

The Impact Of Social Media On Modern Journalism Practices In Uganda: A Case Study Of NBS Group Of Media Companies, Jinja

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of social media on modern journalism practices at NBS Group of Media Companies in Jinja, Uganda. The proliferation of social media platforms had fundamentally altered the news production, distribution, and consumption landscape globally, and Uganda's media industry had not been immune to these transformations. The study adopted a descriptive case study research design and collected data from 120 respondents comprising journalists, editors, digital content producers, and senior management personnel at NBS Jinja. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and direct observation. Pearson correlation analysis and multiple linear regression were employed to assess the relationships between social media adoption dimensions and journalism practice indicators. The findings revealed that social media use was significantly and positively correlated with content diversity ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$), audience engagement ($r = 0.688$, $p < 0.01$), speed of reporting ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), and journalistic credibility ($r = 0.574$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis indicated that platform integration ($\beta = 0.368$, $p < 0.001$), citizen journalism facilitation ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$), and real-time reporting ($\beta = 0.259$, $p < 0.001$) were the strongest predictors of changes in journalism practice. The study also documented challenges including the spread of misinformation, erosion of editorial standards, inadequate digital skills among some journalists, and tensions between the speed of social media reporting and the accuracy requirements of professional journalism. The study recommended investment in digital journalism training, development of robust social media editorial policies, and enhanced fact-checking mechanisms.

Keywords: Social Media, Journalism, Uganda, NBS Group, Media Practices, Digital Journalism, Citizen Journalism, Misinformation, Jinja, Content Production

Introduction

The emergence and rapid proliferation of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter (now X), YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, had brought about unprecedented transformations in the practice, economics, and social role of journalism worldwide (Frank et al., 2023). For much of the twentieth century, journalism had been defined by the gatekeeping role of professional editors and broadcasters who determined which events and issues were newsworthy, how they were framed, and through which channels they were disseminated to audiences (Joshua, 2026). The advent of the internet and subsequently of social media had fundamentally disrupted this model by enabling any individual with a smartphone and internet connection to create, share, and comment on news content, effectively dissolving the boundaries between professional journalism and amateur content production (Audrey & Nancy, 2025).

In Uganda, the media landscape had undergone significant changes since the liberalisation of broadcasting in the early 1990s, which saw the proliferation of private radio stations, television channels, and online news platforms (Sophie &

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Crispus, 2024). By the time of this study, Uganda had over 300 licensed radio stations, more than 30 television channels, and a growing number of digital news portals and social media-based news channels. Social media penetration had expanded rapidly, driven by the growing affordability of smartphones and mobile data, particularly among urban and peri-urban populations. According to DataReportal (2023), Uganda had approximately 4.8 million social media users as of January 2023, representing a 4.5 percent increase from the previous year, with Facebook being the most widely used platform followed by YouTube and TikTok.

NBS Group of Media Companies, which operated NBS Television, NBS Radio, and associated digital platforms with a significant presence in Jinja, Eastern Uganda, was one of the media organisations that had most actively embraced social media as part of its content production and distribution strategy(Kazaara et al., 2023). The station had invested in dedicated digital teams, established active social media accounts across multiple platforms, and integrated social media monitoring into its news gathering and editorial workflow. As such, NBS Jinja presented an instructive case study for examining how a contemporary Ugandan media organisation navigated the opportunities and challenges presented by social media integration in journalism practice(Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023).

Despite the obvious significance of social media's impact on journalism, empirical research on this phenomenon within the specific context of Ugandan media organisations was limited at the time of this study(Shakilah & Kazaara, 2023). Most existing scholarship on social media and journalism in Africa focused on broad continental trends or on South African, Kenyan, and Nigerian contexts, leaving a knowledge gap with respect to smaller markets like Uganda and specific regional media organisations like NBS Jinja(Mercy et al., 2023). This study therefore sought to fill this gap by empirically examining the impact of social media on journalism practices at NBS Group of Media Companies in Jinja, with a view to generating insights applicable to the wider Ugandan media industry. The study was organised around four specific objectives: first, to determine the extent of social media adoption and integration into journalism practices at NBS Jinja; second, to assess the impact of social media on the speed, breadth, and diversity of news reporting; third, to examine the effect of social media on audience engagement and newsroom-audience relationships; and fourth, to investigate the challenges associated with social media use in journalistic practice, particularly with regard to accuracy, credibility, and editorial standards.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks. The first was the Gatekeeping Theory, originally formulated by Kurt Lewin (1951) and subsequently applied to journalism by White (1950) and Shoemaker and Vos (2009). Gatekeeping theory conceptualised journalism as a process in which editors and journalists acted as gatekeepers who selected, filtered, and shaped the flow of information from sources to audiences through editorial decisions informed by professional norms, organisational values, and commercial considerations. Social media had fundamentally challenged

