

Professional citizen journalist? It's possible through media literacy

Godfrey N. Danaan, Ph.D.

Department of Mass Communication
University of Jos
Jos, Nigeria
godfreydanaan@yahoo.com

Aloysius, C. Ifeanyichukwu

Department of Communication
University of Delaware
Newark, United States

Abstract

This study's objective is to examine the potency of media literacy in professionalizing citizen journalism in Nigeria. Since the emergence of citizen journalism as an alternative source of news gathering and dissemination, scholars have continued to debate its relevance and reliability compared to mainstream journalism. The relationship between citizen journalism and mainstream journalism has generated much debate to the extent that some researchers fear that the increased popularity of citizen journalism may signal an end to mainstream journalism. Yet on the converse, scholars who are core loyalists of the mainstream media think that citizen journalism and mainstream journalism are not at par. The study adopted Focus Group Discussion, which had five traditional journalists and five citizen journalists, purposively sampled from two cities of Awka, Anambra State and Jos, Plateau State. Both cities were selected to represent the southern and northern regions of the country. Findings reveal that media literacy is critical for professionalizing citizen journalists, even though the atmosphere is not conducive due to misunderstandings among journalists. It recommends that media literacy education should be extended not only to citizen journalists but traditional journalists and the citizenry.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism, Media, Literacy, Professional.

Journaliste citoyen professionnel ? C'est possible grâce à l'éducation aux médias

Godfrey N. Danaan, Ph.D.

Département de communication de masse
Université de Jos, Jos, Nigéria
godfreydanaan@yahoo.com

Aloysius, C. Ifeanyichukwu

Département de communication
Université du Delaware
Newark, États-Unis

Abstrait

L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner la puissance de l'éducation aux médias dans la professionnalisation du journalisme citoyen au Nigeria. Depuis l'émergence du

journalisme citoyen comme source alternative de collecte et de diffusion de l'information, les chercheurs ont continué à débattre de sa pertinence et de sa fiabilité par rapport au journalisme traditionnel. La relation entre le journalisme citoyen et le journalisme grand public a suscité de nombreux débats dans la mesure où certains chercheurs craignent que la popularité croissante du journalisme citoyen ne signale la fin du journalisme grand public. Pourtant, à l'inverse, les universitaires qui sont les principaux partisans des médias grand public pensent que le journalisme citoyen et le journalisme grand public ne sont pas au même niveau. L'étude a adopté une discussion de groupe focalisée, qui comptait cinq journalistes traditionnels et cinq journalistes citoyens, sélectionnés à dessein dans deux villes d'Awka, dans l'État d'Anambra et de Jos, dans l'État du Plateau. Les deux villes ont été choisies pour représenter les régions du sud et du nord du pays. Les résultats révèlent que l'éducation aux médias est essentielle pour professionnaliser les journalistes citoyens, même si l'atmosphère n'est pas propice en raison de malentendus entre journalistes. Il recommande que l'éducation aux médias soit étendue non seulement aux journalistes citoyens mais aussi aux journalistes traditionnels et aux citoyens.

Mots clés : journalisme citoyen, médias, alphabétisation, professionnel

Introduction

Most scholarly criticisms about citizen journalism bother on the unprofessional status of its practitioners. Chiakaan, Kaigama, Kpera, and Tsokwa, (2022) confirm this by noting that citizen journalists operationally do not abide by any code of ethics unlike in mainstream media. Accordingly, proponents and practitioners of traditional journalism are known to be unwilling to take citizen journalism seriously and hold them suspect in three main areas: accuracy, fact-checking (the checks-and-balances process) and credentials. One concern, according to Hood (2011), is that the title of citizen journalist is used loosely, implying that anyone can be called a citizen journalist without education, training, or experience. Grant (2007) and Keen (2007) are reluctant to consider citizen journalism as legitimate journalism. Leigh (2008) reserved no credibility for the works of citizen journalists since they do not take the time to produce a high-quality accurate product. "In the rush to embrace new media we risk destroying the soul of traditional reporting" (Leigh, 2008 p. 54). Within the Nigerian context, Apuke and Ayih (2019) recounted the unprofessional conduct of citizen journalists during the Dana Airline crash of June 3, 2012, which saw them upload gory pictures of incidents without concern for the families of victims.

