

Original Research Article

Examining Career Prospects of Mobile Journalism amongst Journalism Students

Abstract

Mobile journalism is a rapidly developing field in journalism with many opportunities for aspiring journalists. For journalism students with the intention of venturing into full time journalism, mobile journalism provides numerous career choices which can often become a daunting challenge. With scholarly literature within the Ghanaian setting on mobile journalism and student career choices in short supply, the present study sought to examine the factors that influence university students to pursue a career in mobile journalism. Qualitative data was collected from students of the National Film and Television Institute on the factors influencing their decision to enter into mobile journalism. The study found that the broad areas where student's career goals in mobile journalism are focused were politics and social issues. Students also reported that their choices in mobile journalism were largely influenced by their lecturers and social media. Factors that influenced student's decision to enter into mobile journalism were broadly categorised into internal and external influences. The study also found that there were various factors that acted as barriers in the achievement of student's career goals. The study concluded that mobile journalism holds numerous potentials for budding journalist which requires adequate support.

Key words: Mobile Journalism, Ghana, Career development, Education

Background

Mobile journalism as a fast developing sphere of journalism is characterized by the close association between journalism and technology. The practices of mobile journalism also called *mojo* are made of various forms of all-round, multimedia solo reporting in which the smartphone acts as the complete unit for the production, collection, editing and dissemination of information (Hanusch, 2013; Mellado et al., 2013; Salzmänn et al., 2020; Vernon, 2011). Mobile journalism is widely considered as an emerging field which is largely associated with the proliferation of novel and innovative journalistic practices growing around traditional focus of news institutions (Salzmänn et al., 2020, 2021). In Ghana, the increased usage of mobile technology has gained momentum due to the explosion of mobile phone and easy access to the Internet. With an estimated population of about 29 million, Ghana has about 34.5 million mobile phone users due to multiple device ownership (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019).

The penetration of mobile infrastructure has revolutionized journalism in Ghana so the extent where working journalists, being part of mobile-laden media ecosystem, are more well-equipped and connected for rapid production and dissemination of news especially in rural and

remote areas of both countries (Ahiabenu et al., 2018; Umair, 2016; Zanne, 2018). Despite these positive implications of mobile journalism, the use of mobile phones and cameras for news reporting by journalists has raised concerns regarding the authenticity and credibility of the news content in Ghana (Ahiabenu et al., 2018; Umair, 2016). Other challenges associated with mobile journalism is largely attributed to the underdevelopment of mobile journalism and the slow rate of growth of when compare with Western countries. These challenges associated with mobile journalism calls into attention the indispensable role of journalistic training and professionalism often delivered through formal training by institutions such as the National Film and Television Institute.

Students aspiring to become journalist are increasingly being required to possess mobile journalism production skills (Carpenter et al., 2016; Salzmair et al., 2020, 2021), As part of the National Film and Television Institute Broadcast Journalism programme, students undertake a special course in mobile journalism or reporting where students are taught how to use their smart phones to record good videos for their TV news stories, record good sound for their radio news stories and as well as edit. However, while formal training of journalist plays a prominent role in ushering more professional journalist into mobile journalism, career prospects and decisions play a crucial role in determining the rate of growth of mobile journalism (Ferrucci, 2018; Mellado et al., 2013; Walck et al., 2015).

The choice of a career is a major challenge Ghanaian students who may be required to consider their personal aspiration and what parents expect from them. Research in Western jurisdiction shows that the University level is the turning point in one's media career decision-making process. Studies have shown that majority of journalist made their decision to enter the communication field by the age of 19. Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that majority of these students made their decision to major in journalism in high school and university. Most recently, the 2018 Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates conducted in the USA showed a significant correlation between time of decision and one's occupational commitment (Coleman et al., 2018). The longer one had journalism as an educational focus, the more likely the recent graduates saw themselves staying in journalism throughout their careers (Coleman et al., 2018). Because of the effect of college and university decisions on one's ultimate career path, this study investigates some of the factors in those university decisions pertaining to establishing solo careers in mobile journalism.

Problem Statement

The proliferation of digital technology has created various changes to the way human life and activities are undertaken. Technology is improving daily and it keeps bringing noticeable upgrades that is influencing communication. As a result, journalists are beginning to embrace better and more enhanced methods for acquiring information from the public and also presenting news to the public. The adoption of mobile production has become attractive for various reason such as cost reduction, flexibility and speed (Ayish & Dahdal, 2021; Emmanuel et al., 2021; Salzmair et al., 2021). While mobile journalism is often conceived as an aspect of journalism complementing traditional journalism, others consider mobile journalism as a

significant domain of journalism. The implications of these shifts is that it is becoming increasingly expected of new journalists and those journalists with seasoned careers to now learn and use mobile journalism skills outside of their required duties or job descriptions. In addition as a significant domain of journalism, mobile journalism is opening a new career dimension for budding and experienced journalist.

