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SOCIAL MEDIA AS SOURCES OF NEWS FOR NIGERIAN BROADCAST MEDIA

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Abstract

The advent of Internet and social media has spurred research interest in broadcast media in particular and the media ecology in general. However, most of these studies centre on use of social media with emphasis on how users including broadcast journalists deploy social media for certain purposes. An aspect understudied is how social media constitute sources of news for broadcast media especially in Nigeria thereby creating a geographical gap. On account of this, a study was undertaken with the objective of providing insights into how broadcast journalists rely on social media as sources of news which they reproduce and broadcast. Anchored on source credibility theory, the study argues that Internet and social media have widened the dimensions of mass media use as journalists no longer source news only from common sources like officials, organisations, institutions, personal organisations, events and natural phenomenon, but also from social media platforms. The study concludes that the imperative of social media in media ecology with their attendant shortcomings is indubitable. The study recommends among other things the need for broadcast journalists to upscale their training to be able to grapple with technological challenges confronting them while discharging their duties in the new technological media environment.

Keywords: broadcast media, credibility, multi-skilling, social media, sources

Introduction

The broadcast media have continued to play a significant role in news gathering, processing and dissemination. This genre of traditional media which is owned and

controlled by individuals, corporate organisations, and government at different levels is essentially comprised of radio, television, and of course, cinema. In living up to their responsibility, the broadcast media sustainably carry out the functions of informing members of society about daunting issues amidst educating, and entertaining members of society. Putting these roles to perspective, Udende, Abdulraheem and Oyewo (2014) explain that some of these news stories deal with matters of general social, economic or political significance and are implicitly intended to help citizens in their role as democratic decision-makers. To further stretch the import of the functional roles broadcast media play in society, Ariye (2010) notes that by combining audio, vision and motion, the broadcast media's effectiveness in communicating information with speed and accuracy to the heterogeneous audience has been proved over the years. Ariye furthers that, moreover, the broadcast media have helped the individual to share ideas not only within his immediate environment but also beyond his social milieu. This brings to mind the wide reach of broadcast signals which could be visual or audio to connect the anonymous and varied audiences. In discharging this duty, broadcast journalists explore vast sources for news. These sources include personal contacts with a broad spectrum of people and organisations, institutions as well as observations of events and phenomenon as they unfold.

As public space, the broadcast media offers opportunity for members of society to ventilate their feelings about the way they are governed. Thus, government restrictions commonly placed on what should reach the public in Nigerian government-owned broadcast media have been blurred to a large extent by the private media that became operational by virtue of Decree 1992 Section 38. This means plurality of ideas have the privilege to compete in media ecology sequel to the expansion and near unfettered access offered by the private media.

The advent of Internet and social media has brought a new dimension into broadcast media industry. Chapman (2009) argues that the computer is at the heart of this revolution: it too has become a medium for broadcasting. The digital revolution and convergence have meant that television and radio can be received using a variety of platforms. Apart from providing online platform for the broadcast media to disseminate information with an amazing rapidity and ease, both the Internet and social media serve as news sources for the broadcast media. This entails an addition to a plethora of existing sources broadcast media explore for information. As shall be argued, broadcast media routines condition broadcast journalists to resort to social media platforms as veritable sources of news. The extent to which a particular broadcast medium utilises these outlets highly depends on financial viability of the medium, credibility and integrity of the social media platform measured in terms of accuracy, fairness, balance, and richness in content of the news story emanating from the social media platform. Of these virtues, Williams (2005) upholds accuracy which he links with sincerity and explains it as reporting how things are only when the report is the outcome of sufficient investigation to make it likely to be true. On the other

hand, Williams construes sincerity as the virtue of communicating only how journalists take things to be; skills and attitudes that resist the pleasure principle, in all its forms, from a gross need to believe the agreeable, to mere laziness in checking one's investigations. That is suggestive of passion for ethically getting it right.

