1. INTRODUCTION

In this era of technological boom, the process of news gathering and reporting has taken a paradigm shift. The processes of gathering news item have been altered by the emergences of new media technologies. According to Udenze (2017), the media landscape has been in constant metamorphosis; improvement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made information sharing easier. The average journalist is becoming tech-savvy by the day. The ability to use modern technologies is now a yardstick for the measurement of individuals’ professionalism in the media. “The internet changes the face of communication; journalists are beginning to have a new way of packaging and disseminating news to the public” (Talabi, 2011). In line with the growth of new technologies, “the media audiences are becoming sophisticated by the day. Individuals are moving in par with technological development. Media gadgets do not operate itself, it is the individual that manipulates the gadgets. By so doing, the operator becomes sophisticated and domesticates the medium to suit his/her need” (Udenze, 2017). New media
technologies are an integral part of news gathering and dissemination chains. Their importance in the media landscape cannot be underestimated. Pavlik (2001, p.49) writes that advancement in new modern technology have transformed these technical devices, ‘which offer new ways to process raw new data in all its forms, whether handwritten notes, audio interviews, or video content’

The objective of this paper is to critically understand the meaning of new media and their advantages and disadvantages in news gathering and reporting.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 New Media

Hasan & Pfaff (as cited in Ekwenchi and Udenze, 2014, p.1) opine that the new media can be catalogued to include, websites, audio and video streaming, chat rooms, e-mail, online communities, web advertising, DVD and CD-ROM media, virtual reality environment, Internet telephony, digital cameras, and mobile computing”. Similarly, in the wisdom of Agboola (2014, p.105), “most technologies described as “new media” are digital, and often have characteristics of being networkable, dense, compressible, interactive and impartial. New media that are interactive incorporate two computing as opposed to “old media” such as the telephone, radio, and TV (Logan, 2010). Lister et al. (as cited in Olley, 2009, p.25) affirms thus, “The term ‘new media’ refers to a wide range of changes in media production, distribution, and use. According to Gbileeka (2017), new media means the Internet, and other social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc.

The ‘new’ in ‘new media’ implies a somewhat break away from the ‘old’, or what Meikle (as cited in Olley, 2009) refers to as ‘top-down technologies. The new media are two-way media. They are interactive and as well as collaborative. Agber (2017) argues that new media possess the following characteristics:

- Participatory: the new media guarantee instant feedback. For instance, a reader can comment on a journalist’s post on WhatsApp, Twitter or Facebook. The interactivity of the new media has made it a vital tool for improved journalism.
- Online Community: the new media encourage people that share similar interest to create platforms where they discuss issues that concern them.
- Conversational: the social or new media make the exchange of ideas easy. People are free to air their opinion no matter the distance.
- User-Generated-Content (UGC): everybody is a content generator in the new media. It is open; people can create and disseminate information of their choice. The phenomenon of citizen journalism stems from this attribute.

Olley (2009) identifies some benefits of new media technologies to its end-users:

- High impact with a compelling interactive experience through the use of spoken word, animation, graphics and video.
- Freedom of choice through interactivity. Users like to be in control and not be forced down a particular route. We like to browse.
- Usefulness because users are interested in quality information delivered in a properly organised and easily understood fashion.
- Instant availability from the desktop, laptop, or even WAP phone or Pocket PC.
- New Media also provides many advantages for those who commission them:
- Effectiveness, which is enhanced by using sight and sound, compared to sight or sound alone, as in old media.
- Appropriateness through the capability to deliver as much or as little information as the user requires in order being convinced.
- The ability to sustain long term relationships with customers, without the need to visit.
- Expandability as needs develops or changes. New parts can be added, or old areas amended with reasonable ease.
2.2 Benefits of New Media in News Gathering and Reporting

Deuze (as cited in Obalanlege, 2015 p.17) succinctly asserts the advantage of the new media thus: New media has accelerated the news gathering process due to its digital nature and offers flexibility to journalists by way of allowing them to spend more time in the office. This contrasts with traditional journalism routines, which induce reporters to roam the streets in search of news without adequate communication devices for networking and direction.

The availability of new media technologies like smartphones, laptops, tablets, etc. it is convenient for media practitioners to gather and disseminate news. Similarly, the publishing of news items is easier and convenient. The availability of social media platforms like emails, facebook, twitter, and youtube has made news dissemination easier. O’Sullivan and Heinonen (2008), suggest that new digital technology offers a novel platform for reaching audiences. This quote by Obalanlege, (2015 p.71) captures the significant changes the new media have brought into news gathering and dissemination:

“...The internet has brought about significant changes in journalism. It has initiated rationalisation into journalism in the sense that certain functions can be outsourced, while others could be combined in order to reduce cost. For instance, most media organisations in Nigeria have embraced multi-platform journalism; journalists are now trained not just to specialist in print journalism, but to be able to handle video and some online operations, including the merging of online team and traditional newsroom together. Hence, the same content used for traditional publications is now recycled online. What is different is that online content is now regularly updated.

