distribution of Students and Staff Members who took Part in the Study

Type	University	Target Population				Total
		Students		Staff Members		
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Public	1. Kenyatta University	103	87	7	5	202
	2. Chuka University	44	38	2	2	86
Private	1. Kenya Methodist University	30	26	3	1	60
	2. Daystar University	18	12	2	1	33
Total		195	163	14	9	381

Source: self

4.5 Influence of Online Journalism on News Access

The third objective sought to establish the influence of online journalism on news access. The opinions of the respondents were captured on the Likert's scale and are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Influence of Online Journalism on News Access

Influence	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Fast access of news	154	40.4	94	24.7	52	13.6	48	12.6	33	8.7
Files on back up (storage)	92	24.1	103	27.0	66	17.3	54	14.2	66	17.3
24 hours of service	159	41.7	84	22.0	43	11.3	67	17.6	28	7.3
Easy update of news	48	12.6	171	44.9	115	30.2	11	2.9	36	9.4
Easy choice of content	142	37.3	97	25.5	31	8.1	72	18.9	39	10.2
Less censorship of news content	72	18.9	78	20.5	41	10.8	72	18.9	118	31.0
Adopting of news technology	88	23.1	112	29.4	57	15.0	53	13.9	71	18.6
Abundant information	96	25.2	106	27.8	38	10.0	61	16.0	80	21.0
Online journalism technology is easy to use	78	20.5	93	24.4	71	18.6	69	18.1	70	18.4
Overwhelming freedom	68	17.8	99	26.0	62	16.3	83	21.8	69	18.1
Appeals well to my age group	88	23.1	107	28.1	52	13.6	57	15.0	107	20.2

Table 10 shows the major characteristics of online journalism that influence news access among internet users. A proportion of 40.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that fast news access enhances their interest in online news, 24.7% agreed that faster news access influences internet users interest in online news, 13.6% were undecided, 12.6% disagreed, while 8.7% strongly disagreed. According to majority of the respondents, online journalism propagates news faster than traditional media such as the print media. Whenever news breaks at any place around the world, in a matter of minutes, it gets published on online news platforms contrary to the delays normally experienced on newspapers, televisions and radios. Newspapers normally publish at least once a day forcing those who are interested in regular news updates to go for online journalism platforms.

24.1% of respondents strongly agreed that the ability of online journalism to store news files (news back-up) for later use influence news access, another 27.0% agreed while 17.3% of the respondents were undecided. The respondents argued that they are able to access all the news they need since all of news are banked on internet therefore simple to access by a click of a button. However, 14.2% of the respondents disagreed that online news back-up influences news access, and 17.3% of the respondents also strongly disagreed. This is because there is always a clear disregard of ethical standard by people who falsify and fabricate news without allowing audiences the opportunity to know the producers of those news items.

Pertaining to whether online journalism 24 hours service influence news access, 41.7% strongly agreed that 24 hours availability of news online influences news access, 22.0% agreed, 11.3% were undecided, 17.6% disagreed, while a meager 7.3% respondents strongly disagreed that online journalism 24 hours service influences news access.

On whether ease of online news update influences news access, 12.6% of the respondents strongly agreed, a majority 44.9% agreed while 30.2% were undecided. Only 2.9% disagreed and 9.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Online news updates are very critical and enhances the chances of internet users to access breaking news. Online journalism alerts audiences about new occurrences day and night therefore increasing internet users' chances of accessing online news. However, some people feel disturbed by the regular news alerts from online platforms saying that they are disruptive and annoying. This makes them ignore such news updates which in effect reduce their chances of accessing breaking news.

The study also sought to establish whether easy choice of online news content influences news access. 37.3% of the respondents strongly agreed, 25.5% agreed, 8.1% were undecided, 18.9% disagreed, and 10.2% strongly disagreed. Easy choice of online news was considered an influence to news access by internet users. These results are in line with the Theory of Uses and Gratifications by West and Turner (2000), that internet users choose news that gratifies their demands and interests. Across the sample, majority of the respondents said they are able to go for news items they want and disregard the rest. The power to choose what to read, view and listen to attracts audiences to access online news more than the news from the traditional media outlets.