Most social media platforms are almost always accused of disseminating unreliable and unverifiable claims that endanger society. For lack of professional editing that characterises social media reports, misleading and inflammatory stories on social media have potentials of threatening the unity and peaceful co-existence of a country. Cela (2016) elaborates that those users of social media including citizen journalists, who Ogidi and Utulu (2016) call incidental journalists do not have to edit the news do not care for quality of information, credibility or other ethical elements while publishing on social networks. This untoward behaviour is premised on the assumption which most journalists have grown up with that journalists tell people the news which they think they should be told. This should not be so. On demand news means that people can choose the news they want, and when they want it. And they can interact with it, rant about it and contribute to it (Simon Bucks cited in Kinsey, 2009). This is why broadcast media have to exercise some degree of caution while relying on social media as sources for news.

Even as rich literature exist on social media and broadcast media some bothering on the effects of specific platforms like Twitter and Facebook comments on journalism (see Gearhart & Kang, 2015), social media impact on news sources (see Cela, 2015), comparative study of social media and traditional media (see Ogidi & Utulu, 2016), and social media and the user (see Gangadharbatla, Bright & Logan, 2014) this study seeks to situate the place of social media platforms as news sources to Nigerian broadcast media. Doing this will expand literature on the nexus between social media and traditional mass media.

Thus, the objective of this paper is to explain how broadcast media are not simply inextricably tied to the Internet and social media, but specifically the extent to which broadcast media rely on social media platforms as robust information provider and sources of news. In achieving this objective the paper is compartmentalised into different subheadings as discussed below.

Theoretical Framework

The study finds relevance in source credibility theory developed in 1951 by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss. The basic assumption of the theory is that when mass media messages are presented to people as coming from a high-credibility source and low-credibility source, those messages emanating from high-credibility source produce more opinion change than those from low-credibility source. Essentially, the theory holds that credibility of all communication, regardless of format, is heavily influenced by the perceived credibility of the source of that communication (Lowry, Wilson & Haig, 2013). In other words, credibility of a communicator reflects the

public perception of the communicator's fairness and factualness. Some sources are viewed trustworthy while others are viewed untrustworthy. Therefore, news with high credibility in the eyes of news receivers is likely to have respect and is more readily accepted.

The idea about source credibility arises from how audiences perceive sources of information they get because there must be something alluring about the source that have been able to catch and sustain audiences' attention. As Umeogu (2012) asserts, it is one thing to catch someone's attention and another thing to hold it for as long as the speaker desires. And what is used in catching attention is the honesty and believability or integrity of message source.

Credibility is defined as a "kind of professional, cultural, and ethical treatment of mass media material so that where all the dimensions of the subject and trends raised around it in a balanced way based on the evidence and accuracy in the presentation of information and separated from the personal views" (Azza, 2006, pp.27&28). Viewed this way, source credibility can be seen as a situation where message believability depends on the credibility status of the sender in the minds and eyes of the audiences. Credibility is one's perception of truth of news or information from the mass media and it serves as a means for the receiver of the information to rate the source or transmitter of the communication in relation to the information or messages. Consequently, the concept of credible news which is synonymous with accuracy, completeness, efficiency, and impartiality and balance in predetermined, equity, objective, honest, and trustworthy in the source and media organisation is of focal consideration in journalism (Popoola, 2014). This notwithstanding, Seiler and Kucza (2017) argue that not only credibility is aspect that impacts the effectiveness of a message but how persuasive the message is presented is important.

In presenting messages, Hovland and Weiss (1951) cited in Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) suggest that the dimension of expertness and trustworthiness are important considerations. In affirmation of this, Whitehead (1968) cited in Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) posit that four dominant factors are significant. These factors include trustworthiness, professionalism or competence, dynamism and objectivity. According to Whitehead, the professionalism or competence which is similar to expertness differs more with manner of presentation.

Given that the mass media are integral sources of news for the general public and that social media constitute sources of news for broadcast media that ultimately determine the quality of broadcast news, it is logical to conclude that source credibility theory applies to this study.

