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Public Perception of Citizen Journalism as an Alternative to Mainstream Media in Nigeria

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Abstract

Citizen journalism has gained global attention. Daily, it has become more popular within the global media industry. Our focus in this paper was to establish the perception of the Nigerian public, using the chosen population, about this brand of journalism, which heightened in the country during the 2020 lockdown caused by Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the popularity of citizen journalism, this study, anchored on the Democratic Participant Theory and the Social Responsibility Theory, set out to establish whether this brand of journalism is in any way a threat to the mainstream media. Another objective was to examine whether, based on its obvious public acceptability, citizen journalism can become an alternative to the traditional journalism. Then, based on various opinions by scholars, the study also sought to establish how the professional media can collaborate to maximise and utilise the potentials of citizen journalism. Applying the qualitative method, the sample, purposively chosen, comprised 30 interviewees from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. The outcome, which reflects views from these zones, is that though Nigerians have sustained attraction to citizen journalism, it cannot replace neither is it a threat to the mainstream media. This study demands further findings on the specific slant and depth of collaboration that can help tame the excesses of citizen journalism.

Keywords: Citizen, Mainstream Media, Journalism, News, Participatory Journalism

Introduction

The statement was brief. It came from the Jamaican Constabulary Network. The content revealed that a certain man who attacked two policemen on duty had been killed. According to Corinne Barnes (2012), shortly after the public announcement, a short video footage, whose contents contradicted the story by the police, went into circulation. It showed two policemen standing over a man who was obviously being tortured. Both held police batons and were using them on him. Then one of the policemen pulled a gun and shot the man. Silence. He died. The public watched in utter shock. Tears rolled down some cheeks. Barnes states that the identity of the man who recorded the video was never revealed. He was a citizen journalist — untrained, unpaid, unidentified. He simply melted into the unknown after getting the job done.

Across the world, something phenomenal has unfolded. There is no doubt that citizen journalism is not new. It is the advancement in communication technology that has made it to attain greater heights in practice and spread. It has changed event witnesses into reporters—passive media audiences have become unstoppable media actors. As captured by Okoro, et al (2013), despite the orchestrated seeming confusion and misconception, this brand of reporting is an emerging genre of journalism whose content is user-generated, used “unedited, uncensored and comes real time.” Glaser (2006), in agreement, describes citizen journalism as a practice whereby people without any form of training in journalism take advantage of modern technological communication tools, principally the internet, to create media content and distribute to a hungry audience. The concept behind this, states Glaser, is that the mainstream media practitioners no longer constitute “exclusive centre of knowledge” of journalism because the “audience knows more collectively than the reporter alone.”

Anorue, et al (2019), explain that over the years, journalism practice has been squarely made the preserve of professionals in the field; those “who have acquired the nitty gritty of the profession.” But then, as society began to advance in technology, the untrained but curious individuals began to exercise the functions of those officially trained to practice the profession. This gave rise to citizen journalism. Reasoning along this line, Apuke (2019), observes that unlike the traditional mass media, citizen journalism refers to the involvement of ordinary or untrained citizens in news reporting. The practice, he notes, is made possible through availability of sophisticated information communication technology. With the internet, it is now possible for people to use their mobile telephone handsets to take still pictures, record videos or audio at events, offload and have them published in media platforms for public

consumption. In medicine, people are usually told: what to do where there is no doctor. Today, citizen journalism is about: what to do where there is no trained journalist.

On July 6, 2016, Philandoe Castile, a 32-year-old African-American elementary school worker, his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, and their four years old daughter, went on a ride along Falcon Heights, near Minneapolis in the United States. They were immediately flagged down by two police officers. Reynolds had her android mobile telephone handset with her. Her daughter was seated on the back seat. One of the officers, Jeronimo Yanez, approached Castile and complained of a non-functioning brake light. He asked for identification document. Castile informed the officer that he had a gun in the car; with a permit. The conversation soon turned bloody. Yanez pulled a gun and emptied seven bullets into Castile at close range. Instinctively, Reynolds turned the phone camera on and began a live-streaming on Facebook (Davidson, 2017). She only missed the instant when the bullets were released into her boyfriend; but not the blood-soaked atmosphere. Reynolds was half crying, running commentaries, taking care of her daughter and still feeding the audience with live video of her boyfriend gasping for breath. The world watched in shock. Castilo died 20 minutes later. The global Facebook community reacted with one voice. That was citizen journalism at its best—instantaneous, user-generated, unedited, full of action, uncensored.