However, citizen journalists and their supporters assume that their work has positively impacted on the field of journalism. They insist that citizen journalism gives rise to unbiased, positive reporting, debates and discussions which are real soul of journalism, and which aid the realization of true democratic society. With regards to the idea of convergence, Kolodzy (2006) believes citizen journalism has taken the act of convergence a step further. With its attribute of sharing between producers and consumers; this brand of journalism requires audiences to be part of the team and taking active part in the conversation. For Franklin (2009), citizen journalism is giving a voice to the voiceless; with many voices unheard of under the mainstream media being heard today. The idea and practice of citizen journalism has evidently broken the bureaucracies of gatekeeping and has turned the tables against those who formerly wielded influence in news making process. Riaz and Pasha (2011) opine that the significant rise of citizen journalism has constituted a threat in the hearts of some

traditional journalists who fear that soon citizen journalism can displace traditional journalism in the command of influence among the audience. That may be the reason Noor (2017, p. 55) says that citizen journalism is “a concept in media that refers to journalistic activities of ordinary people....[C]itizens themselves report the issues confronting them.”

Essentially, this study is not interested in taking side with either of the party in the debate. It is rather interested in finding a workable solution between the two schools of thought. The points raised by traditional journalists are clearly valid considering the height of influence commanded by the media in the society. There is indeed a need to ensure that whatever is transmitted to the public is accurate and clearly understood. Still, it will be grossly unfair to deny the positive impact of citizen journalism in contemporary society. Citizen journalism has come to stay regardless of the flaws and the risks associated; and while traditional journalists may argue against it in principle, most traditional media today have successfully incorporated citizen journalism in their news gathering and dissemination business. To bridge this gap of professionalism among citizen journalists, this study surveys the opinions of journalists in two cities- Awka and Jos on media literacy and its potential in professionalization of citizen journalists.

Literature and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Overview:

Citizen Journalism

By its nature, citizen journalism enables ordinary people once regarded as audiences and who were hindered from making news, to now have their voices heard and be relied on as news sources. The citizen journalist receives no professional journalism training but could function as a reporter within his or her neighborhood or community (Duffy, Thorson, & Jahng, 2010).

The terms "citizen journalist" and "citizen journalism" came to be known when individuals or groups who were not aligned with publishers as "professional journalists" began to collect, edit, and provide publishers with (or publish directly) news material that was out of the publishers' reach (Tilley & Cokley, 2008). The nature of the news carried by these unorthodox media included spontaneous or breaking news like fire outbreaks, crashes, floods, and other disasters. Most news of this nature presented constraints for traditional journalists who may not be at the scene when such events took place, thus leaving them at the mercy of witnesses who may be less accurate. Aided by modern technologies, citizen journalists are usually spot-on, reporting events in real-time.

Over the years, scholars have approached the concept of citizen journalism from different angles depending on their motives. For many, citizen journalism represents an attempt towards political change and the infusion of democratization principles in both the media space and society in general (Salgado, 2012; Min, 2016; Mapudzi & Osunkunle, 2017). Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker, and de Zúñiga (2018); Dare (2012); Nah, Namkoong, and Record (2017) connect citizen journalism with civic participation while Chung, Nah, and Yamamoto (2018) saw it from the perspective of audience engagement. Focus on citizen journalism from the angle of de-professionalization has also made feature in the readings by Loosen and Schmidt (2012) and Splichal and Dahlgren (2016). While Ostertag and Tuchman (2012) and Wall (2018) view citizen journalism media as emerging new models of news making. Citizen journalism came as a child of the technological revolution which swept through the length and breadth of the

globe. This participatory and democratic brand of journalism (Baase, 2008) sought to redefine the mode of journalism practice by transferring the power of news-making to the audience thereby birthing what is known today as an active audience.

Bowman and Willis (2003) defined citizen journalism as the act of non-professionals, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. The first essential feature of citizen journalism is the absence of gatekeeping practice. Gatekeeping can be broadly understood as the control of information passing through a gate or filter (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), cited in Erzikova (2018, p.1). From an angle, the principle of gatekeeping is a good idea, especially as regards the promotion of the right standards. However, from another angle, it allows for high-handedness, selfishness, and unnecessary bureaucracies. The gatekeeping principle allows the door to be closed on truth, sometimes to protect a given interest. Going further on the limitations of the gatekeeping principle, McQuail (1994, p. 214) noted that:

[T]he gatekeeping concept, despite its usefulness and its potential for dealing with many different situations, has a built-in limitation in its implication that news arrives in the ready-made and unproblematic event-story form at the 'gates' of the media, where it is either admitted or excluded. The gatekeeping framework is largely based on the assumption ... that there is a given, finite, knowable reality of events in the 'real world', from which it is the task of the media to select according to appropriate criteria of representativeness or relevance (p. 214).

With citizen journalism aided by modern technologies, the revered gate has been crashed and the keepers rendered irrelevant. Bruns (2003) notes that the practice of citizen journalism has moved from "gatekeeping to gate watching". The liberal nature of the internet and the World Wide Web has also made it impossible to gate-keep the amount of information flowing in and out hence the idea of gate-watching. Citizen journalism allows a platform for citizens to play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information (Kolodzy, 2006).