Method

This paper adopted a literature review method which deals with building a study on and relating it to existing knowledge. This method is a systematic way of collecting and synthesising previous research. It evaluates what has already been done to

show the relationships between different works in relation to the study (Snyder, 2019). Researchers have adopted various types of literature review method including narrative review (see Wong, Greenhalgh, Westhorp, Buckingham & Pavson, 2013), meta-analysis which is a statistical approach (see Davies, Mengersen, Bennett, & Mazerolle, 2014), and integrative approach (see Torraco, 2005). In spite of the various types adopted by researchers, this study was streamlined to the integrative approach which deals with critique and synthesis of existing literature. Data collection was based on secondary sources like research articles in books, journals, and other published texts on the Internet specifically Google Scholar and Google. The retrieval of articles was divided into two sections. In the first section, a broad range of search terms to include broadcast media, social media, and nexus between broadcast media and social media, and news sources were used to retrieve pertinent publications. In the second part, a snowball method was used which involves obtaining additional cited papers from the initially retrieved articles. Furthermore, books, journals, theses and dissertations were also used to identify other related studies. It is instructive to note that since keywords in research are not based on common lists, it is possible that some of the literature was missed. Nevertheless, this did not significantly undermine the outcome of this present study which extends our understanding on use of social media as sources of news by Nigerian broadcast media.

Functions of the Broadcast Media

The term broadcast media also referred to as electronic media covers a broad spectrum of different communication methods which require the user to utilise an electronic connection to access them. Examples are radio, television, cinema or film, and even new media like internet and computers etc. The broadcast media which have radio and television as their main component that is the focus of this study play several functions in society.

The broadcast media share useful information known as news that could help knit the fabric of society closer as well as promote socio-cultural, economic cum political gains for the people. News is essential to humanity and the reason of existence for the broadcast media and the mass media at large. Early researchers on the role of broadcast media like Lasswell (1948) found in their study that both privately and public owned broadcasters strongly agree with the news and information function of media in covering development, i.e. the surveillance of what is happening in the world and reporting information and news (cited in De Rycker, Ponnann, Fong, & Syed, 2017). Holistically, the surveillance roles of broadcast media include socio-economic and political issues in society. They foster personal growth, facilitate social integration, promote economic development, and enrich cultural diversity.

Closely related to the information or news function of the broadcast media is education. Geleceđi and Kuyucu (2016) regard this function as the most important function of the broadcast media after the news function. The purpose of education is

to make individuals attain new forms of behaviour they never had before and make them stop with the unacceptable behaviours. There are two types of education- formal and informal. Informal education is provided within the family, as a result of apprentice-master relationship or within the friend groups. Formal education encompasses the systematic and planned activities carried out in schools. Broadcast media as channels of mass communication are used for education. This explains why the education function is maintained extensively in countries such as USA, Canada, Norway, Netherlands, and England

The entertainment function broadcast media play complete the tripartite traditional functions of the mass media which broadcast media constitute. People feel the need for entertainment in order to overcome boring and stressing rhythm of their busy daily life. Nowadays, radio for example, has turned into a music box. This situation shows that its entertainment function is more important than other functions it performs and literature buttresses this. In reference to a study, Geleceđi and Kuyucu (2016) assert that, a survey was conducted to figure out the views of the radio listeners on functions of the radio. In the survey applied to 520 persons from various age groups, it was found that 83.65 percent of the radio listeners attach importance to the "entertainment" function of the radio among other functions.

In addition to the traditional functions of broadcast media is the socialisation function. The broadcast media are major agents of socialisation that shape the way people see themselves and the world around them (Ritzer & Ryan, 2011). By amplifying social identity of citizen, the media serves as bond that knit members of a given culture together. The linkage between broadcasting and culture was first established by Harold Lasswell when he noted that part of the responsibilities of the mass media is the transmission of social or cultural heritage from one generation to another. To achieve this, broadcast media do not only seek, identify, preserve and promote the nations diverse cultures but also select critically the positive aspects of foreign cultures for the purpose of enriching the nation's culture.

The media are greatly involved in mobilisation of members of the society to accept and participate in development programmes and policies like public works, economic activities, and political activities. As broadcast media carry out these functions, they impact on audiences and the effect of broadcast media can be seen in the reaction of audience members. Substantiating the media effects based on functions broadcast media play, Chapman (2009, p.13) brings findings of his study to the fore that the effects of news coverage of issues have been hotly debated, with claims that the American civil rights movement, for example, would not have existed without television coverage. Protests involving civil disorder tended to be newsworthy, but were said by some to be given more prominence by virtue of the attention given to them by the media. Similarly, students confronting tanks in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989 showed that nations and governments cannot hide from their problems. When Mrs. Thatcher referred to journalism as providing the 'oxygen of publicity' for terrorists,

she highlighted contemporary debate about the effects of television. In the cases of coverage of terrorism and of missing children, the style of television treatment becomes part of the social policy process (Altheide, 1991 cited in Chapman, 2009). Similar scenarios have played out in Nigeria at different junctures to suggest the role of the broadcast media. For example, mobilisation of citizens to know and support government policies and programmes like the several poverty alleviation programmes, immunization campaigns against polio, and youth's empowerment programmes attest to this.