Regarding whether less censorship of online news influences news access, 18.9% strongly agreed, 20.5% agreed, 10.8% were undecided, 18.9% disagreed while 31.0% strongly disagreed. The study also sought to establish whether adoption of new technology influences online news access. 23.1% of the respondents strongly agreed, 29.4% agreed, 15.0% were undecided, and 13.9% disagreed while 18.6% strongly

disagreed. The study therefore considered the adoption of new technology an influence to online news access. The ability to access unregulated news was more popular with the students than the staff members. Fairly older people criticized online journalism for making it simpler and cheaper for unqualified people to manufacture and publish news therefore misinforming the audiences. For example, bloggers have been accused of erasing the line between personal thoughts and news stories.

With regard to availability of abundant news online at any time, 25.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that abundant news influence news access to internet users, 27.8% agreed, 10.0% were undecided, 16.0% disagreed, and 21% of respondents strongly disagreed. Hence, availability of abundant news was considered to influence online news access. Online journalism's ability to have a large capacity to store all the news published on it has enabled audiences to access news at any time they need them. For example, news from traditional media outlets, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, You Tube, Yahoo, Blogs and Blogs provides a wide range of news items for audiences to choose from.

Pertaining to whether online journalism technology's simplicity into its use influences online news access, 20.5% of the respondents strongly agreed, 24.4% agreed, 18.6% were undecided, 18.1% disagreed while 18.4% of the respondents strongly disagreed. Across the sample, the findings were that heavy mobile phone users, majorly smart phone owners tend to access online news quite often than most of the computers and tablets users. Majority of the smart phone users said they access online news as much as they go online. Many people who own many technological media devices frequently access online news than those people who own single devices.

On whether overwhelming online journalism freedom influences news access, 17.8% of the respondents strongly agreed, 26.0% agreed, another 16.3% were undecided, 21.8% of the respondents disagreed while 18.1% strongly disagreed. Overwhelming online freedom was considered an influence on news access. Too much freedom online has brought about many unchecked contents that raises a lot of credibility issues about what should be reported. Majority of the staff members said online journalism news need regulations in line with the journalistic standards.

The study also sought to establish whether online journalism appeal to the respondents' age groups influence news access. 15.0% of the respondents strongly agreed, 13.6% agreed, 20.2% were undecided, and 23.1% disagreed while 28.1% strongly disagreed. Across the sample, it was clear that those who lacked technological abilities to use internet well were pushed away as younger tech-savvy individual embraced online journalism. Technology appeals well with the students than the staff members. Students were more likely to use Facebook, WhatsApp and You Tube to access news.

These results implied that 65.1% of the respondents agreed that online journalism's ability to speedily report news influences news access by internet users, 51.1% agreed that the ability of online journalism to store news for later use influences news access, 63.7% of the respondents reported that online journalism's ability to update news as it unfolds influences news access, 62.8% agree that audiences ability to choose online news they want and leave those they don't want influences news access, 39.4% agree that online journalism's less level of censorship influences news access, 52.5% agree that increase in the adoption of new technology enhances news access by internet users, another 53% of the respondents agree that abundant news online enhances news access. 44.9% agree that the ease of use of online technology positively influences news access, 43.8% of the respondents agree that overwhelming online freedom enables news access and 51.2% agree that online journalism appeals well to their age group and that consequently enhance online news access by audiences.

The above findings concurred with Mudhai (2011) on immediacy and openness in a digital Africa, that the installation of internet cables throughout Kenya has given rise to online news sites that propagates news far and wide through the internet. Further, the results supported findings of Ndonye & Kasandi-Telewa (2013). On normative dilemmas and issues for Zimbabwe print journalism in information society era, where they found out that these new form of journalism is quite interactive, real time, and more easily accessible. According to Hiebert and Gibbons (2000), platforms of online journalism enable media audiences to access news 24 hours day and night.

Table 4.

Factors Influencing Online News Choice

Factors	YES Frequency	%	NO Frequency	%	Total 100
Ease of interaction with reporters	197	51.7	184	48.3	100
Immediacy of news access	288	75.6	93	24.4	100
Hypertext ability (link to related news)	250	65.6	131	34.4	100
Multimedia ability	253	66.4	128	33.6	100
Back-up (ability to store news)	247	64.8	134	35.2	100

Table 11 shows that 51.7% of the respondents considered easy interaction with online news reporters a factor that influence the type of news to choose; however, 48.3% of the respondents disagreed that this factor would dictate the type of news to read, watch or listen to. Many respondents believed that online journalism presents audiences with a critical opportunity to interact with reporters and other readers. They are able to take an active role in preparation and improvement of news article and further participate in analyzing and sharing of the news. This creates a sense of involvement and being part of the news items, thus attracting them to access online news articles more and more. Audiences also share videos, graphics, and news articles or comment on news items. Those who never interacted with news reporters said they were just disinterested in such interactions.