There are numerous user-generated websites, including news portals and blog sites, which have afforded opportunities for citizen journalism. Examples of such renowned citizen journalism websites include *Cable News Network's (CNN) iReport Feature* that was launched in 2006, *Al-Jazeera's Sharek Portal* (which means "share") launched in late 2007 (Dreier, 2012), Germany's *myHeimat.de*, launched in 2005, which has been structured as an aggregated hyperlocal news site (Bruns, 2009) and South Korea's popular and commercially successful online news website *OhMyNews*, which was founded on February 22, 2000 by Oh Yeon Ho with the motto, "*Every Citizen is a Reporter*" (The Open News Room, 2011). Also, there are social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc., through which ordinary people have constantly been contributing their own quota in making the news and constituting impact in the society.

Traditional Journalism

Traditional journalism is the conventional type of journalism practiced around the globe. Also known as mainstream journalism, it retains the two-basic type of media - print (newspaper and magazine) and electronic (radio and television) as its tool of operation. The traditional type of journalism supports the gate keeping philosophy where certain

professionals known as the editors decide what goes in and out of the medium and, sometimes, how the information received is transmitted (framing). There is a principle of hierarchy observed under this set up which has journalists following set of institutional authority.

Traditional journalism and its media were borne out of a long history of ideology and practice, from the mass society era to this era of modern empiricism (Kenix, 2011). Their close affinity with society in every aspect has earned traditional media names like the fourth estate of the realm and the watchdog of society. Considering the enormous influence that the media wield, the traditional journalist is trained to be cautious and professional in his or her dealings. A traditional journalist must undergo rigorous stages of training beginning from academic qualification to in-house or on-the-field training. The traditional journalist is guided by ethics and journalistic codes of conduct. Having gone through these rigorous stages of development, it is not surprising that the trained journalist reserves no love or regard for the untrained citizen journalists who are bereft of the core training of the profession.

Under traditional journalism, journalists often specialize in different beats and with time often rise to become editors and publishers. The affinity it retains with the society at large informs this assertion by Kenix (2011) that the mainstream media make the ideological values of any society with a large scale of influence through publishing reports from professional journalists which relate to corporations that are looking for a profit based on the government's approval. The traditional media do not only stop at informing the audiences; they also feel their pulse to know how they received or perceived what has been transmitted. CNN, BBC, New York Times, Aljazeera, and other channels are good examples of mass media outlets that do this (Cissel, 2012).

The traditional media are known to be more organized but are often limited by ownership status and other bureaucracies depending on the nature of the society in question. Traditional principles like editorial policies and house styles are a few subtle ways through which what is traditionally mediated can be influenced. The implication is that often the people's interests are usually sacrificed for either pecuniary reasons or to protect the interest of a particularly influential person. Citizen journalism readily explores this weakness of the traditional media with its feature of dishing news in record time without going through the barriers of gatekeeping.

Media Literacy

Media literacy (ML) simply means knowledge of the media. It implies having to know about the workings and organizations of various mass media. Operationally, media literacy provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet (Baran, 2014; Ciurel, 2016; Tilley & Cokley, 2008). With a sound knowledge of the media, an understanding of the role of media in society and the essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy is achieved. Cernicova (2013) explained that living in a media-saturated world requires a constellation of skills —critical resources for users to cope with and to process media messages, produced and distributed via traditional and new channels alike. Media literacy is the opportunity availed to media producers and consumers to have a good grasp of what they are on to. Ciurel (2016) noted that what is known as media literacy today evolved from diverse fields, beginning from the core media, and stretching to cultural studies and semiotics. It is built on diverse theoretical frameworks and is perceived differently by scholars and

practitioners. Good knowledge of the nature and workings of the media enables not only a solid understanding of the consumer; it also furnishes the critical abilities for analyzing media messages. With media literacy, media discourses are properly interpreted, analyzed, understood, challenged and, in some cases, refuted. All media messages are representations, implying that they are inherently ideological and biased (Ciurel 2016). By its nature, information from media messages can either be of positive or negative effects on consumers. With media literacy, an active and competent media user base is created. Basically, media literacy justifies the theory of limited media effect, for it births new knowledge or reinforces an idea by systematically questioning or challenging what has been availed.

Describing media literacy, Kellner (1995) noted that a media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities. In this media environment, the boundaries between news and entertainment have been blurred leading to what is known today as infotainment. There is also a blurred line between news and propaganda, hence it is in the interest of users to have a good grasp of the messages they are decoding. Often due to a lack of sufficient media literacy, the media exert undue influences where they exist. Media ignorance or misconceptions lead to abnormal attitudes which can be of adverse consequences. Media literacy however affords the user a critical insight into what he or she is consuming.