Social Media and Broadcast Media

Despite numerous and varied perspectives on the concept of social media, this study settles on the definition offered by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) commonly cited in academic scholarship. The reason is that the definition is not simply about the new technology involved in news production and dissemination but also its use as alternative platform of public communication and source of information for others. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) conceive social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. This definition underscores an application resulting from technological advancement. Relating this definition to communication, researchers have come to describe it as "alternative platforms of public communication" (Poell & Borra, 2011, p.696). Examples of social media are Flickr, MySpace, MeChat, Facebook, Twitter, 2go. These media are systematically classified by Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) thus: collaborative projects (Wikipedia), blogs and micro-blogs (Twitter), content communities (YouTube), social networking sites (Facebook), virtual game worlds (World of War Crafts), and virtual social worlds (Second Life). Each of these social media platforms focus on some functional building blocks which are identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationship, reputation, and groups required to understand the engagement needs of the social media needs of audience. Broadcast media on the other hand refer to traditional or mainstream media comprising essentially radio and television as earlier highlighted. Both radio and television have commanding appeals that endear audiences.

There exist an inextricable relationship between social media and traditional broadcast media. The Internet and social media have increased the formats broadcast media bring different kinds of news to their audiences, and significantly quicker than had been before possible. Spurred by the need to investigate factors that condition journalists' attitudes to their job in the ever-changing media environment which requires journalists to effectively adapt to current trends in technology, Udende and La'aro (2017) found that the advent of new technologies and attendant social media platforms have changed what constitute news as well as its production process. Therefore, the requirements and capability of journalists are expected to change in

conformity with the technological changes that have expanded the frontiers of journalism. Chapman (2009) foresaw this development when he posited that as we progress through the twenty-first century, broadcast journalists are facing a challenge to the discrete identity of broadcasting and its very survival. Therefore, only journalists who build their capacity will be able to fit in the new order.

Traditional broadcast media are constrained with air time. The pressure of time to be the first is compounded by competition of social media. Cela (2016) adds the orientation of journalists or producers of news towards social media to produce and disseminate information to the public which force the traditional media to review their sources of news to include social media platforms with the hope of locating news.

A dual relationship may be noticeable between social media and traditional broadcast media. One of these relationships is complementary consumption and the other is displacement. The complementary consumption explains how both social media and traditional media depend on each other. For example, traditional media use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as alternatives to main stream broadcasting. Displacement communication explains how new technologies seem to supplant traditional media in news production and dissemination. As convincing as this may be, the relationship that hallmarks discourse of this study is how broadcast journalists consider social media as sources not in the light of posting reports on social media platforms, but how journalists use social media news to amplify the news in the main stream media.

Social Media as Source

An essential asset of broadcast media is the content or information commonly known as news. This news is a product of the interaction between different interests within the mass media, different sources of information, and different interests of groups outside mass media organisations. Sources of news for the different mass media vary. Journalists source news from general public but specifically business organisations, politicians, police and other security agents, hospitals, distinguished personalities, archives, natural phenomena just to mention a few (Udende, Abdulraheem & Oyewo, 2014). These sources shape the direction of news.

