

Prosumer Concept and New Media: Effects on the Journalist

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Abstract

The media world today is currently witnessing a paradigm shift, a shift ushered by technological change and radical innovation eliminating the power of monopoly from traditional media outlets. The emergence of the new media has created a change the roles of the media and their stakeholders, to such an extent that the professional journalist no longer possess the sole right of gathering and disseminating information to their audience but the audience now have the ability to do same, with the power the new media have thrown at them. This development has brought the concept of the prosumer to the media industry, a situation where media audience are no longer just receivers but are creators and distributors of media contents. Hence, this study's focus is on the implication and the effect the activities of the prosumer has on the journalist and the journalism profession. The study was hinged on the Uses and Gratification, Democratic Participant and Libertarian theories. The study concludes that, the advancement in technology and the emergence of digital platforms is reshaping the media industry and the public sphere. The implication and effects of this development are both positive and negative in nature and more are still emerging. However, the opportunity and the potential exists to channel these impacts for the better.

Keywords: *New Media, Technology, Prosumer, Journalist, Gatekeeping*

Introduction

Globally, the media landscape is currently facing one of the greatest changes of all time, which is the paradigm shift in the relationship between the journalist and their audience/public. Previously, the relationship between both parties have predominately been one-way, a situation where the traditional media were solely responsible for dishing out information to their massive audience. Acceptably, the media at a point created a platform for audience feedback, sadly, that was all there was to it. The public has been very significant and crucial to the media industry, this significance of the public to the media was clearly stated when Carey (1987) noted that;

Insofar as journalism is grounded, it is grounded in the public. Insofar as journalism has a client, the client is the public. The press justifies itself in the name of the public: it exists- or so it regularly said – to inform the public, to serve as the extended eyes and ears of the public, to protect the public's right to know, to serve the public (p.5)

Prior to what is now obtainable in the media industry, the media have solely been responsible for dishing out information to their public. However, in an ever-changing world there is now a paradigm shift from what was once the norm, this shift has birthed a twist in the functions of both parties and thus has created a hybrid of roles for both the journalist and the audience/public. The emergence of new media and digital platforms can be acknowledged for the twist and hybrid of roles.

A warning was issued by media scholar Mark Deuze years ago about the changes that will occur in the journalism field as a result of the presence of the internet. He said that the three main tenets of a new journalistic order will be hypertextuality, interactivity, and multi-mediality. He warned that journalism had to reform and adapt or else it will suffer the repercussions. That caution becomes even more pertinent with the growth of digital platforms (Wilding, Fray, Molitorisz, & McKewon, 2018).

The new media unarguably has brought more players into the field of journalism and journalists no longer possess monopoly over the dissemination of news and information as citizens have now been exposed to various new media where they can easily develop and disseminate information and a variety of media contents to audiences all over the world. This involves citizens capturing newsworthy events with just a click on their cameras (referred to as citizen journalists) and news bloggers analyze news events on independent websites. Such contents are generally referred to as user-generated contents and new media platforms such as the internet, social media, youtube etc. enables the easy dissemination of such contents. The public and the traditional news media have grown beyond a linear form of communication to a communication that originates from multifaceted sources and that is interactive in nature. This shift has given birth to a concept known as 'prosumer'.

The terms "producer" and "consumer" combine to form the compound word "prosumer." Prior to elaborating on the definition of prosumer, it is necessary to comprehend the two terms that comprise the phrase. A producer is a person or group of people who make something with the resources available to them in order to make it usable or consumable by others. In the past, the tools and resources needed to create media content for the audience (consumers) were mostly available to professionals in the media industry. The press had the sole authority to produce media content because of their many tools and expertise, but technological advancements like digital cameras, open-source video editing software, social media, and many more have made media content production more accessible to a wider audience (Lister, Dovey, Giddings & Taylor, 2008).

Conversely, consumers are the individuals that utilise the services or content that the producers have produced. Prior to the widespread use of production tools, consumers had no actual control over the goods and services they purchased and could not participate in any way in the manufacturing process; instead, they were only able to select the product or service that best fit their needs from the options available (Bruns 2008). Customers were thus viewed as passive as they had no control over the manufacturing process, cared little about it, and had to settle for what others had produced, even though their goods and services might not have fulfilled all of their needs.