Before the emergence of android telephone handsets, Reynolds, in the above incident, would have been a mere eye witness—sought after by the traditional media for a-blow-by-blow-account of the incident. But there is a role reversal now. Non-professional journalists present at news-worthy events, with no access to organised mass media, have constituted themselves into reporters without restraints. They have become participants in a profession hitherto reserved for a privilege few. Anorue, et al (2019) say that citizen journalism is community-based. Practitioners double as reporters and publishers.

Sensing the powers of citizen journalism characterised by mass appeal, independence of operation, speed of delivery, instant audience participation and wide reach, Courtney Radsch (2013) describes it as “an alternative” process of news gathering and presentation which operates completely outside the traditional media. She states that citizen journalism is a response to peoples’ dissatisfaction with the mainstream media, which are perhaps driven by completely different desires and mode of practice. This conclusion prompts the need to examine, in this study, whether citizen journalism can, in the perception of the public really succeed in playing that role in Nigeria. Kperogi (2016), as though in agreement with Radsch, mentioned that the traditional media seem to be “in danger of being eclipsed.”

Bowman and Willis (2003) call it “participatory journalism” because it involves people other than those professionally qualified to practice. They describe it as “an emergent phenomenon” though it is not in any way new. It is simply gaining more grounds. The practice does not involve any superior supervision or ethical consideration. Several experts have attributed its rise to the rapid improvement in communication technology. While there exists surplus evidence to support this, some specific cases of citizen journalism had occurred when neither android phone nor internet existed. One of such examples is cited by Belair-Gagnon and Anderson (2015):

“On November 22, 1963, Abraham Zapruder documented the assassination of US, President John F. Kennedy with his Bell & Howell camera, selling the rights for US\$200, 000 to *Life* magazine.”

How Zapruder did the video recording which actually lasted just 26 seconds, is not stated. That was citizen journalism. Born in the present day Ukrain, Zapruder was a dressmaker, according to Ron Rosenbaum (2013), who describes the video as: “a historic, horrific, all-too-clear vision of a presidential assassination.”

From these instances, it is clear that the earliest form of citizen journalism was not the written news. They were mainly news captured on video and distributed to television houses. These videos were shot by people whose vocation had nothing to do with journalism, or even film-making. George Holliday, who bought a video camera a month before March 13, 1991 when he videoed the beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police officers, was a plumber. It was a historic 9-minute video that was aired unedited on international television channels in the United States (AP, 2021). None of the instances cited would have been possible if the world had waited for the presence of mainstream journalists.

In Nigeria, citizen journalism has gained tremendous attention and has made a lot of impact. It flourishes maximally during public protests against government policies. Okoro, et al (2013) state that citizen journalism has become popular in Nigeria due to the democratization of information technology. They note that “both the political leaders and the electorate use the social media for various reasons.” They note that citizen journalists cover community and national events. It is their split-second delivery that poses a challenge to the traditional media.

Okpara (n.d.) points out that citizen journalism has become a strong phenomenon in Nigeria and states that the advent of this genre of journalism has democratised the media to a point where Nigerians' right to know and participate in information management process would no longer be held hostage by the mainstream media. The practice of citizen journalism in Nigeria is clearly in line with what happens globally. When events unfold, whoever is at the scene, becomes a reporter. Such news must be covered and posted raw for public consumption, no editing, filtering, censorship or any such quality control mechanism. What constitutes news is as defined by the person at the scene of event. It is a competition bordering on who first comes out with the news.

On June 3, 2012, an aircraft belonging to Dana Airline took off from Abuja on a direct flight to Lagos. With just a few minutes to landing, the pilot raised a call for help as the aircraft violently went down with 150 passengers and the crew. All died. People within the vicinity of the crash rushed to the site. While the elderly raised alarm for immediate help, the younger ones pulled out their android mobile telephone handsets and started video-recording as the victims struggled and died in the process. Apuke (2019) describes their speed of dissemination of the video and gory pictures as instant; though unacceptable. Anorue, et al (2019) explain that one issue that prompts the popularity of citizen journalism practice in Nigeria is the fact that the sequence and rapidity of unfolding events supersede the capability of the local mainstream journalists, because their staffing is limited. For now, citizen journalism fever has gripped Nigerians as revealed by Apuke and Ayih (2020). Both observed from their study that citizen journalism has really impacted on the lives of Nigerians.