The developments in technology of information brought a new perspective regarding to news production and dissemination. Journalists no longer restrictively source for news from traditional sources like public officials and natural phenomenon. The birth of social media avails social media as new sources for traditional mass media. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and the spread of blogs have brought a step forward the transformation of communication process (Cela, 2016). Journalists, who have converted into computer operators monitor these platforms and extract what qualifies for news content and reproduce. This practice is akin to the age-long culture whereby Nigerian journalists would comfortably monitor

established global networks like CNN, Al Jazeera, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle to deepen their broadcast content base. As pointed out by Wilson (2009), BBC News 24 relying on the perceived credibility and integrity of the country's longest-established provider of broadcast news and Sky News establishing a reputation for swift reaction to news stories: 'We can't afford to be on background or analysis when there's a breaking story' (Nick Pollard cited in Hudson and Rowlands, 2007, p.396). Apparently, Nick Pollard is expressing the thought of his media outfit that in the media ecology, interdependence is an acceptable norm.

A salient condition that leads some broadcast journalists to rely on social media stories is attributed to economic consideration. According to Sterne (2010), studies have shown that the political economy of the media has an impact on journalists' attitudes towards work. This is because increasing commercial and economic constraints placed on newsrooms mean journalists are required to do more with fewer resources (Gower, 2007). Consequently, journalists rely on news from social media platforms rather than pursuing their own investigations and literature exist in this regard.

In a study by Ruth (2010) titled, *Social media revolution: Exploring the impact on journalism and news media/organisations*, findings show that reporters with the aid of social media are able to carry out their work by capturing contents shared on social media to enrich their stories and sometimes even make use of the virtual audience to help them find out about an issue. Similarly Ismail (2012) found that Nigerian journalists are excited about the new opportunities social media have offered them as they aid them to carry out their tasks of news monitoring and gathering with ease by exploring various sites on daily basis. Both studies carried out in different environments adopted quantitative research method using few respondents. More so, both studies were limited to just two social media platforms. This requires a more robust research that should expand the networking sites and even the method. Despite these limitations, the studies were able to provide some meaningful insights into social media studies as it affects journalism.

There is also some support in a research to indicate that social media is well positioned to serve as sources of news to the main stream broadcast media. A study by Bonds-Raacke and Raacke (2010) provides insight that information gathering was one of the identified dimensions, together with maintaining and, friendships and making new connection. The information component may be related to personal information such as invitations, photographs, and updating posts, what is paramount is the possibility of broadcast journalists that constitute audience and may be inclined to amplifying what they receive from the social media.

A study by Morah (2018) on new media technology use patterns among selected broadcast stations in Nigeria shows that even as the new media technology is evolving speedily, the use of social media as a source of news is yet to be generally accepted. Continuing, Morah (2018) explains that most of the stations were using new media

technology with private-owned stations deploying the latest state-of-the-art technology more than public stations. However, there are instances of refusal by some stations to use information from social media as news source; a refusal which stems from the presence of fake news and harmful information on gateless social media. This study is emblematic of a drastic departure from other studies that seem to conclude that broadcast journalists generally source news from the social media. In addition, the study dichotomises the pattern of usage between private and government-owned media with the former having an edge. And the reasons adduced to reservations broadcast media use social media as source of information for news are their unverifiable and misleading colouration.

By and large, with the Internet and social media nowadays, main stream journalists and other users can source their own information, independent of single institution, using the capabilities provided by search and social media. Also they can create content in many forms like blogs, email, tweets, and comments on websites that create greater independence from other institutions and offer mechanism whereby public opinion can be directly expressed (Newman, Dutton & Blank, 2012). This content can bypass or be amplified by the traditional mass media, but in doing so it must be credible. If journalists rely on socialmedia platforms as news sources, they constitute audience members to these platforms in the first instance and what those journalists do with the social media content is secondary.

Problems of Relying on Social Media

Broadcast news tends to relay activities and events of people. It is the recording and passing the information which has already taken place. The information to be reported must pass through the editor, who might correct grammar, take out certain things that he or she thinks are not relevant (Akpede, 2010). This amplifies the impression that what finally reaches the audiences is verifiable information that is not fundamentally skewed to advantage a section of people over others or misinform the generality of the audience.

However, the advent of Internet and social media has defiled this age-long practice common with the conventional media. Since social media requires little efforts, anyone who possesses a smart phone and has access to Internet becomes news collector, processor and disseminator. Unprofessional as what has been churned out may be, even supposedly trained journalists are inclined to utilise what often turns out to be junk or at best half-truth. By acting this way, Cela (2015) argues that reporters or journalists risk losing their power over audiences due to the fact that the producers of who contributes in published news in social media are doing the same thing even in some cases even faster than journalists in traditional broadcast media.