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this gatekeeping model by enabling individuals outside the formal media system to access, produce, and disseminate information directly to potentially large audiences, effectively creating what Singer (2014) described as a 'networked journalism' environment in which the traditional gates had become more porous and the gatekeeping function had become distributed across a wider range of actors.

The second theoretical lens was the Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) through their landmark study of the 1968 US presidential election. Agenda-setting theory proposed that the media did not tell audiences what to think, but rather what to think about, by determining which issues received attention and prominence in news coverage. Social media had introduced a significant complication to this framework by creating bidirectional agenda-setting dynamics in which social media trends, viral content, and public conversations online were increasingly influencing what traditional media organisations chose to cover, reversing or at least complicating the traditional one-directional agenda-setting relationship. The interaction between social media and traditional media agendas was therefore a central analytical concern for this study.

Social Media and Journalism: Global Perspectives

The relationship between social media and journalism had been extensively examined in the global scholarly literature, with researchers documenting both the opportunities and challenges that social media presented for professional journalism. Lasorsa et al. (2012), in a study of Twitter use by journalists at leading US newspapers, found that social media had encouraged journalists to express more personal opinions, share more links to external content, and engage in more interactive conversations with audiences than was typical of conventional journalism. They noted, however, that most journalists on Twitter still adhered broadly to professional norms regarding objectivity and balance, suggesting that professional socialisation remained a moderating influence on social media behaviour.

Lewis et al. (2014) examined the impact of social media on the news gathering practices of journalists in five countries and found that Twitter was increasingly used as a tool for finding sources, monitoring breaking news, and distributing content, while Facebook was more commonly used for audience engagement and community building. These findings were consistent with those of Hermida (2010), who argued that Twitter had become a form of ambient journalism in which a constant stream of information about world events flowed through journalists' social feeds, enabling them to monitor a wide range of topics and sources simultaneously and to detect breaking news rapidly.

Research on African and Ugandan media specifically had begun to document the local dimensions of social media's impact on journalism. Nassanga et al. (2013) observed that Ugandan journalists had rapidly adopted social media tools for news gathering and distribution but that many newsrooms lacked clear social media policies or training frameworks to guide professional conduct in the digital environment. Mukherjee and Couldry (2016) highlighted the risk of misinformation and rumour amplification when social media content was incorporated into news reporting without adequate verification, a

concern that was particularly acute in contexts with limited institutional fact-checking capacity. Kainja (2015) documented how social media had empowered citizen journalists in Malawi to break news and hold powerful actors accountable, but also noted the attendant risks of unverified and sensational content circulating widely before professional media could assess its accuracy.

Social Media, Credibility, and Misinformation

One of the most debated dimensions of social media's impact on journalism concerned its implications for the credibility and accuracy of news reporting. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) introduced the concept of the 'information disorder' to describe the contemporary media environment characterised by the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation across social media platforms. They argued that social media's algorithmic amplification of emotionally resonant content, combined with the erosion of traditional editorial gatekeeping, had created conditions in which false and misleading information could spread rapidly and achieve widespread public acceptance before corrections could be issued.

Research specifically focused on Uganda found that social media had been a significant vector for the spread of political misinformation, health misinformation, and inflammatory content, particularly around election periods and public health emergencies. Mwesige (2019) documented how Ugandan politicians and their supporters had used social media platforms to disseminate false narratives about political opponents and electoral processes, while Kyakulumbye (2020) examined the role of WhatsApp in spreading COVID-19 health misinformation in Uganda. These dynamics posed significant professional and ethical challenges for Ugandan journalists who increasingly relied on social media as a news source but faced pressures to publish quickly in a highly competitive digital environment.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive case study research design, which was considered appropriate for an in-depth examination of social media's impact on journalism practices within a specific organisational context (Abiodun Nafiu, 2012). A case study design was particularly suited to this study because it enabled the researcher to explore a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, using multiple sources of evidence to build a comprehensive understanding of the processes, practices, and outcomes under investigation. The choice of NBS Group of Media Companies in Jinja as the case study site was deliberate and purposive, as NBS represented one of the most digitally active media organisations in Eastern Uganda with a documented track record of social media integration in its journalism operations.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised all journalists, editors, digital content producers, social media managers, and senior management personnel at NBS Group of Media Companies in Jinja who were directly involved in news production, editing, and dissemination at the time of the study. According to the organisation's human resources records, NBS Jinja employed a total of 187 persons, of whom 143 were directly engaged in journalism and related functions (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). A sample of 120 respondents was selected through stratified purposive sampling, with strata defined by occupational