The reason for this study is because different views have trailed the practice of citizen journalism. Okoro et al (2013) have emphasised the "serious challenge" which citizen journalism poses to the traditional media in Nigeria due to its impacts on the media audience. Despite this, some scholars (Diri, 2013) still see the quality and practice of citizen journalism as "amateurish, misleading, fallacious, subjective and haphazard" Aditi Pareek (n.d) sees citizen journalism "as a threat to the traditional journalism." He anchors his opinion on the wide reach of citizen journalism. This paper attempts to establish what perceptions the publics have regarding the "serious challenge" or "threat" posed by citizen journalism to the mainstream media despite being described as "amateurish" and how both can collaborate to close the gap.

Research Objectives

Citizen journalism has generated various reactions and conclusions among scholars. This implies that it is obviously creating huge impacts. While some people say that it is a threat to the mainstream media, others say its operation and contents are too unprofessional to be reckoned with. Still, others see it as a huge challenge to the traditional media because of its wide acceptance. This paper seeks to establish the reality of these opinions and use the findings to close the gaps in the arguments.

This study set out to:

1. Establish whether citizen journalism poses any threat or challenge to mainstream journalism in Nigeria.
2. To examine whether, with all its unique characteristics, citizen journalism can become the alternative mass media.
3. Determine how the mainstream and citizen journalism can collaborate to benefit from each other.

Research Questions

1. Does citizen journalism pose any threat or challenge to the mainstream journalism in Nigeria?
2. Can citizen journalism, with all its unique characteristics, become the alternative media in Nigeria?
3. How can the mainstream and citizen journalism collaborate to benefit from each other?

Literature Review

Citizen Journalism as a Threat to Mainstream Journalism

Within the Nigerian journalism environment, Kperogi (2016) has cited a crucial paradigm shift. This is because the former audiences have become news anchors, creators, co-creators, disseminators and eventually consumers. By so doing, they are said to have fundamentally challenged “the age-old oligopolistic model of news production.” He states that the shift became obvious when the traditional mass media, which previously served as the only source and carrier of news, became increasingly dependent on the contribution of the citizens or the masses on social media networks to complement their news contents, a situation that has positioned them as being “in danger of being eclipsed.” Kperogi says “this is exacerbated by

the parallel proliferation and flowering of home-based online and citizen journalism in Nigeria.”

This flourish of citizen journalism in Nigeria and elsewhere has raised the question of who a journalist really is. Lindner, Connell and Meyer (2015) have come up with two definitions of journalism—and two classes of journalists. In their opinion, as a field of practice, professional journalism “is a body of knowledge, norms and beliefs that are generally shared by practitioners.” In the occupational category, they describe professional journalists as “people who are paid for engaging in those practices that are seen as legitimate within the field.”

In support of this, Ray Ekpu (2018) says the controversy on the status of journalism has since been settled because journalism has met all the known attributes of a profession. These include the fact that it has a body of knowledge which is multidisciplinary; it has minimum entry standard; it has canons of professional practice; which include accuracy: fairness, completeness, objectivity, etc.; it has a code of ethics, which regulate the conduct of practitioners in the execution of their professional responsibilities of informing, educating, entertaining and surveying the environment; and it has regulatory authorities such as the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC).

The question then arises: does citizen journalism deserve to be so called? According to Carpenter (2019) the emergence of citizen journalism or what Bowman and Wills (2003) call “participatory journalism,” has prompted journalists and scholars to readdress what constitutes journalism and who is a journalist. She states that citizen journalists have since disrupted what she calls “news-media ecosystems by challenging the veracity and representativeness of information flowing from mainstream news-media newsrooms.”

It does not actually seem like the debate would end soon. Glaser (2006) states that many mainstream journalists believe and truly so that “only a trained journalist can understand the rigors and ethics involved in reporting the news.” At the same time, he said there are various trained reporters involved in the practice of what could be termed citizen journalism, because they write their personal blogs online—a practice that is outside the traditional journalism hierarchy.”

Again, Ekpu (2018) confirms that there exist some professionally-owned online news platforms in Nigeria. He mentions the *Cable*, *Premium Times*, *The Next Edition*, *First News* emphasising that such online platforms are manned by professional journalists who had hitherto worked in the tradition media and were adherents of professional and ethical

journalism. Ekpu says bloggers “constitute a problem for truth.” He discloses unlike the conventional media, bloggers often adopt unprofessional approach of publishing information as news without verification.