In the face of any misdeed by broadcasters, the integrity of both the journalist and the broadcast media becomes at stake. As a way of redeeming the dented image caused by information that injure the media integrity, broadcast media resort

to public retraction of the story with an unreserved apology. While social media are laden with a lot of ills, precautionary measures are similarly emerging to curb the menace. Professionals are evolving fact-checkers which can be used to ascertain the genuineness of an event that is reported on the social media. Expectedly, broadcast organisations and journalists fact-check sources and authenticate information they receive before reproducing for public consumption.

Another problem that may confront broadcast journalists at the adoption of information that people post on social media could be from unreliable sources or the information may be published as a personal opinions (Saiikaew & Noyunsan, 2015), or incomplete information or aimed at people with the intention of raising the issue and attracting undue attention.

The advent of Internet and social media has burdened broadcast journalists as it requires of them to develop additional skills to be abreast with the evolving technologies. Most of them are yet to brace with the trending media environment that requires multi-skill. Wilson (2009) underscores this challenge that certainly the job of broadcast journalists nowadays is not an easy one; they have to be jacksof all trades, working twelve hours a day in some cases, satisfying the demands of multi-channel and multi-platform output. Media and news organisations are focusing on exploiting media technologies to reach audiences and maximise value and cost effectiveness. Cottle and Ashton (1999) elaborate that the multi-skilled environment of multimedia production appears to have compromised the ability of journalists to become familiar with, knowledgeable about, and responsive to local communities and their news reporting interests and needs and has led to more superficial journalist involvement with selected news stories and their sources.

In addition to the above problems is a lack of in-depth and investigative reporting in journalism generally and this is linked to news commercialisation as means for survival. Broadcasters accept that commercial challenges impede the delivery of some in-depth and investigative forms of news programmes (Ofcom, 2007). If journalists were conscientious, dedicated and committed to their job, their reports would not be simplistically and superficially based on social media sources but be based on passionate and adventurous journalism.

Conclusion

The study which aims is to provide insights into how Internet and social media that champion media ecology in contemporary times confirmed the notion that journalists in traditional broadcast media do not solely use common sources of news like public officials, institutions, personal observations, events, and natural phenomenon. Even as they may naturally prefer the common sources due to their credibility, the advent of social media sources, if properly used could also be trustworthy. This is why the study established in clear terms that most social media information could be

misleading. Consequently, it cautioned that for journalists to be able to authenticate sources and genuineness of such information they may reproduce in the broadcast media, there is every need for them to use fact-checkers. This study also reckons with the fact that the transient nature of broadcast news stampedes journalists to endeavour to be first meaning news should be produced and broadcast with amazing rapidity. This does not mean compromising standards.

Profoundly, a conclusion that can be drawn is that journalism has gone beyond the tradition when news was at the whim of the editor to the era of technology that has brought new dimensions in news gathering, production and dissemination. On their part, the audience members are increasingly not passive but active actors in the theatre of the new media environment.

Conceptually, the study argued the significance of both social media and main stream broadcast media being reflected in the practices of both. While main stream news organisations as well as the practices of social media use Internet to enhance their news production and dissemination in increasingly complex media ecology, the traditional media rely on social media as complementary sources of news, this leads to the suggestion that despite numerous challenges that constrain broadcast journalists, media literacy and upholding of fundamental principles that govern their professional conduct should not be ignored.

Recommendations

Against the background that poor remuneration and lack of incentive do not encourage broadcast journalists to perform optimally under pressure it is recommended that management should improve on welfare of journalists. Such incentives will boost their moral to explore sources beyond imagination and eschew from wholesale reliance on social media as sources which are most often misleading.

It is recommended that broadcast journalists should attend professional development and ongoing skills training essential for them to be abreast with a growing expectation of multiskilling and acquire media literacy. This will provide them the enablement to easily determine the newsworthiness of social media stories suitable for reproduction.

Social media operators, who are integral stakeholders in media industry, should evolve fact-checkers. Those that have already entrenched the mechanism should modify fact-checkers as dictated by changes in technology with potentials of encouraging and facilitating misleading information.

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