Studies on mobile journalism have been done to comprehend the mechanisms by which mobile journalist have understood their duties and responsibilities within journalism in order to unravel the issues that affect influence their work (López-García et al., 2019; Perreault & Stanfield, 2019). Although, these studies have contributed to understanding the field of mobile journalism, these studies were not clear on the potential career prospects of mobile journalism. There has been calls for various studies to examine mobile journalism from the perspective of career decisions because mobile journalism is becoming increasingly attractive especially for self-driven journalist interested in pursuing solo careers.

Career development generally represents a lifelong process of engaging the work environment through the selection of employment opportunities made available to them. Each individual presented with the various life career development choices may be influenced by many factors including the socio economic factors(Carpenter et al., 2016; Mellado et al., 2013; Mishra et al., 2017). A major turning point in the lives of young people pertains to career choices that are made while in University. Often these choices are perceived by family and community as a mere start to workplace readiness however, decision on career choices have a significant influence on establishing people in a career path that opens as well as closes opportunities . Given that various differences exist in the social economic environment of university student, it is important to assess some of the factors that influence potential career choices for specific careers.

Within the Ghanaian setting studies on mobile journalism is in short supply because the development of mobile journalism is in its infancy. The development of this field of journalism hold numerous potentials for the growth of journalism in the country and is worthy of research attention. It is therefore against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the factors that influence University students to pursue a career in mobile journalism. The study therefore seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the career/job goals in mobile journalism students are considering?
2. Who or what helped students learn about their choices in mobile journalism?
3. Who or what has had the greatest influence on student's employment decisions to enter into mobile journalism?
4. What are the barriers to the achievement of student's employment goals in mobile journalism?

Literature Review

Mobile Journalism

Mobile journalism according to Westlund and Quinn (2018, p. 12) refers to “all of the interrelated dynamics at play in which news is being produced and distributed with or for mobile devices”. Mobile journalism has developed substantially over the past decade and mobile news has become a key feature in mobile ecosystems and is frequently accessed by a growing portion of the public (Carpenter et al., 2016; Hanusch, 2013; Salzmänn et al., 2020). Mobile journalism is characterized by the close entanglement between journalism and technology. To this end, scholars such as Perreault and Stanfield (2019) describe mobile journalism as a journalistic process while Ayish and Dahdal (2021) defines mobile journalism as a holistic form of multimedia storytelling whereby a professional journalist writes, shoots, edits and publishes news stories entirely on a mobile, networked, handheld, multimedia device.

The practices of mobile journalism involves solo reporting in which the smartphone acts as a complete production unit for collecting, editing and disseminating news content. Mobile journalism practices is widely driven by information demands of people and represents neo-journalistic approach largely associated with the breeding of novel journalistic practices evolving within and outside of mainstream journalistic practices and institutions (Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019; Salzmänn et al., 2020; Walck et al., 2015). While mobile devices have often been utilized by journalists for decades as a primary work tool, smartphones have evolved into a comprehensive and all-in-one tool for journalists. Smartphones are considered as the most indispensable tool that allows journalists to take advantage of the numerous avenues for multimedia storytelling (Salzmänn et al., 2020; Walck et al., 2015). Mobile journalism has grown side by side with technological advancement from being utilized for solo video news gathering to smartphones being utilized as full-fledged multimedia production units.

Career Development

According to Njogu, (2019, p. 23) “career development is a term used to describe both the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic and chance factors that combine to shape individual career behaviours over the life span.” The term career development also refers to the interventions or practices that are utilized to enhance an individual's career development or to enable that individual to make more effective career decisions. Career development is the process of choosing a career, improving one's skills and advancing along a career path. It also represents a lifelong process of learning and decision-making that brings an individual closer to their ideal job, skillset and lifestyle (Coleman et al., 2018). Career development is the process of self-knowledge, exploration, and decision-making that shapes an individual's career. It requires successfully navigating occupational options to choose and train for jobs that suit one's personality, skills, and interests. Career development is therefore a subject of choice and as such may be influenced by an array of factors. Some of the

factors include personal characteristics, financial resources, and physical state and demographic characteristics.

Personal characteristics includes personality, interest, values and aptitudes that defines an individual. The characteristics play a significant role in career development because they influence which occupations individual find satisfying as well as the conducive work environment capable of inducing success. Pursuing certain career choices can often be expensive. Some career choices require individuals to attend and receive formal training which may often be costly. Therefore financial limitations can hinder individuals in their choice of career. Some individuals may be more suited for certain jobs due to physical and mental limitations. In addition, demographic factors such as age or perception of age can influence career choices and development. Certain profession may be more suited for young people while others may not. Some career paths also come with age restrictions which may influence both career choice and progression.