As if in response to Ekpu’s analysis, Bowman & Wills (2003) reveal that several mainstream journalists do not recognise or respect “participatory journalism, particularly webloggers.” They state that these are usually characterized as “self-interested or unskilled amateurs.” But the hatred seems to be mutual because, according to the two scholars, web operators also view traditional media as “an arrogant, exclusive club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press.” Ekpu says what bloggers do is not journalism, and that: “It is a misnomer to call it journalism.” The reason is because it lacks what he calls “the rigour, the professionalism, the ethical obligation, truth-telling and the fairness doctrine that journalism is infused with.”

Again, Carpenter (2019) reiterates the unique calling of journalists. She states that journalists are expected to assemble and analyse complex information that would guide others in making informed decisions concerning themselves and their communities. Disagreements already exists over “citizen’s participatory and editorial-control levels,” because as Carpenter puts it, “news construction and dissemination have been the primary duty of professionally trained and skilled journalists.” She explains that journalism involves assembling, reporting, or collecting information, taking pictures or recording, then writing, editing, or publishing of the product of that information, which is news, in line with certain values associated with the profession; in public interest.

Criticisms and Collaboration

Santas Tsegyu (2016) talks about a shift in the conceptual framework from the ancient hypodermic needle media approach “to the two-way pervasive information and communication era” facilitated by the surplus Information and Communication Technologies. The implication is that the ICTs have placed enormous media power in the hands of the masses. Tsegyu says many Nigerians have appropriated the new communication technology to interact through sharing ideas, criticise and even vent their annoyance.

Okpara (2020) states that prior to the advent of citizen journalism in Nigeria, the traditional media was the only platform that could set agenda and guide the people on decision-making during political campaign period. She believes that the privilege was abused by the traditional journalists “who openly displayed political, economic, religious and ethnic biases.”

Her study states that it took the intervention of citizen journalism for Nigerians to have choices in terms of the media to read, listen to and view during electioneering politics, in spite of the perceptions that citizen journalism operates far below the required standards of ethical media practice. But despite such endorsement, Colette Davidson (2017) believes that sifting through what is true and what is false has placed the traditional media above citizen journalism. She cites traditional media's ability to meticulously verify information as against user-generated publishing by the new media.

The meeting ground between mainstream and citizen journalism is the belief that both produce news. This, to some scholars and media experts, is misleading. Their argument is that the product called news can only be produced by people trained or skilled in the art and practice of journalism. Some have gone further to explain that journalism as a profession has what Deuze (2005) calls journalism ideology, which include: public service; objectivity; autonomy or independence; immediacy; and ethics. These are attributes citizen journalism does not identify with except, perhaps, immediacy.

On possible collaboration, Riaz (2011) identifies lack of training as a problem of citizen journalists. This he says can be seen in their reports which are deprived of the basic journalistic requirements. He suggests the need for "proper arrangement of training of the citizen journalists" because if they are properly trained on the academic and practical requirements of the job, they might just be able to produce reports that are in line with what is required of journalism practitioners. According to Bowman & Wills (2003), at present, citizen journalism focuses more on releasing unfiltered messages to the public rather than purifying such messages through gate-keeping.

In Nigeria, this position is confirmed by Tsgyu (2016), who reveals that as good as citizen journalism as a concept is, it has huge credibility crisis caused by its unregulated activities. In other words, there is no gate-keeping process. His conclusion is that despite being an emerging potent force in building a democratic society and having so far yielded some benefits, his findings show that the concept is bedevilled with certain major issues with potential for unmanageable "crisis situation in information and communication needs of the society." He mentions the issue of invasion of peoples' privacy in view of what he calls "the pervasive nature of social media." With specific reference to the "potential to fuel mass revolt and protest," he concluded that Nigeria experienced this in the course of the fuel subsidy protest which "was largely mediated through social networking sites."

Journalism, as a socially responsible profession, operates on ethics. These are deliberately developed guiding principles that have created and sustained the confidence of the people in media contents. As asserted by Okalla, et al (2022), journalism takes pride in reporting and disseminating accurate and reliable information which must have gone through thoroughly scrutinized processes and cross-checked through established and approved news production techniques. They declare that professional journalists are firm on issues of truthfulness, correctness, objectivity, and legitimacy of news; and that “although there are occasional gaffes in traditional news reporting, they are rare in the workplace.” But it is not the same with citizen reporting, where “laxity is common, and in some cases, purposeful, in order to instigate unhealthy events or avenge personal wrongdoings.” They argued that most times, the factuality of is not matched with the time-honoured virtues of ethical consideration, objectivity and justice.