As technology advanced, more individuals had easier access to the means of production, blurring the distinction between producers and consumers. As a result, their responsibilities grew increasingly entwined, giving rise to the new term "prosumer." Therefore, combining the definitions of producer and consumer yields the meaning of the term prosumer. An individual or group of people who both create and consume media material is known as a prosumer.

Over time, the characteristics of the prosumer have changed, and their positions in society—particularly in the media industry—have grown more significant. Customers can design anything they wish to suit their demands. Customers were no longer constrained by the goods and services created by major media or production companies. Thanks to technological advancements, prosumers can now create software or content that appeals to them and can fill in holes left by more conventional production methods. The internet has been extremely disruptive to traditional media, according to Scott (2005), who examines the difficulties posed by technology. He claims that "it has demanded new business models, threatened complacency, and responded to innovation" (p. 93). Using public news sources like eyewitness accounts and participatory publishing are examples of innovative business models.

Therefore, this study examines how prosumer actions impact journalists and the journalism profession as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted three theories that are in line with the study, in order to give it a strong theoretical anchor. The theories are the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the Democratic Participant Theory and the Libertarian Theory.

According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, people deliberately choose and consume media to satisfy particular needs. Put differently, motives are viewed as shared tendencies that influence people's propensity to interact with media information (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The theory's roots can be found in the 1974 writings of Michael Gurevitch, Jay Blumner, and Elihu Katz. Anaeto, Onabanjo, and Osifeso (2008) state that the theory focusses on how individuals use the media rather than how the media affects them.

According to the Uses and Gratifications theory, audience uses of media content took precedence over media sources and message effects. This hypothesis, which falls under the restricted or indirect effect theories of mass communication, came into being as a substitute for the numerous communication scholars who were unable to provide convincing proof of the impact of media on audiences. The demands of the audience members dictate the uses (media exposure) and pleasure (gains or advantages). "The interaction of people with the mass media can most often be explained by the uses to which they put media content and/or the gratifications which they receive," according to Blake and Haroldson (1975, p.131).

The theory's central tenet is that people who consume mass media material have an impact on how those media affect them. As a result, media consumers actively choose their purposes for using the media rather than passively. The uses and pleasure theory describes the media's functional use. This theory focusses on people's motivations for using a certain medium and the satisfactions they hope to achieve. The central idea of the theory, according to Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) in Okoro and Nwafor (2013), is that audience members have specific needs that lead to their selective exposure to, attention to, and retention of media messages due to the perceived benefits they provide.

Since people pick, pay attention to, perceive, and recall media messages based on their needs, beliefs, and other factors, it is assumed that they are not passive but rather actively affecting the effect process (Wogu, 2013). According to Folarin (2005), people who consume mass media have specific requirements that are important to them, which is why they are exposed to, pay attention to, and remember media messages because of the perceived satisfaction they provide. Nayyar (2007) identified the basic assumptions guiding the uses and gratification theory, which are:

- 1 The audience is seen as being engaged.

2 The audience member determines the choice and satisfactions of the media; in other words, individuals utilise the media more frequently for their own benefit than for the media's benefit.

3 Other forms of need satisfaction, particularly in-person interactions, compete with the media.

4 Data provided by the individual audience members themselves can be used to determine many of the objectives of media consumption.

5 Depending on the values they set on the material, each audience member chooses whether or not to watch it.

According to the argument, the public is 'in control' and uses the media logically to further its own objectives. The implementation of this theory in this study is justified by the fact that consumers, or citizen journalists, increasingly use the media anyway they see fit to create content and use social media to interact with other members of society and spread information.

The Democratic Participant Theory, the second theoretical construct in the paper, is a branch of the normative theory that Denis McQuail (1987) proposed. According to him, the main ideas of the theory are based on the anger that the current bureaucracy, commercialisation, and professional hegemony in media systems be dismantled in order to ensure that all potential users and consumers have easier access to media (McQuail, 2005). According to McQuail, the notion evolved in response to the monopolisation and commercialisation of privately held media as well as the bureaucratisation and centralisation of public broadcasting organisations. In order to achieve a full communication circuit, the theory therefore supports a horizontal communication system in which citizens can engage in the communication process as opposed to a top-down communication structure that prioritises feedback.