Media literacy skills help users to: adopt a critical stance; recognize the persuasion techniques used in various media messages; employ a multi-perspectival approach to media; recognize bias, propaganda, manipulation, misinformation, and disinformation; skeptically examine the often-conflicting media messages based on user's own experiences, abilities, beliefs, and values (Ciurel, 2016). Baran (2014, p. 21) identifies eight key elements for which media literacy is known:

1. A critical thinking skill enabling audience members to develop independent judgments about media content. Thinking critically about the content users consume is the very essence of media literacy. Media consumers must take responsibility for the outcome of their choices in content.
2. An understanding of the process of mass communication. As users comprehend how mass media operate and how its various components relate to one another, they can form expectations of how the media messages can benefit or harm them.
3. An awareness of the impact of media on the individual and society. Mass media is a change agent, and it is influencing people on any level. If users ignore the impact of media on their lives, they run the risk of being caught up and carried along by that change rather than controlling or leading it.
4. Strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages. To consume media messages thoughtfully and meaningfully, users need a foundation on which to base thought and reflection. The users can employ critical tools to interpret media messages, or the meaning can be imposed on them.
5. An understanding of media content as a text that provides insight into users' culture and lives. A culture and its figures, attitudes, values, concerns, and myths become known through communication. In modern cultures, media messages increasingly dominate this communication, shaping its understanding.

6. The ability to enjoy, understand and appreciate media content. Media literacy does not mean refusing the media messages, or always being suspicious of harmful effects and cultural degradation. Consumers can enhance their understanding and appreciation of media texts, as well. Learning to enjoy, understand, and appreciate media content includes the ability to use multiple points of access—to approach media content from a variety of perspectives and derive from it many levels of meaning.
7. Development of effective production skills. Media literacy assumes that the effective and efficient comprehension of media content can be enhanced by production skills that enable users to create their own media messages. Online platforms require effective production skills.
8. An understanding of the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners. To make informed judgments about the performance of the media, users also must be aware of the competing pressures on practitioners as they do their jobs. They must understand the media official and unofficial rules of operation.

Research Objective and Questions

The objective of this study is to explore and to establish the feasibility of professionalizing citizen journalism, given its perceived impacts on society. The import of this objective is informed by the growing avenues for media literacy in the information ecosystem. These authors believe that citizen journalism can be professionalized through robust media literacy campaigns. This objective, therefore, birthed the following research questions, which guided this study:

1. To what extent can media literacy help citizen journalists to professionalize?
2. Is there a conducive atmosphere for media literacy campaign to thrive among journalists?
3. In what ways has citizen journalism impacted on traditional journalism?

Some Debates on Citizen Journalism

The emergence of citizen journalism as a challenge and possible alternative to traditional journalism has constituted renewed debate between proponents and practitioners of traditional journalism and those of citizen journalism. Regardless of the claims of citizen journalists, traditional journalists believe that being opportune to witness a newsworthy event, covering and sharing it on social media does not necessarily make one a journalist. Patel (2014) engaged some traditional journalists on their perception of citizen journalism. Below are some of their views:

Citizens with cameras: good, but not journalism. Journalism is about developing context, being skeptical and asking awkward questions. These people are just watching events and not really understanding or asking the big questions - who, why etc. There is the potential for a distortion of the truth in some citizen footage. Detachment and objectivity are important benefits of parachuted in journalists. They are there to convince us why this news is important. Traditional journalists are trying to ape the citizen journalists too much. There has been a collapse of editorial confidence (retweets as a metric of success at some papers). We the public should hold journalists to account. Demand the best of truth. Not try to do it ourselves.

Clair Fox - British Institution of Ideas

The best definition of journalism is by HL Mencken: 'It is the job of the journalist to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.' It's my watchword. Run that test...here is a frisson that lies behind a lot of this smart phone footage, a rather grotesque form of entertainment – a form of comfort, if that's what it is – that responsible journalism should not be involved in. Citizen journalism is coming in to fill a vacuum but it's a mistake to call it journalism. Everybody can be heard now, but nobody's listening.

WiSelf - New Statesman

We wouldn't dream of printing hearsay. We would go to the spot. The job of the journalist is to bear witness. Marie was incredible at going one step further, one step further.... With citizen journalists there isn't that depth. Give me 20 minutes with that footage and I can tell any story you like.-

Paul Conroy

In Ukraine, a lot of people have started setting up Livestreams from occupied public buildings, but I wouldn't call this journalism so much as activism. They use it for coordination but journalists can follow the cameras set up to know what's going on and where. Citizen journalists are mostly endangering themselves.”