As a way out of the huge professional divide, suggestions for a merger or collaboration between citizen and mainstream media have been made by researchers and even media practitioners. This is based on the belief that citizen journalism has come to stay. It is not about to fade out soon. With daily advancement in communication technology, it would even get more sophisticated, impactful and damaging to the profession if left unchecked and unassisted. Lindner, et al (2015) project that collaboration would not only confer legitimacy, but that with the insertion of skill and professionalism, there would be some differences in contents. Oleh (2012) supports collaboration. His belief is that the new media have potentials for unpredictable long-term impact.

Some scholars say the collaborative alignment has even started with the introduction of online version of the traditional media; handled by trained professionals. Nip (2007) states that citizen journalists should be made official news contributors “or expert commentators for professional media regarding event and activities in their local areas.” Oleh (2012) opines that although citizen journalism has won supporters because of its immediacy, its reliability still raises questions. This, he says emphasises the need for collaboration.

According to Etika (2019), traditional media faces the deficiency of not having their reporters everywhere events occur. Citizen reporters can fit in there. He advocates “proper synergy” between the two classes of unequal practitioners aimed at ensuring comprehensive news coverage “through mutual cooperation and collaboration of the two types of journalism.”

But there is nothing new about collaboration between the mainstream and citizen media, according to Akila and Ayodele (2020). They note that after more than 20 years of co-

habitation, “it is anticipated that a robust mutually beneficial relationship has been forged.” However, some traditional mass media believe participatory media constitute a serious threat; and vice versa. The scholars disclose that fortunately, members of the mainstream media have started recognising the fact that they cannot be everywhere at the same time to cover events. What this means is that “they have concurrently realized the wealth of stories that can be missed if there is no existing partnership with users...” Both authors mentioned the case of Channels Television that appreciates collaboration with non-professional reporters, believing that what remains to be seen is “whether mainstream media will avail citizen journalists an equal sit at the high table of journalism practice.”

Citizen Journalism as Alternative Media

This study examines the possibility of the new media overwhelming the old media. Riaz (2011) quickly dismisses the assumption. Being an alternative media implies becoming the primary source of news and information or operating as a replacement of the traditional media. It also explains a situation whereby citizen media would occupy a place of priority over the privileged category. At present, it is the speed of information delivery that stands citizen over the traditional media. This is because such information is not subjected to industrial processing. The puzzle then is whether media consumers would in future prefer news and other media contents offered by the untrained, unskilled and unethical reporters over those produced by tested professionals. However, the belief is that through citizen journalism, news dissemination has become “more democratic and participatory as opposed to the mainstream monopolistic media productions” (Apuke, 2019).

Instead of becoming an alternative to mainstream journalism, Oleh (2006) states that citizen journalism cannot do without mainstream journalism if it must gain credibility by producing good quality copies “in terms of accuracy and objectivity.” He confirmed that citizen journalism will grow stronger with improvement in information and communication technology, but it would definitely not diminish the mainstream journalism. In addition, Lindner, et al (2015) are categorical that even if mainstream media have been rejected by the new media, the former still maintain the lead in acceptability and defining legitimacy even in online publication.

In Nigeria media scholars and journalists disagree that citizen journalism would one day, soon, reduce the traditional media to a second place. Anorue, et al (2019) cite high level of computer illiteracy as one of the reasons. Most importantly, they state that Nigeria does not

have a functional basic facility that would help in this regard. In a study conducted by the scholars, it was concluded that besides inaccessibility to internet facility and computer illiteracy, other hindrances include what they term “high cost of surfing...prevalence of defamatory statements and the discouragement of professionalism.”

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on two relevant theories, the Democratic Participant Media Theory and the Social Responsibility Theory. The Democratic Participant Theory (DPMT) is about the democratisation of the mass media; which implies participation of the masses in the media processes. This is the idea behind citizen journalism—involvement of the people in the gathering, processing and dissemination of information. The DPMT emphasises the dismantling of any form of hegemony or media dominance by a privileged few—a shift from exclusion to participation of the masses. This comes as a serious challenge and threat to the hitherto supremacy of the mainstream media.