According to the notion, the media must be democratised and decentralised in order to facilitate easy access to communication channels and the active involvement of media audiences in programs. In light of this, the democratisation of media technologies has created a participatory aspect of communication that permits the production and dissemination of mass media content by regular citizens as well as user-generated content, thereby dismantling the monopoly that was previously held by traditional media of communication.

According to the idea, the needs, interests, and goals of the active recipient in a political society are related to their right to pertinent information, their right to respond, and their right to employ communication tools in small-scale community, interest group, and subculture settings. According to the argument, the media must be participatory and interactive in order to uphold democracy.

Therefore, it is sufficient to state that the audience must be permitted to engage in the communication process for the process to be considered complete. Additionally, participation promotes interaction and eliminates linear communication. Because Nigeria is a democratic country, the Democratic Participant theory was chosen as the model for the study. This is because information sharing is essential to any democracy's ability to prosper. When the Democratic Participant Theory is applied to this discussion, it gives prosumers the freedom to collect, distribute, and share information about what constitutes "prosumption."

The third theory, libertarian theory, promotes a society in which everyone is an active newsmaker and reporter, free from any kind of control or limitations. Proponents of this view, including Lao Tzu, John Locke, John Milton, and John Stuart Mill, all held that since people are inherently logical and competent to produce media, they ought to be free to express themselves as they see fit. According to this view, there should be no restrictions on the free exchange of ideas. Similar to

the libertarian philosopher, the prosumer gives regular content creators some degree of autonomy to create reality however they see fit.

New Media and Newsgathering

The late 20th century saw the emergence of the term "new media." The Oxford English Dictionary defines new media as new forms of mass communication, particularly electronic ones like CD-ROMs and the Internet. Similarly, Manovich's (2003) definition of new media, which is frequently used, makes the following claims:

1. Cyber-culture, which describes social phenomena connected to the Internet, is different from new media.
2. It is distributed and exhibited by computer technology.
3. It is made up of software-manipulated digital data.
4. Older software and data representation conventions have merged to create new media.
5. They are the aesthetics that show up when new contemporary communication and media technologies are introduced.
6. Compared to manual methods or other technology, new media carry out algorithms more quickly.
7. Because they alter methods of obtaining and modifying information, they are meta-media (also known as the modernist avant-garde).
8. Lastly, new media highlight how post-World War II art and contemporary computer technology are similar in that both can be created by humans (Manovich, 2003, pp. 16–23).

The enormous expansion of news prepared and distributed by non-traditional journalists has been credited to the new media. The idea of citizen journalism, which was made possible by new media, calls for anybody (consumers) with the appropriate device to participate in the production and dissemination of content. More recently, citizen-produced images, texts, and films that are often shared online appear to be in high demand due to major news events (Du, 2007). He contends that alternative news providers can emerge from sources other than mainstream news thanks to the internet.

According to Radschi (2011), who elaborates on the idea of citizen journalism, citizen journalism is an activist and alternative form of news gathering and reporting that operates outside of mainstream media institutions. It frequently arises in response to shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, which employs similar journalistic practices but is motivated by different goals and depends on sources of legitimacy other than mainstream journalism or the traditional media. This accurately describes the nature of media operations in the modern day, as the hegemonic class controls most media organisations and frequently manipulates them to further the interests of people in positions of authority. This is in addition to time and access constraints, as well as occasionally hidden agendas in the way the mainstream media convey one side of a topic.

Because of these limitations, citizen journalism would allow citizens the freedom to tell their own story by allowing anyone to cover and share news (Agboola, 2013). Citizen journalists have reported on sexual assault, police brutality, political corruption, and other topics of interest to local, national, and worldwide communities using blogs, Twitter, and YouTube. The idea behind citizen journalism is that anyone without formal journalistic experience can work with others to produce, enhance, or fact-check media material using the resources of contemporary technology and the worldwide reach of the internet (Lassica, 2003). This serves as the foundation for the prosumer concept.