Simon Ostrovsky

The views of these traditional journalists about citizen journalism seem to suggest that citizen journalism does not equal real journalism. While they recognized that citizen journalism is good, they are hesitant to consider it real journalism. Duffy, Thorson and Jahng (2010) described citizen journalists as individuals who are not trained professionals, but who nonetheless may report on their neighborhoods or community. Ezeibe and Nwagwu (2009) further observed that conventional journalists are of the opinion that citizen journalism gradually debases conventional journalism hence the relevance of professional journalism in the public domain. They believe that citizen journalism is driven more by eagerness than accuracy. A good instance would be the hoax of “salt bath and drinking as a cure for Ebola”, a rumor which resulted in scores of deaths in Nigeria around August 2014 and originated from a Facebook post. Potential false news reports are just one of the many possible ramifications of sourcing news from anonymous sources. The news could be factually correct, but have flaws like blatant disregard for ethics, lack of objectivity, impartiality, and balance. It could also be a hidden agenda or opinion sugarcoated as fact or a libelous or defamatory statement that puts subjects in the story in a bad light (Okoro, Diri, & Odii, 2013).

Regardless of these bouts of criticism leveled against it, proponents and practitioners of citizen journalism continue to assert their relevance and impact even on traditional journalism. Patel (2014) notes that notwithstanding what is said against citizen journalism, the fact remains that some of the most powerful and indelible images of breaking news stories during the past few years have come from so-called citizen journalists on the ground: the tsunami in Thailand, the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, Syria, the Boston Marathon, the Japanese earthquake, the London riots, the brutal murder of Lee Rigby. Citizen journalism has risen to provide a window to events as they unfold. Traditional media and trained reporters cannot be everywhere and when they make their way to the front, they are hardly the most inconspicuous, agile, or welcomed.

Reacting to citizen's journalism contributions to the political landscape, Bowman, and Willis (2003) noted that the emergence of citizen journalism has led to the reign of free, diverse, and neutral voices on communication podiums which in turn enhance the standards of democracy. Citizen journalism is almost free-of-charge journalism because non-journalists express their views and share their knowledge online without any financial reward. Citizen journalism generally epitomizes the belief that the experiences of people personally involved with an issue present a different—and often more complete—picture of events than can be derived from the perspective of an outsider.

Due to limitations of access and time—and in some cases ulterior motives to present just one side of a story—traditional reporting risks at least the perception of being skewed. By granting access to anyone to cover the news, citizen journalism presents a more personal, nuanced view of events and has the potential to cultivate communities of people with a common interest. Through blogs and other avenues, citizen journalists have broken stories about political corruption, police brutality, and other issues of concern to local and national communities (Educause Learning Initiative, 2007)

Dare (2012), recalled that Sahara Reporters, the foremost citizen journalism medium in Nigeria scored high in blazing the trail, especially in exposing corruption and combining advocacy journalism with mainstream journalism. A study, 'The Rise of Citizen Journalism in Nigeria – A Case Study of Sahara Reporters', argued that the emergence of Sahara Reporters was fueled by the interactive and investigative vacuum left by the traditional media in Nigeria. Summarily, supporters of citizen journalism are of the view that their new principle of participatory journalism has done better than harm to humanity by opening new and wider doors of opportunities in the media world and shrinking the famous 'gate' of news whose key is wielded by professional gatekeepers alone. Citizen journalism is said to have broken down the cult of newsmakers and afforded access to all who are willing to author or make news. The heightened interactive features of the new mode of journalism make the global village popularly touted by Marshall McLuhan possible. Citizen journalism, in their view, should be lauded for advancing the profession rather been scorned.

Method

This paper adopted the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to ascertain the possibility of professionalizing the practice of citizen journalism through media literacy. The choice of FGD was informed by its suitability in generating unique and diverse responses from individuals. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) explained that FGDs are advantageous since individuals feel less inhibited than in individual interviews, and that makes the results more complete. One respondent's remarks tend to stimulate others to pursue lines of thinking that might not have been elicited in a situation involving just one individual. The population of this study includes all practicing journalists in Nigeria. Two cities were purposively selected as the area of study – Awka, the capital city of Anambra State and Jos, the capital city of Plateau State. The two cities were selected to represent the southern and northern divisions of the country. Due to time constraints and the highly busy schedule of the journalists, the researchers employed the convenience sampling method to select the respondents used in the study. Convenience sampling is a sampling technique for drawing representative data by selecting people because of the ease of their volunteering or selecting units because of their availability or easy access to help with the ease of data gathering (Business Dictionary, 2017). Five traditional

journalists were constituted as respondents in each of the cities bringing their number to ten. They met at their respective Press Centres on the day of their Chapel meetings. To ensure balance the researchers also sampled ten citizen journalists, who are resident in the two cities. However, reaching them proved difficult as they were not located in the same place. To solve this problem, the researchers created a Facebook group chatroom where ten citizen journalists (five from each of the cities) interacted with the researchers. In the end, the total number of respondents contacted was twenty. They were pseudo-named TJ1-TJ10 and CJ1-CJ10.