Newman (as cited in Wawire 2013, p.17) argued that ‘there is growing consensus that citizen journalism and social media are not going to replace mainstream media, but will be complementary to it’. The participatory journalism where people are able to take charge, own and share their stories through social media platforms in an interactive way to the media outlets is playing a significant role in shaping the news content. “Social media, a mixture of interactive tools on the internet for sharing information in various forms, is grown into an important tool for journalists to find out leads to news, sources, feel the atmosphere of public opinion over the information and even conduct journalistic activities for producing news” (Wawire 2013, p.18). According to a research by the Society for New Communications Research, 70% of journalists are using social networking sites, 66% are using blogs, 48% online video, 47% Twitter and 25% are using podcasts to assist them with their reporting. Additionally, 70% quote bloggers in their articles and 80% believe that bloggers have become important opinion shapers for the twenty-first century (McClure, as cited in Wawire 2013, p.20).

In a research entitled, “The Impact of Social Media in News Gathering and Rep Delivery: A Case Study of Kenya Network Television”, Wawire (2013, p.44) found that the social media enhances news gathering and dissemination through:

- Easier access to information
- Faster news delivery and breaking news items
- Easier access of feedback from the audience
- Interactivity with the viewers
- Following trending news stories and debates
- Monitoring the news story development and reactions
- Access to a greater variety of sources, people and opinions.
- Social networking sites have improved productivity

The new media have made an immense contribution to news gathering and dissemination; it has democratized the information space. Any individual can partake in news gathering and reporting, so as far as we have access to the new media. Hitherto, the news space was monopolized by the privileged and powerful. The emergence of the new media provides an alternative voice for the populace. New media encourage citizen journalism which is an integral part of democratic-participant media theory. The audiences now have a medium they can freely use without going through the rigour of media gatekeeping.
The new media has made everybody gatekeeper of news. Gatekeeping is no longer the exclusive preserve of the media reporter, the sub-editor or the editor.

2.3 Demerits of the New Media in News Gathering and Reporting

Despite the potentials of the new media in news gathering and dissemination, the media have some shortcomings. The new media is open; anybody can publish whatever they want to publish. This attribute of the new media is its major disadvantage. According to Silvia, (as cited in Wawire 2013, p.22), “for many, the social media, the open and interactive world of online participation is not seen to be taking journalism to new heights. Rather the limitless opportunities for anyone to have their say on anything is decreed to result in opinion and vitriol”. The scholar further opines that lack of accountability and anonymity of those contributing and responding online also introduces concerns of verification, accountability, and accuracy. There are criticisms of the blogosphere as doing nothing more than opening the floodgates to unverified, de-professionalized gossip. However, these shortcomings of the new media have made journalists vigilant and critical when reporting the news. Journalists are now careful not to fall for the unprofessional contents of bloggers and citizen journalists.

3. CONCLUSION

The new media are here to complement the effort of the traditional media. With the help of new media, news gathering, processing and delivery are now spontaneous. The best channel to break a story is through the new media. Similarly, media convergence has also helped news gathering and reporting. The conglomeration of different mediums on a platform has made news reporting to be rich. Despite the disadvantages of the new media in the news gathering process, the media have made journalist be on their feet. Journalists double-check their sources of news in order not to publish unprofessional contents.

The information super-highway: the Internet has revolutionized diverse sectors of human endeavours. It is no gainsaying that the Internet has made these endeavours easier and more efficient. Specifically the news consumers, that is, the audience have become more powerful in the news gathering process. Because of the new media they get news information at the speed of light. It is equally important to state that the audiences have become news contributors and disseminators due to the openness of the new media.

Finally, from the above assertion it is glaring that the new media is a tool in the hands of both the news reporter and the news consumer. It is a two-way thing. However, both the reporter and the consumer have become authors due to the intriguing characteristics of the new media, hence, the professional use of the new media.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- The new media is like a double edged sword. Because of this feature, the author recommends the careful use of the new media in news gathering and dissemination. Users of new media should thoroughly verify their sources of news before dissemination in order to avoid the spread of fake news and unsubstantiated information.
- Media organizations should endeavor to train and retrain their personnel on ethical use of the new media in news reporting and gathering.
- The media audience should also exhibit some professionalism in news dissemination. In as much as they have become news publishers, audience should be socially responsible in the kind of contents they post online.
- The new media should be adopted to further the tenets of development communication especially in the developing countries. Journalists and the media audience should engage in reportage that would uplift the living standard of the masses, and the new media poses potentials that could engender this cause.
5. REFERENCES

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