The theory emphasises what Bajracharya (2018) calls “the right to information.” This includes the right to generate, disseminate and receive information. Propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987, the DPMT requires open participation, not monopolisation, centralisation and top-down reportorial approach as against horizontal approach. Johnson and Johnson (2013) categorise the DPMT as “a modification of social responsibility theory.” Vilanilam (2019) calls it the “technological version of the libertarian theory” because it wants people to express views freely or exchange ideas with absolute liberty through the application of technological communication innovations, “without any central authority to control it.”

Advantages and Criticisms

The acceptability or relevance of any media theory in the modern era lies in its contribution to professionalism and participation. In most cases, it is difficult if not impossible to have a particular theory that embodies these two virtues. The DPMT is not an exception. This theory is quite relevant to a discourse on citizen journalism because, according to Riaz (2011), “citizens’ involvement in the news process breaks down the sense of media hegemony. Versatility and freedom of voices is the beauty of journalism comprising the basic features of democracy.” Bajracharya (2018) highlights its main features to include: enhancement of interaction between the media and the audience; encouragement of feedback; audience participation in the media process; promotion of the concept of equality, inclusion, and equal

access which eliminates marginalisation; promotion of democratic ideals; among others. This study exposes these attributes as threats to traditional journalism.

But the theory has been criticised for being more idealistic than realistic in a world where capitalism has been sustained. Bajracharya (2018) believes that the promotion of DPMT, could result in less professionalisation of the media since DPMT emphasises involvement of the masses without consideration for professionalism. This constitutes one main feature of citizen journalism which requires collaboration with the mainstream media.

The Social Responsibility Theory

The second theoretical framework is the SRT. This theory is about the obligations of the mass media in the specific areas of accountability and responsibility to the people. Paul and Kabiru (2022) note that the theory places a responsibility on journalists to report “truthful, comprehensive and accurate accounts and representative picture of events and occurrences to keep the people fully informed, untrammelled by other forces outside the ethical prescriptions.” The ethical prescription becomes, perhaps, more important under citizen journalism with its inherent lack of gatekeeping and other ethical filtering processes.

In the fifth edition of his book, *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory* (2005), Dennis McQuail says that:

The media have obligations to society, and media ownership is a public trust; news media should be truthful, accurate, fair and objective and relevant; the media should be free but self-regulated; the media should follow agreed codes of ethics and professional conduct and under some circumstances, government may need to intervene to safeguard the public interest. (p.150)

Propounded in 1956 by Siebert, Peterson and Schram, the SRT was first analysed in their book: *Four Theories of the Media* (Mercy, 2019). But the foundation for its emergence was laid far back 1942 by the Hutchins Commission, appointed to re-examine the freedom of the press and protect it from both self-destruction and undue manipulation by dictatorial systems (Blevins,1997) and (Middleton (2009). The Commission, headed by Robert Hutchins, later emerged with stunning recommendations; including asking the mass media to always give “...a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning...”

Relevance and Criticisms

Considering the history of the emergence of citizen journalism, there is need to view its activities within the scope of the SRT. The rise of citizen journalism was primarily to fill a gap created by mainstream media; which were found to be too elitist and alienated from the people. This begs the question—whether citizen journalism could be the alternative to the traditional media. Citizen journalism came to involve the masses in the media process—generating and disseminating information through the social media, with no attention paid to ethical considerations. It therefore begs the question: whether citizen journalists can be held accountable for what they write and circulate as demanded by this theory.

Nosa Owens-Ibie (2004) states specific areas where the mass media are accountable to the public they serve. He divides the public into audiences—the media consumers; the government; the proprietors; and the professionals. Then he says:

To their audiences they owe correct news reportage, analysis and editorializing; to the government they owe constructive criticism, a relay of popular opinion and adequate feedback from the population; to their proprietor they owe the survival of the media organization as a business corporation as well as a genuine source of education, enlightenment and entertainment; to themselves they owe fulfilment in their calling, satisfaction and an entire success.

This immediately raises the question of where citizen journalism stands, considering the fact that those involved are not answerable to anybody—not even the government. In the traditional media, these questions are asked by the gatekeepers: is this story factual; accurate; verifiable; biased; trustworthy; will justice be done by it? These are issues usually examined as part of the social responsibilities of the mass media. This does not exist under citizen journalism. This again relates to and raises the issue of collaboration between citizen and mainstream media in order to close this deficiency and necessity gaps.