Overview of the Prosumer

A significant rise in mobile devices that are ready for the internet was brought about by the advent of web 2.0 technology. Online communication is now commonplace for a huge portion of the global population due to the increased development and widespread use of data networks. Web 2.0 technologies are becoming a major area of consumption due to these advancements (Tabea, Christian, Sabine & Frank, 2013). The main medium on which prosumption occurs is the internet. The term "prosumer," which was first used by Alvin Toffler in his 1980 book *The Third Wave*, refers to the premise that as society transitions to the post-industrial era, the producer and the consumer have combined to become the prosumer. Therefore, people who actively contribute to the creation of the information they consume are considered consumers.

This idea was developed a long time before social networking. According to Kotler (1986, p. 510), "the number of pure consumers will decline as society moves towards the post-industrial age." Prosumers, or those who manufacture a large number of their own goods and services, will take their place. Due to the popularity of social media, people who utilise social media in general and bloggers in particular are increasingly referred to as prosumers. Internet users, typically without organisational support, freely create and market content for their readers. The new prosumer is hailed as an empowered consumer who can take down big businesses with a single internet post in strategic communications, such as marketing and public relations (Hamelin, 2011; Kucuk, 2008; Weber, 2009).

According to some, "empowerment is the ultimate product of blogging" (Kline & Burstein, 2005, p. 248). But according to other sociologists, prosumers could not be fully capable producers or consumers (Archer & Harrigan, 2016). It has been suggested that the power of consumers who have become producers and the democratisation of the internet are a myth (Comor, 2011). For instance, Comor (2011) contended that prosumers are being exploited and that their activities primarily serve the interests of the status quo. This has implications for journalism since the majority of Internet content is actually the opinions of others, raising questions about content creation. The main presumption platform is new media, which prosumers can access with relative ease.

Implications of the Prosumer Concept on Journalism

1. As user-generated (or consumer) content has proliferated, established content sectors are now competing for professionally produced material.
2. A large number of consumers have demonstrated that they are content to produce content rather than only consume it. To compete with the creative impulse, cultural sectors, including traditional media outlets, will need to produce engaging content.
3. Prosumers will put increasing strain on the conventional content creation sectors as they hone their craft and become more adept at telling stories. Some user-generated content creators might view this as an alternate road to careers in the professional business. It provides jobs for people with presumption skills, particularly bloggers.
4. News and other social events are now easily accessible to the general public due to instant content creation (eyewitness reports).
5. A pervasive concern among journalists is that the media industry will become less professional and standards will be lowered as a result of surviving in a world where citizen journalists, non-journalistic platforms, and journalists vying for public favour are the norm.
6. Because the audience now has easily accessible alternative news sources, the aforementioned facts have reduced the commercialisation of news by news organisations and media outlets.

Effects of the Prosumer on the Journalism Profession

With the emergence of prosumer, non-journalistic platforms and journalists seeking public acceptance and approval due to their occasionally unprofessional conduct, which consistently lowers the standards of the industry, there is a profound and unsettling fear in the media landscape.

The power of public participation in news gathering has been recognised by mainstream news outlets. "Anyone with a camera is tantamount to being a reporter," says Kenny Plotnic, news director for the New York division of the West American Broadcasting Company (WABC). The people's collective knowledge is being used to generate news content by news organisations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), public broadcasting stations, and websites like Ohmy News, which is based in Korea (Sambrook, 2005). However, several writers have criticised amateur journalism of this kind. According to Brown (2005), citizen journalism is not professional journalism in any manner. He points out that civilians are not obligated to follow criteria like fact-checking and accuracy, but traditional journalists do. Nevertheless, some authors contend that citizen journalists have gained popularity and embraced the new, open style of communication.

According to some academics, society is about to enter an electronic democracy that encourages public discourse and deliberation. According to Bardoel (1996), communication technology will make citizens more informed since traditional media will shift from collecting information to controlling its flow. As more people shift their interests from traditional media channels to online content generation, this appears to be the case. According to O'Donnell (2009), a community of better listeners will be created as user-generated content becomes more popular. Since traditional media have supplanted investigative news reports, diversity issues, and community-related stories with infotainment and sensationalism, consumer practices and their activities are a welcome development for both the audience and mainstream media.