Regarding the analysis of data generated, the thematic analysis method was adopted following the guide of the study's research questions. The thematic analysis, as captured by Anderson (cited in Meribe & Oke, 2017), is a research method where the researcher groups and distils from the texts a list of common themes to give expression to the community of voices across participants. The basic goal of thematic analysis is to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provides an answer to the research question being addressed. Patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarization, data coding, and theme development and revision. Thematic analysis is theoretically flexible. This means it can be used within different frameworks, to answer different types of research questions.

Findings The demographic analysis of the respondents shows that eight of them were female while twelve were male. They were all journalists - ten traditional journalists and ten citizen journalists. These data are presented in the tables below:

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	8	40
Male	12	60
Total	20	100

Table 2: Distribution of Type of Journalists

Type of Journalists	Number	Percentage
Traditional Journalists	10	50
Citizen Journalists	10	50
Total	20	100

Their experiences in their respective fields of journalism fell between 3 years to 29 years.

Research Question 1: To what extent can media literacy help citizen journalists to professionalize?

To a large extent, media literacy can help citizen journalists become professionals.

All the respondents - both citizen journalists and traditional journalists agreed that media literacy can turn citizen journalists into professional journalists. They noted that the major cause of the criticisms against citizen journalists is their lack of proper media literacy. However, they disagreed on the manner through which citizen journalists can become media literate. The traditional journalists believed the citizen journalists had to start from scratch to learn the basics of journalism, perhaps understudy professionals and undergo intensive training exercises before being considered professionals. The citizen journalists however believed a less stressful route to professionalism will be suitable. In their opinions, they suggested that media literacy courses should be offered online where citizen journalists could learn conveniently without being subjected to traditional bureaucracies.

The above inferences were evidenced in the responses of the participants. For example:

TJ1: The way I see it what is keeping the citizen journalists down is the lack of proper information; if they are open to learning, why not? It is being better informed that makes one a professional;

TJ4: Media literacy is indeed what differentiates real journalists from others. If citizen journalists want to learn then they must be willing to walk their talk, understudy real professionals and enroll in serious training exercises;

TJ10: Media literacy is needed even for professional journalists owing to constant changes in the field; how much more the citizen guys. Whoever wants to claim the crown must bear the cross.

CJ3: Education is critical for all; I agree that I need to learn to improve my skills. I think the traditional journalists must not deliberately make things difficult for others.

CJ1: I would disagree that I must work in some mainstream media before I am thought a professional. But I agree that proper media literacy is important to do better in this field and it can be found all over the net.

CJ9: Knowledge is essential to do well in all fields. Media literacy is therefore crucial to me. I am willing to learn whatever I need to advance.

These responses suggest that media literacy can help citizen journalists to professionalize in journalism.

Research Question 2: Is there conducive atmosphere for media literacy education to thrive among journalists?

There is no conducive atmosphere for media literacy to thrive, owing to misunderstandings among the journalists.

Based on the participants' views, the atmosphere for media literacy to thrive among Nigerian journalists is not conducive. The traditional journalists perceived citizen journalists as pseudo-journalists and encroachers who constitute a threat to the dignity

of their profession. They also viewed citizen journalists as people too proud to learn. On the other hand, the citizen journalists viewed the traditional journalists as intolerant, obsolete and pompous. In some ways, they feel their duty is to right the wrongs of the traditional journalists and often in doing that they end up crossing the lines.

Excerpts from the responses of the journalists read:

TJ7: The citizen journalists' eagerness to prove their worth makes it difficult to teach them. They lack humility.

TJ5: We can't seem to come to a formal agreement with citizen journalists because they are naturally aggressive and have a conceited perception of traditional journalism.

TJ8: How do you begin to teach someone who thinks you're archaic and out of value?

TJ2: The misunderstanding between traditional journalists and citizen journalists has left the atmosphere too heated for any learning process to thrive.

CJ4: How can someone who doesn't consider you of worth teach you?

CJ7: Ours is a charged atmosphere. I see no way media literacy can thrive here. Understanding

acceptance must happen first before we begin to teach each other.