Method

In this study, qualitative research methodology was adopted. Data were collected through 15 in-depth interview questions involving 30 participants purposively picked across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The geopolitical zones are North East, North Central, North West, South South, South East and South West. This research method was intentionally adopted to reflect the views or perceptions of the people across Nigeria by reaching out to them within the six geopolitical zones. The interviewees were members of the public; with more focus on journalists. Some of the interviewees provided additional or detail information through telephone interviews. These individual telephone interviews aimed at enriching the already supplied information. The data collection exercise lasted 30 days, that is March 1-30, 2022. Majority (14) of the interviewees were media practitioners. We had six online publishers. Others included two public servants, four media scholars, two NGO workers and two business people.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

For the in-depth and telephone interviews, 15 questions were presented to the sample population. Most of the questions required explanations. The qualitative data analysis approach was adopted.

Q1: Demographic Data

Within Nigeria's six geo-political zones are 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. All Nigerians belong to each of the states and the geo-political zones. In the course of this study, every participant was identified by state of origin; geo-political zone; state of residence; gender; occupation; and age bracket. Each interviewee was identified as Discussant (**D1** to **D30**). Among the participants, made up of 20. males and 10 females, the oldest was 62 years while youngest was 29 years. A mix of interviewees was chosen to fully reflect the views of the media audience. Sample was not limited to the media professionals who might be biased.

Table 1: Geo-political Distribution of Participants

SN	Geo-Political Zones	Number of Participants	Males	Females
1	North West	1		1

2	North East	2	1	1
3	North Central	7	6	1
4	South West	5	4	1
5	South South	10	7	3
6	South East	5	2	3
TOTAL	6	30	20	10

Source: Field Study (2022)

Table 1 shows the geo-political zones, number of participants and the gender.

Table 2: Occupational Distribution of Participants

SN	Journalists	Online Publishers	Comm. Scholars	Public Servants	NGO	Business	TOTAL
1	14	6	4	2	2	2	30
2	46.6%	20%	13.3%	6.6%	6.6%	6.6%	100%

Source: Field Study (2022)

Participants were also picked from different professions; although journalists and online publishers were in the majority for obvious reasons (Table 2). Their opinions were more professional and helped enrich the study.

Q2: Threat to professional journalism in Nigeria

Only one person said citizen journalism does not pose any “serious” threat to the mainstream journalism, which in a way means that there is a threat element no matter how unserious. Two persons said there is no threat at all. However, 27 participants affirmed that there exist real threats of misinformation, loss of confidence by the audience, turning journalism into an all-comers affair, unprofessionalism, licentiousness, false reports and blurring the line between professionalism and fake news. The summary of views showed agreement that though “this set of activities so-called” has its place in the modern society, the nomenclature, citizen journalism, “is just as misplaced and misleading as juju music which has nothing to do with juju. How can juju music threaten juju?”

Despite being a threat along professional lines, 26 participants said citizen journalism is still necessary; only 4 participants said it was undesirable. Many believed that the growth of citizen journalism was due to “the failures or inadequacies of mainstream journalism.” According to them, citizen journalism offers a platform for marginalised groups. It was also described as the inevitable by-product of Internet-enabled technological advancement. The interviews revealed that producing contents for citizen journalism is cost-effective, and due to its reliance on the Internet, it is able to reach large audiences around the world. Interviewees explained why citizen journalism “as activism journalism” has become increasingly popular. The general opinion was that media hegemony will always breed discontent; leading to alternative media.

Participants also mentioned areas in which citizen journalism has contributed to the growth of mainstream journalism. These include providing leads, forcing mainstream journalism to retool its operations, among others. They said that just as it has its bad sides, citizen journalism does have some advantages, because professional journalists have received tips about great stories from citizen journalists; reports filed by non- professionals have over the years led to some ground-breaking stories. One interviewee mentioned a story about the disappearance of a female BRT passenger in Lagos which he said was first ‘reported’ on a Facebook post. Professionals took it from there and the prime suspect was eventually arrested.

Q3: Collaboration between citizen and professional journalism in Nigeria

Some of the interviewees cited convincing reasons to discourage this arrangement. Participant **D9** said that citizen journalism is what it is: an emergency reporting not covered by requisite skills and capacity. His position was that endorsing its operation side-by-side with professional journalism on a formal status would be akin to endorsing the side-by-side operation of court clerks with lawyers or first aid medical personnel with professional medical doctors.

Others did not think that way. They stated that embracing citizen journalists as partners would be better than pushing them aside. The main reason cited was that citizen journalism cannot be ignored and that it would be better to make the best out of the situation by integrating their work into the mainstream media systems. This, they said, could be done by subjecting their contents to the same ethical and professional rigour that the professional journalist has to go through.