A majority, 75.6%, of the respondents considered the level of immediacy to receive news online a factor that determines their choice on which news to access, while 24.4% of the total respondents disagreed. People today want news while on the move. Online journalism alerts audiences on the latest news minute by minute and this has enabled internet users to access news as they unfold.

65.6% of the respondents considered hypertext ability (link to related news) of online journalism a factor in influencing the choice of news they make, another 34.4% disagreed. Across the sample, majority of the respondents pursue in depth news coverage by clicking on hypertext that links them the related news items. Those who disagreed said they were not conversant with how hyperlinks work.

66.4% of the respondents agreed that online journalism's multimedia ability influences the choice of news they make; however, 33.6% of them disagreed. This is because online journalism is able to provide news stories from diverse array of formats and angles. Online journalism is capable of providing audiences with text videos, images, and audio news on various topics. On the same note, majority of the respondents agree that they are able to use multiple technological gargets such as laptops, tablets, desk top computers and smart phones to access news materials on many occasions.

On whether news back-up ability (storage) of online journalism influences the choice of news they access, 64.8% of the respondents agreed, and another 35.2% disagreed. With the search engines enabling internet users to search for news items of their own choice at any time they want them, online journalism's capacity to store both the old and the latest news stories has enabled the availability of abundant news stories at their audiences' disposal.

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that most of the respondents considered ease of interaction with news reporters, immediacy of news access, hypertext ability (link to related news), multimedia ability and back-up ability (news storage) as major factors that influence online journalism audiences' choice of online news content. According to Daft and Lengel (1986), Media Richness Theory proposed that richer news media are capable of enabling efficient communication because the more diverse the medium, the richer the medium. Media Richness is a composition of its ability to establish a personal focus, to facilitate feedback and to handle multiple information cues simultaneously.

These results were in line with findings of Sambrook (2005) that online news audiences are able to interact with news reporters by posting videos and comments on stories and participate in online discussion forums. Similarly, Deuze (1999) in his study on journalism and web an analysis of skills and standards in an online environment found out that hypertext used innovatively has ability to target different groups of readers such as those interested in the headlines as well as those interested in deeper analysis of news, and furthermore it has no limitation of space. According to Napoli (2011) audiences today are interested in accessing the type of news they want as it breaks. And this agreed with the results of this study on the influence of immediacy on audiences' content choice.

Further, Deuze (2004) indicates that multimedia factor of online journalism offer an opportunity for audiences to receive news in various forms they choose to, such as text, audio, video and photos or graphics. The results were further in tandem with Poteet (2000) that found out that online technological devices offer such as computers and smart phones that include wireless connections to internet offer extensive storage capacity for variety of online news. These results implied that online journalism factors to a large extent influence audiences' choice of news content.

Conclusions

Various internet users have different tastes, preferences and choices on news content they want. The uptake of online journalism by media practitioners has taken care of this by enabling audiences to choose particular news they are interested to read, watch or listen to.

Online journalism has given internet users unique opportunity to meet with reporters and discuss news contents on internet discussion forums. Audiences have been invited into the cooking pot to help with the cooking therefore opening up new ways of news production.

Generally, it is critical to note that online journalism platforms have very attractive interface capable of capturing the interest of internet users. For example, the structure of news organization, the colour and the variations in the designing of various platforms highly appeal to internet users to go for online news.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the researcher recommends that:
   i.   Given that online journalism significantly influences news access and choice as more internet users shift attention from traditional media to digital media, the study recommends that media industries increase investment in developing online journalism so as to be in a better position to attract more audiences.
   ii.   Universities, media industries and individual journalists should embrace digital journalism the earliest because there is a potential growth in the field of online journalism.

Suggestions for further Research
   i.   A study should be carried out on challenges facing online journalism practice in Kenya.
   ii.   A study should be carried out on impact of online journalism on print media in Kenya.
   iii. A study should be carried out on influence of online journalism on media ethics in Kenya.

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