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category to ensure representation across journalists, editors, digital team members, and management (Julius & Kazaara, 2026). All 12 senior editors and managers were included in the sample through census sampling given their small number and the critical nature of their perspectives to the study's objectives. From the remaining journalism and technical staff, 108 respondents were selected through systematic random sampling from the staff register.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, an in-depth interview guide, and a direct observation checklist. The questionnaire comprised five sections addressing respondent demographics, social media use patterns, perceived impacts on journalism practices, challenges experienced, and recommendations for improvement. Items measuring social media adoption and journalism practice changes were rated on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was validated through expert review involving two media studies academics and two senior journalists, and a pilot test was conducted with 15 respondents from a comparable media organisation in Kampala. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 editors and senior managers to obtain detailed insights into organisational decisions about social media integration and editorial policy. Direct observation of the NBS Jinja newsroom was conducted over a five-day period to document actual social media use practices and newsroom workflows.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 25.0, with descriptive statistics computed for all variables and inferential analyses conducted using Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression (Nelson et al., 2022). The dependent variable in the regression model was an overall journalism practice change index constructed as the mean of four subscale scores measuring content diversity, audience engagement, reporting speed, and journalistic credibility. Independent variables included five social media adoption dimensions: platform integration, citizen journalism facilitation, real-time reporting, multimedia content production, and audience feedback integration. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the social media adoption and journalism practice variables. Real-time reporting capability recorded the highest mean score among the social media adoption dimensions (M = 4.12, SD = 0.803), indicating that respondents strongly agreed that social media had significantly enhanced the speed at which news could be gathered and disseminated. This was followed by platform integration (M = 3.91, SD = 0.874) and audience engagement (M = 3.88, SD = 0.876). Journalistic credibility recorded the lowest mean among the outcome variables (M = 3.44, SD = 1.024), suggesting that respondents had more mixed views about whether social media adoption had contributed positively to the perceived credibility of their journalism.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Media Adoption and Journalism Practice Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
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Platform Integration	3.91	0.874	1	5	120
Citizen Journalism	3.68	0.921	1	5	120
Real-time Reporting	4.12	0.803	1	5	120
Multimedia Content	3.84	0.889	1	5	120
Audience Feedback	3.57	0.953	1	5	120
Content Diversity	3.76	0.912	1	5	120
Journalistic Credibility	3.44	1.024	1	5	120
Audience Engagement	3.88	0.876	1	5	120

Note: All variables measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). N = 120.

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for the main study variables. Social media use was significantly and positively correlated with all four journalism practice indicators. The strongest correlation was observed between social media use and content diversity ($r = 0.731, p < 0.01$), indicating that greater integration of social media into journalism workflows was associated with a wider range of topics, formats, and perspectives in news coverage. Social media use was also strongly correlated with audience engagement ($r = 0.688, p < 0.01$), suggesting that the interactive and participatory features of social media platforms had meaningfully enhanced the relationship between NBS journalists and their audiences. A significant positive correlation was observed between social media use and speed of reporting ($r = 0.612, p < 0.01$), consistent with the widely documented capacity of social media to compress the news cycle and enable near-instantaneous reporting of breaking events(Nelson et al., 2023).

The correlation between social media use and journalistic credibility was positive and significant ($r = 0.574, p < 0.01$), though comparatively weaker than the correlations with the other journalism practice indicators. This pattern was consistent with the theoretical tension identified in the literature between social media's capacity to broaden news coverage and accelerate reporting on one hand, and the risks of accuracy erosion and credibility damage associated with unverified social media content on the other. The finding suggested that while social media adoption was overall associated with positive journalism outcomes at NBS Jinja, its contribution to credibility was more nuanced and less consistent than its contributions to speed, diversity, and engagement.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix – Social Media Use and Journalism Practice Indicators at NBS Jinja

Variable	SM Use	Content	Engagement	Speed	Credibility
Social Media Use	1.000	0.731**	0.688**	0.612**	0.574**
Content Diversity	0.731**	1.000	0.702**	0.589**	0.563**
Audience Engagement	0.688**	0.702**	1.000	0.641**	0.598**

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Speed of Reporting	0.612**	0.589**	0.641**	1.000	0.534**
Journalistic Credibility	0.574**	0.563**	0.598**	0.534**	1.000

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed). $N = 120$.