Mobile Journalism and Career Development

Parallel to the use and adoption of smart phones devices and internet in conventional news practices, the journalism education sector has turned oriented its focus towards integrating mobile journalism into its curriculum(Carpenter et al., 2015; Coleman et al., 2018; Jamil & Appiah-Adjei, 2019; Mishra et al., 2017). All over the world, the proliferation of mobile journalism training including Ghana through the National Film and Television Institute suggest that there is a growing interest and need to prepare a new generation of mobile journalist for conventional and online news reporting careers. The introduction of university education that focuses on mobile journalism does not only appeal align with modern learning trends but it sensitise prospective journalist about the evolving nature of their profession in a changing virtual environment(Hanusch, 2013; López-García et al., 2019; Vernon, 2011; Westlund & Quinn, 2018). A survey involving mass communication students revealed wide support for mobile integration into journalism profession in both conventional and virtual contexts(Ferrucci, 2018). The findings of this study showed that while students recognise the importance of mobile journalism, the emerging mobile journalism profession presents young and upcoming journalist with various opportunities to successfully utilise multimedia facets and networked communication as tools for packaging and reporting information(Ferrucci, 2018). Although there is favourable support for integrating mobile devices into journalism practices, there is still a major issue of sustaining the interest of students to a point where most of them would be willing to pursue mobile journalism as solo careers.

Previous studies in other subject areas have reported that various factors influence a student's choice of University major. Particularly a study by Walck et al., (2015) reported that the choice of university majors are determined by factors such as external influences of friends and families, students' own interests and their motivation. Similarly, Carpenter et al. (2016) also

identified that interest in the subject, salary and career and job opportunities were significant factors that determined student's choice of university majors.

Additionally previous studies conducted since the 1950's have indicated that the acceptance of journalism major has been plagued by various uncertainties. A study by Weigle (1957) which was one of the earliest studies on factors influencing journalism career choices of students was against the backdrop of a shortage of trained professionals for editorial positions in America. In the survey, it was reported that university students found journalism less desirable due to the popular notion that it is difficult to land a job in journalism. Other factors included negative perception of journalism as a career due to low salaries, limited job opportunities and less glamour. Similar findings have been reported in other studies in more contemporary times even though the journalism profession has seen much improvement in modern times (Carpenter et al., 2015; Coleman et al., 2018; López-García et al., 2019; Mishra et al., 2017; Njogu, 2019; Vernon, 2011). Other challenges persist particularly during this era of competition and advancement in technology and especially in mobile journalism which is why understanding the career decisions of university students is important.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed method approach which embraces both qualitative and quantitative designs. Essentially, qualitative research methods are designed to explore the worldview and life experiences of individuals. In addition, this study applied a cross-sectional design where data was collected once, at a particular point in time. A cross-sectional survey was applied on the grounds that it gives a 'snapshot' of the result and the features related with it, at a particular point in time (Levin, 2006). The population of the study includes final year students of the Nations Films and Television Institute (NAFTI). Using convenience sampling technique, a total of 10 participants were selected for the study. This study relied on interviews for data collection. Interview responses were also subjected to thematic analysis. This involved first transcribing all recorded interview verbatim. The transcribed interviews were then closely read to identify content categories and pattern of responses. The pattern of responses was then developed into themes. Subsequently, these themes served as the pillars around which the analysis was woven.

Findings and Discussions

The study sought to examine some of the issues surrounding the career choices of students concerning mobile journalism. The specific objectives of the study were to examine the career/job goals in mobile journalism students are considering, to examine the factors that helped students learn about their choices in mobile journalism, to examine the factors that has

had the greatest influence on student's employment decisions to enter into mobile journalism, and to examine the barriers to the achievement of student's employment goals in mobile journalism.

Research Question One: What are the career/job goals in mobile journalism students are considering? The broad areas of focus concerning the career/job goals in mobile journalism by students included politics and social issues.

Politics: Some participant aspired to use mobile journalism to highlight significant issues associated with governance and distribution of political power in the country. Some selected comments that captured this theme are presented below

I aspire to cover political issues that affects the life of most Ghanaians. Elections and other national political functions require smart journalism and proper dissemination of timely information to all citizens. I think i may want to delve more into politics.....

I want to report on public issues especially those on corruption. Most of the times, the activities of our leaders go unchecked because journalist are not independent and politically neutral enough to project the true happening in the country. I think with mobile journalism, i can do more investigative journalism and help clean some of the mess in the political sphere.

Social Issue: Some students had aspirations of using mobile journalism to highlight key societal problems affecting a lot of people in our communities. Some of the selected comments of the students are presented below

I have been a victim before, I cannot go into the details. No one heard my story and i believe countless people feel that way too. Abuse, inferiority complex, poverty, lack of women empowerment, you name them. We don't talk much about these issues but they exist. Well I could go all out with this mobile journalism thing and add my voice to these issues.