This was however countered by **D15**

Yes, I do think they should operate side-by-side because citizen journalists often lack the resources and professional training

needed to deliver fair, accurate, balanced and reliable information. Left alone, citizen journalism is ultimately too dangerous for any society

At the end, 19 participants went for collaboration or side-by-side operation as against 11 others who opposed it.

Q4: Citizen journalism as alternative media

Most people agreed to this, not in the sense of replacement or an option. Their opinion was that citizen journalism could or would continue to serve merely as another source of information to the media audience by creating some kind of variety within the media community. Majority of the participants agreed that because of its ubiquitous nature, the media audience would always be persuaded to consume whatever citizen journalism offers because they can hardly ignore it. One of the interviewees, **D17**, summarised the response of others this way:

It could be called alternative media due the concentration of ownership and control of the so-called independent media in the hands of a powerful few. It is seen as an alternative to the view pushed forward by these powerful media owners. In this context, citizen journalism is seen as independent, participatory and a service to the community. It is called an alternative media when seen as activism journalism. I personally don't agree with this characterisation, principally due to the absence of ethics, professionalism and rigorous editorial processes

At the end, 20 participants said citizen journalism could be an alternative; not in the sense of taking over the media space, but not being ignored. Others, 10 persons, believed it can't.

Discussion of Findings

The objectives of this study were to first establish whether citizen journalism poses any threat to mainstream journalism in Nigeria; examine if citizen journalism can become the alternative mass media to Nigerians; then based on findings, determine how the mainstream media can benefit from the potentials of citizen journalism.

Findings indicate that threats posed by citizen journalism to the mainstream media though real, are basically along professional lines. Viewed against the background of the Democratic Participant Media Theory, it was the collective opinion of the sample population that citizen journalism, with its mass participation or democratic approach, devoid of gatekeeping or any filtering process, will eventually and lavishly dent the professional integrity of the mainstream media. This would range from publication of fake news, misinformation, turning journalism into an all-comers affair with no regards to ethics—a situation that is already obvious—and crass display of unprofessionalism. Another threat is the erosion of public confidence in the traditional media, licentiousness and false reports, which would blur the line between professionalism and amateurism. Also mentioned was the threat is the ubiquitous nature of citizen journalist—a feat no mainstream media can match. These findings confirm submissions by certain scholars (Riaz, 2011; Anorue, et al, 2019).

A proper examination of the possibility of citizen journalism becoming an alternative to the traditional media ended in affirmation in terms of continuous patronage but not replacement. That means while it would continue to serve as a second opinion medium; it would not diminish the traditional media. People would always patronise citizen journalism because, first, it is almost free. Second, it has a sense of immediacy even if the information contents are not reliable. Third, the information comes raw from the source—no editing, no censorship or manipulation. Also mentioned was its participatory nature—the audience is allowed to be part of the news through prompt responses. Participants also mentioned that unlike the mainstream media, citizen journalism focuses mainly on the community people. Based on these attractions, audience would alternate between the mainstream and citizen media. These findings somehow challenge the observation by Kperogi (2016) that the mainstream media are “in danger of being eclipsed.”

The last objective has to do with possible interdependency or collaboration. Sample population spoke in a loud voice in favour of collaboration through training and media literacy. Based on the Social Responsibility Theory, which emphasises observing the tenets of sound journalism, it was their opinion that the present drift exhibited by citizen journalism would be

arrested through collaborative efforts. They believe alongside media experts (Riaz, 2011; Etika, 2019; Akila & Ayodele, 2020; Lindner, et al, 2015) that potentials of citizen journalism should be mobilised for the good of the society.

Conclusion

Findings by this study, based on its objectives, indicate that citizen journalism has come to stay irrespective of the different opinions of scholars and mainstream journalists. In addition, citizen journalism has significant roles to play within the media industry. Therefore, instead of discrimination and demonisation of the other, there is need for deeper collaboration between both. There is no doubt that the mainstream media stand to benefit a lot from citizen media through a formalised collaboration as already experienced by a few that have tried it.

Recommendations

This study recommends:

1. The need for further studies on how the envisaged collaboration between the citizen and traditional media could be carried out for mutual benefits of both the practitioners and the publics.
2. The mainstream media ought to engage in self-examinations to discover and fill the gaps it created, which must have given rise to the emergence and success of citizen journalism.

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