"From a lecture to a conversation, listening and talking to the public rather than remaining a closed stubborn profession that has long been a potential detriment to a healthy public sphere," according to Nguyen (2006), journalism needs to change (p.2). It seems that certain professional journalistic associations are more receptive to including amateurs' eyewitness reports. This evolution has demonstrated that the prosumer is a crucial component of the news production process with a bright future. However, the prosumer must be monitored because unbridled freedom might have detrimental consequences.

Prosumer Activities: Its Effect on Gatekeeping

The daily process by which news decision makers critically evaluate and distil hundreds of pieces of information before distributing them to the public is known as "gate keeping" in the media industry. According to Singer (1998), gatekeeping is an excellent method for researching how online journalists choose stories that are worthy of being reported. , The Internet "defies the whole notion of a "gate" and challenges the idea that journalists (or anyone else) can or should limit what passes through it," according to Singer (2006, p. 265), who conducted a recent research on online newspaper editors. The impact of new media and participatory practices on gatekeeping efforts is now being studied by researchers (Beard & Olsen, 1999; Singer, 2006; Bakker & Pantti, 2009). A historical theoretical viewpoint will be taken into consideration prior to exploring the potential effects of gatekeeping in this digital sphere.

In journalism studies, gatekeeping has a long history that began in 1947 when psychologist Kurt Lewin observed that people manage what passes through the gate and that information flows via the gate (Lewin, 1947). Researchers have discovered that the news selection process involves not only professional and personal news judgement but also news organisations, routines, financial

constraints, and communication technology (Livingstone & Bennett, 2003). More lately, academics have concentrated on how journalism is being impacted by the Internet and citizen-produced material. Because the Internet gives readers the ability to choose what is newsworthy, Singer (2001) suggested that print journalists may be letting go of their traditional gatekeeping responsibilities. Singer (2004) later discovered that online newspapers were implementing participatory newsgathering techniques, which included discussion boards, blogs from editors, and the general public. According to the studies, by allowing people to have a say in the news product, online editors may be going beyond their conventional gatekeeping responsibilities.

More recently, Bruns (2008) claims that the open news era has arrived. Producers and consumers (prosumers) collaborate to create and disseminate information in open news. Storm (2007) offers some insights into the integration of public media in Bluffton Today, a print and online publication, as part of her inquiry into citizen-produced news. Despite allowing community participation on the website, she discovered that the publication never printed much of the Web-generated content.

“The lack of freestanding attributed Web-generated user content at Bluffton today, signifies that Web-generated user content is not published in its newspaper as a new dimension of credible journalism, but rather is used by the newsroom’s professional journalists to add breadth to their own work” (Storm, 2007, p.22).

Conclusion

Prior to the industrial era, producers and consumers were one and the same, and there was no division of labour. A division of labour and a divide of producers and consumers arose with the rise of the mechanical form of organisation brought about by industrialisation. "Even though division of labour tends to separate the living space from the place of work, it always creates a separation between producer and consumer" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 100). McLuhan claims that this trend reversed itself with computer automation, impacting not only production but also all stages of marketing and consuming since, in the automation circuit, the consumer turns into the producer. Another feature McLuhan noted for electronic media is decentralisation, which is simply an extension of the reintegration of producer and consumer with computing and its acceleration with new media. Although necessary, the decentralisation that gives rise to the prosumer should be regulated in some way to guarantee that their freedom is accompanied by some accountability.

According to the widely held belief, the only thing that is constant in life is change. This also holds true for the media sector, which is changing along with the public sphere due to technological advancements and the rise of digital platforms. This breakthrough has implications, impacts, and repercussions that are both favourable and bad, and more are always being discovered. Nonetheless, there is a chance and ability to use these effects for the greater good. According to the Reuters Institute's 2018 Digital News Report, "Nothing stays the same for long: new technologies like voice-activated interfaces and artificial intelligence are on the way, offering new opportunities but also new challenges for audiences, regulators, and media companies..." (Newman et al. 2018). In this uncertain news environment, journalism must adapt and change its traditional setting in order to maximise the potential of the new media and delve into digital journalism made possible by the new media that is currently being witnessed. Additionally, consumers who use digital platforms must do it in a favourable and credible way when conducting business.

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