I think mobile journalism can be used to highlight some societal problems that affects the ordinary Ghanaian. It has been one of my aspiration as an upcoming journalist. Well if I have the chance I will report on issues about women and children as well as poverty.

Research Question Two: Who or what helped students learn about their choices in mobile journalism? Generally, most of the student mentioned that they have learnt a lot about mobile journalism from their teachers and also from social media. Some of the comments highlighting these themes are presented below:

The constant and easy tutorials from my lecturers and the lecture about mobile reporting have helped me learn about the choices available in this field of journalism.

I see beautiful pictures, videos and graphics which are all user generated and I was like wow.... I realised people out there are making it on their own with just their smart phones so i figured , there is a lot more I can also do with my phone you get it.

Research Question Three: Who or what has had the greatest influence on student's employment decisions to enter into mobile journalism? From the interaction with the students, several factors have an influence on student's employment decision to enter into mobile journalism. These factors could generally be categorised into internal and external influences.

Internal Influences: Internal factors refers to those influences that emanate from the individual and significant individuals in the life of the students such as family and lecturers. Some of the comments highlighting this theme are presented below

I have always wanted to start something on my own even though i like to work with other people, i want to have a sense of ownership of my ideas. I naturally have a passion for mobile journalism because it gives me the chance to work and do things myself.

My mum has always been supportive of my career aspirations. As her an entrepreneur herself, she understands the value of working for yourself. She keeps pushing me to try out stuff even got me to shoot a documentary once for her business pitch.

Our lecturers have been encouraging us to be creative and i think one of those long talk really got to me. My lecture certainly had an influence on decision to enter into it.

External Influences: External factors refers to those influences that emanate from the context and situations outside of the individual. Some of the comments highlighting this theme are presented below

The ubiquity feature of mobile has helped to cover news in areas where traditional media cannot be existing or cannot reach easily. It's simplicity, you do not need to carry along any huge material on site, just be creative and use your potable device

Research Question Four: What are the barriers to the achievement of student's employment goals in mobile journalism? The responses given by the students can broadly be captured under the themes presented below

Lack of logistics and skills: Some of the students were of the view that the absence of the necessary equipment as well as some skills acted as barriers in the achievement of the students employment goals. Some of the comments reflecting this theme are presented below

Some of these barriers are, how to use the mobile phone device for quality sounds and visuals, and also choice of words to use.

Cost of devices and financial challenges means that you don't get to work with correct equipment and that can affect your output.

Not having thorough lessons on mobile reporting and difficulty in editing.

Lack of visibility and credibility: Some students were of the view that mobile journalism is at its infancy which presented barriers pertaining to visibility and credibility. Some of the comments of student are presented below

Mobile journalism is not widely recognised in Ghana. Besides, there is always competition from traditional media networks.

Not accepting the credibility of their works since it's mobile reporting. There is scarcity of media organizations who have an interest in mobile journalism. Might be difficult to be visible to the public early unlike when you're with a defined organisation

Personal factors: Some participants alluded to personal factors that acted as barriers to achieving employment goals. Some of the comments are presented below

I think one major barrier has to do with low self-esteem. You have to put yourself out there through your work and it can be totally trashed and it can really affect your morale. No one would even recommend you for gigs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study gives us a snapshot of student's opinions concerning career decisions around mobile journalism. Traditional journalism has often been employed as a tool for solving issues within the society on politics, economics and social problems. Mobile journalism as an emerging field in journalism provides young aspiring journalist the chance to report on various issues of relevance to the social, economic and political development of the country. Particularly for career choices in mobile journalism, the decisions of students are shaped by various factors. The current study has pointed out some of these factors which includes information availability, family, friends, contextual influences as well as barriers.

The traditional media institutions of television, radio and newspaper have seen their once-loyal audiences reduced by the Internet, and consequently the job market for traditional media journalist positions have declined. Journalism students looking for career opportunities might therefore have to consider journalism profession outside of the traditional preferably solo journalism careers in order to fully utilize their degree.

Major challenges associated with establishing careers as evident from the findings include lack of technical skills and equipment, lack of confidence and financial problems. From databases to interactive graphics, video to slide shows, journalists today work in a range of media. There are way too many tools available for one person to become an expert at everything. In this regard, upcoming mobile journalists need a working knowledge of the capabilities and to develop their strength. Additionally, it can be important for mobile journalists to surround themselves with likeminded journalism students and individuals who can share their own knowledge and skills in the field. Moreover, budding mobile journalist who would like to pursue solo careers must take

advantage of starting small. By starting small, budding journalist can get to try a lot of different things. As with anything, the best way to become a better journalist is to simply do it.

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