CJ8: I believe we will get there someday, the level when we begin to treat each other with respect. For now, we haven't, and no knowledge process can take place in such a situation.

CJ2: The atmosphere, for now, is not conducive, but it should ideally be to elicit progress.

The above responses imply that a conducive atmosphere for media literacy is yet to suffice among journalists due to wrong perceptions, pride, and lack of understanding. Media literacy cannot happen successfully without the right atmosphere.

Research Question 3: In what ways has citizen journalism impacted on traditional journalism?

All the respondents agreed that citizen journalism has impacted in many ways on traditional journalism. However, they differed in terms of the significance of this impact.

TJ6: Of course, it has made us to up our game and strive to do better. I would not write citizen journalism out entirely, but I just won't say it is professional journalism.

TJ7: With these modern technologies in vogue, citizen journalism is bound to affect us. But I think we are several steps ahead.

TJ6: Well, as a trend, it is supposed to affect the system already existing, citizen journalism truly has changed things in journalism.

CJ1: The significant effects are obvious: Traditional journalists are now more careful in packaging and disseminating the information.

CJ5: Journalism has taken a whole new outlook because of the force of citizen journalism. Online versions of traditional newspapers are now trending to meet up the standard. Still the effect of substandard practice has also rubbed off badly on the journalism profession.

CJ10: For me I will say that citizen journalism has fast-tracked the growth of modern journalism by providing real time alternative source of news. I think the two brands should just marry each other and birth bigger ideas.

From the above responses, it may be inferred that citizen journalism has impacted in many ways on traditional journalism.

Discussion

This study sought to establish the potency of media literacy in professionalizing citizen journalists in Nigeria. Findings from the FGD sessions held revealed that media literacy can help citizen journalists to attain a level of professionals. Incidentally due to misunderstanding and misconceived perceptions among the journalists, the atmosphere for this media literacy to thrive is non-existent. The study also found out that in many ways the citizen journalism practice has affected traditional journalism in both positive and negative ways, thereby making media literacy most cogent.

Discussing the imperative of providing media literacy programmes for citizen journalists; Moeller (2009) noted that the bulk of funding for media literacy education has been usually directed at two populations: children and youth and the general adult public. She argued that it was only recently that the U.S. and international donors working on media development and communication for development projects began to identify media literacy training as a priority for other communities—particularly journalists and policymakers. Citizen journalists are described as a group in dire need of media literacy owing to their active participation in the digital media transformation of the news business. However, their knowledge of journalism standards and values as well as of the rights and responsibilities of the news media is usually minimal. Moeller (2009) also identified six basic reasons why media literacy programme is crucial for citizen journalists:

- Educate about standards, ethics, and the role of media
- Educate about technology and responsible interactivity
- Create appetite for accurate and fair news
- Encourage local and global networks
- Create alternative voices to traditional media
- Train bloggers to become enterprise and investigative reporters

The implication is that media literacy is sine qua non to best journalism practice and citizen journalists could benefit immensely when they have access to education. Traditional journalists must endeavour to create a favourable atmosphere for learning by accommodating and tolerating the citizen journalists in need of media literacy. Finally, journalism practice will be richer when these two forms of journalism embrace each other without rancor. Evidently the impact of citizen journalism on traditional practice is highly significant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the plethora of opportunities available for citizen journalists to professionalize through media literacy, a lot of them are still comfortable with substandard practices. A lot of fake news still finds its way onto social media platforms and blog sites. A good instance would be Nigeria's 2019 and 2023 general elections, where untrained citizen reporters misinformed the electorate by posting false poll results. In view of this, the study recommends that:

1. Citizen journalists should avail themselves of opportunities to access media literacy education. If the job of the journalist is appealing, so should the responsibilities.
2. Media literacy education is not only for citizen journalists, but traditional journalists also need to avail themselves of opportunities to learn more.
3. The citizens should acquire some bit of media literacy education to protect themselves from harm.
4. Media literacy education should easily be made accessible online and could be supported by the government or concerned individuals to encourage citizen journalists to take part.
5. There should be cooperation between citizen journalists and traditional journalists. Citizen journalists can complement the efforts of traditional journalists while traditional journalists can validate the reports of citizen journalists.