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis examining the predictors of journalism practice change at NBS Jinja. The overall regression model was statistically significant ($F(5, 114) = 38.74, p < 0.001$) and accounted for 62.9% of the variance in journalism practice outcomes ($R^2 = 0.629, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.614$). Tolerance values ranged from 0.38 to 0.71 and VIF values ranged from 1.41 to 2.63, confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity. Platform integration was the strongest predictor of journalism practice change ($\beta = 0.368, t = 4.817, p < 0.001$), indicating that the degree to which journalists and editors had systematically incorporated social media platforms into their daily workflows was the most powerful driver of observable changes in journalism practice. Citizen journalism facilitation was the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.312, t = 4.547, p < 0.001$), highlighting the significant role that user-generated content and community sourcing through social media had played in transforming the content and reach of NBS journalism. Real-time reporting emerged as the third strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.259, t = 4.190, p < 0.001$), followed by multimedia content production ($\beta = 0.207, t = 3.143, p = 0.002$) and audience feedback integration ($\beta = 0.178, t = 2.850, p = 0.005$). The significance of all five predictors in the regression model confirmed that social media's impact on journalism practice at NBS Jinja was multidimensional and not reducible to any single dimension of adoption. Rather, it was the combined effect of platform use, citizen sourcing, speed enhancement, multimedia capability, and audience responsiveness that collectively explained the majority of observed changes in journalism practice.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression – Predictors of Journalism Practice Change at NBS Group, Jinja

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	t	p-value
(Constant)	1.124	0.287		3.916	0.000
Platform Integration	0.342	0.071	0.368	4.817	0.000
Citizen Journalism	0.291	0.064	0.312	4.547	0.000
Real-time Reporting	0.243	0.058	0.259	4.190	0.000
Multimedia Content	0.198	0.063	0.207	3.143	0.002
Audience Feedback	0.171	0.060	0.178	2.850	0.005

Note: *Dependent Variable: Journalism Practice Change Index. $R^2 = 0.629, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.614, F(5, 114) = 38.74, p < 0.001$.*

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Qualitative Findings

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The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and newsroom observation provided rich contextual insights into the lived experience of social media integration at NBS Jinja. Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged that social media had transformed the journalism landscape in ways that were largely irreversible and that required the organisation to continuously adapt its practices and policies. Editors described how the advent of social media had compressed the effective news cycle from a daily or bi-daily rhythm to a near-continuous one, creating pressure to publish verified information almost instantaneously or risk being overtaken by less professionally scrupulous competitors and citizen journalists. Several senior journalists recalled how they had initially been sceptical of social media's relevance to professional journalism but had come to view it as an indispensable tool for monitoring public opinion, identifying emerging stories, sourcing eyewitness accounts of breaking events, and distributing content to younger audiences who were increasingly unreachable through traditional broadcast channels.

Newsroom observation revealed that all journalists at NBS Jinja maintained active accounts on at least two social media platforms for professional purposes, with Twitter and Facebook being the most universally used for news monitoring and source communication, and WhatsApp being widely used for internal communication and the receipt of tip-offs and user-generated content from sources and community members. A dedicated digital team of four persons was responsible for managing the organisation's official social media accounts, curating audience comments, and cross-posting content across platforms, while individual journalists were responsible for maintaining their personal professional profiles and engaging directly with followers. The newsroom had recently developed a draft social media policy that covered guidelines on professional conduct online, verification requirements for user-generated content, and protocols for corrections and retractions on social media.