References

- Ardèvol-Abreu, A., Hooker, C. M. & de Zúñiga, H. G. (2018). Online news creation, trust in the media, and political participation: Direct and moderating effects over time. *Journalism* 19 (5): 611–631
- Apuke, O. D., & Ayih, I. J. (2019). Exploring the adoption and practice of citizen journalism in rural communities in Nigeria. *Language and Communication*, 6, 27.
- Baase, S. (2008). *A gift of fire* (3rd ed.). Lebanon: Prentice Hall.
- Baran, S. (2014). *Introduction to mass communication: Media literacy and culture*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Bowman, S., & Willis, C. (2003). We media. *How audiences are shaping the future of news and information*, 66, 13-20.
- Bruns, A. (2003). Gatewatching, not gatekeeping: Collaborative online news. *Media International Australia*, 107 (1), 31-44.
- Business Dictionary (2017) Convenience sampling. Retrieved from: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/convenience-sampling.html>
- Chiakaan, G. J., Kaigama, K. P., Kpera, W. R., & Tsokwa, B. S. (2022). An appraisal of citizen journalism in democracy and good governance: Focus on EndSars protest in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 6(1), 234-240.
- Chung, D. S., Nah, S., & Yamamoto, M. (2018). Conceptualizing citizen journalism: US news editors' views. *Journalism* 19 (12): 1694–1712.
- Cernicova, M. (2013) Reconfiguration of the Timisoara media universe, under the pressure of new media. *Traditional Journalism and New Media* (1), 75-85.
- Cissel, M. (2012). Media Framing: A comparative content analysis on mainstream and alternative news coverage of 'Occupy Wall Street'. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 3 (1), 67-77.
- Ciurel, D. (2016). Media literacy. *Professional Communication and Translation Studies*, (9), 13-20.
- Dare, S. (2012). The rise of citizen journalism in Nigeria – A case study of Sahara reporters. Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper, University of Oxford, Oxford. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-01/>
- Duffy, M., Thorson, E., & Jahng, M. (2010). *Comparing Legacy News Sites with Citizen News and Blog Sites: Where is the Best Journalism?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, International Convention and Exhibition Centre, Suntec City, Singapore.
- Educause Learning Initiative (2007). 7 things you should know about citizen journalism <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eli7031.pdf>
- Erzikova, E. (2018). Gatekeeping. *The International encyclopedia of strategic communication*, 1-6.
- Ezeibe, C. C., Nwagwu, E. J (2009). "Media imperialism and crisis of development." *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 65-69.
- Grant, S. (2007). *We Are All Journalists Now*. New York: Focal Press.
- Hood, C. C. (2011). *Judging the credibility and professionalism of citizen journalism versus professional journalism*. Brigham Young University.

- Keen, A. (2007). *The cult of the amateur: How today's internet is killing our culture and assaulting our economy*. Broadway Business.
- Kellner, D. (1995). *Media culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Kenix, L. J. (2011). *Alternative and mainstream media: The converging spectrum* (p. 224). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kolodzy, J. (2006). *Convergence journalism: writing and reporting across the news media*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc.
- Loosen, W., & Schmidt, J. H. (2012). (Re-)discovering the audience: The relationship between journalism and audience in networked digital media. *Information, Communication & Society* 15(6): 867–887.
- Mapudzi, H. & Osunkunle, O. (2017). Citizen journalism as a contestant in the history of journalism. *Communication*, 43 (1): 17–36
- McQuail, D. (1994). *Mass communication theory: An introduction* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.
- Meribe, N. & Oke, B. (2017). Climate change reporting in Nigeria: Challenges and implications for development. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*, 14 (1), 133-162.
- Min, S. J. (2016) Conversation through journalism: Searching for organizing principles of public and citizen journalism. *Journalism* 17(5): 567–582.
- Nah, S., Namkoong, K., Record, R. (2017). Citizen journalism practice increases civic participation. *Newspaper Research Journal* 38 (1): 62–78
- Noor, R. (2017). Citizen journalism vs. mainstream journalism: A study on challenges posed by amateurs. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, 3 (1), 55-76.
- Okoro, N., Diri, C., & Odii, C. (2013). Citizen journalism in Nigeria: possibilities and challenges. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 11 (3), 22-34.
- Ostertag, S. F., & Tuchman, G. (2012). When innovation meets legacy. Citizen journalists, ink reporters and television news. *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (6): 909–931.
- Patel, A. (2014). Is there a place for traditional reporters in the age of citizen journalism? *Imakesense*. Retrieved from <https://www.imakesense.org/blog/citizen-journalists-changing-face-of-news-reporting>
- Salgado, S. (2012). The web in African countries: exploring the possible influences of the Internet in the democratization processes. *Information, Communication & Society* 15(9): 1373–1389.
- Splichal, S., & Dahlgren, P. (2016). Journalism between de-professionalization and democratization. *European Journal of Communication* 31(1): 5–18.
- Wall, M. (2018). *Citizen journalism: Practices, propaganda, pedagogy*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Wimmer, R., & Dominick, J. (2003). *Mass media research: An introduction*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.