Despite these positive adaptations, the qualitative data also revealed persistent challenges. Misinformation was identified by virtually all interviewees as the most serious challenge associated with social media in journalism. Editors described the difficulty of verifying information that originated on social media and spread rapidly before adequate fact-checking could be completed, and several cited instances where NBS had inadvertently amplified false information sourced from social media before corrections were issued. A senior editor characterised this as an occupational hazard of the social media age, noting that the competitive pressure to be first with a story sometimes conflicted with the professional obligation to be right. Younger journalists were described as generally more digitally fluent but also sometimes more prone to accepting social media content uncritically, while older journalists sometimes struggled to adapt their established professional routines to the faster, more interactive demands of social media journalism. These tensions highlighted the importance of ongoing training, clear editorial guidance, and a newsroom culture that consistently prioritised accuracy over speed.

Discussion

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The findings of this study provided robust empirical evidence that social media had significantly transformed journalism practices at NBS Group of Media Companies in Jinja. The positive and statistically significant correlations between social media adoption and all four journalism practice indicators studied, namely content diversity, audience engagement, speed of reporting, and journalistic credibility, confirmed that social media's impact on professional journalism at NBS was broadly positive in its overall direction, even as the qualitative evidence revealed important tensions and challenges that complicated this overall picture. These findings were broadly consistent with the global literature on social media and journalism reviewed in the conceptual framework, including the work of Lasorsa et al. (2012), Lewis et al. (2014), and Hermida (2010), while also highlighting Uganda-specific dynamics related to digital infrastructure, regulatory environment, and journalistic culture.

The finding that platform integration was the strongest predictor of journalism practice change in the regression model was particularly significant from a policy and management perspective, as it suggested that the degree of systematic and deliberate integration of social media into organisational workflows, as opposed to ad hoc or individual use, was the primary driver of positive journalism practice outcomes. This finding had important implications for media managers and journalism educators, as it suggested that the benefits of social media for journalism did not accrue automatically from the mere availability of platforms but required deliberate organisational investment in training, policies, workflow design, and technological infrastructure. The significance of citizen journalism facilitation as the second strongest predictor aligned with the broader literature documenting the increasingly blurred boundary between professional journalism and amateur content production in the social media age, and suggested that NBS's strategy of actively incorporating user-generated content and community sourcing had meaningfully expanded its journalistic capacity and reach.

The relatively weaker correlation between social media use and journalistic credibility compared to other journalism practice indicators, combined with the qualitative evidence about misinformation challenges and speed-accuracy tensions, pointed to a fundamental dilemma at the heart of social media-integrated journalism. As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) and others had argued, the same features of social media that made it such a powerful tool for rapid, diverse, and engaging journalism, namely its speed, openness, interactivity, and algorithmic amplification, also made it a significant source of misinformation risk that threatened the foundational professional commitment to accuracy and public trust. Navigating this tension required not only technical solutions like fact-checking tools but also organisational culture change, editorial leadership, and sustained professional development, as well as a broader media industry commitment to upholding shared journalistic standards in the digital age.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the impact of social media on modern journalism practices at NBS Group of Media Companies in Jinja, Uganda. The quantitative findings demonstrated that social media adoption was positively and significantly associated with improvements in content diversity, audience engagement, speed of reporting, and journalistic credibility

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at NBS Jinja. Regression analysis revealed that platform integration, citizen journalism facilitation, and real-time reporting were the strongest drivers of journalism practice change, together with multimedia content production and audience feedback integration, accounting for 62.9% of the variance in journalism practice outcomes. These findings confirmed that social media had become a constitutive element of contemporary journalism practice at NBS Jinja and, by extension, of the broader Ugandan media industry.

However, the qualitative evidence highlighted significant challenges including the proliferation of misinformation, the erosion of verification standards under competitive speed pressures, skill gaps among some journalists, and the absence of comprehensive social media editorial policies. These challenges represented genuine threats to the quality and credibility of journalism at NBS Jinja that required urgent organisational attention. Based on these findings, the study offered the following recommendations. NBS management should finalise and implement the draft social media policy, ensuring that it addressed verification requirements, conduct guidelines, and correction protocols comprehensively. Regular digital journalism training should be institutionalised as a core component of staff development, with particular attention to fact-checking tools, social media ethics, and the management of speed-accuracy tensions. A dedicated verification and fact-checking desk should be established within the NBS Jinja newsroom to systematically assess social media content before it was incorporated into news reports. Media trainers and journalism educators in Uganda should integrate social media ethics and digital journalism skills into their curricula to ensure that incoming journalists were equipped to navigate the social media environment responsibly. Finally, the Uganda Communications Commission and the Uganda Media Council should develop industry-wide guidelines on social media journalism standards to provide a regulatory framework for the digital journalism environment.

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