



THE RISE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA AND SECURITY CHALLENGES: A TRAITOR OR PARTNER IN NATIONHOOD?

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Abstract

In recent times, Nigeria's security challenges have been on the front burner both in the conventional and new media. This ugly development has in no small way hampered the move and eroded the gains and grounds already attained towards virile, progressive and formidable nationhood. Several individuals have been pointing accusing fingers at the activities of citizen journalists in the new media. Nevertheless, the new media have contributed in no small way to the widening of the media space; allowing the masses have their say, when they want and how they want as expected in a democratic dispensation. The study was designed as a descriptive survey. The instrument for data collection was an electronic questionnaire issued via Google forms accessed through social media platforms. A sample of 200 students was purposively drawn from Mass Communication students of the School of Communication and Information Technology at the Federal Polytechnic Offa. The study adopted descriptive statistics for data analysis. Findings indicate that citizen journalists are not the major cause of Nigerian insecurity. Citizen journalists are involved in the posting of fake news that cause panic in the hearts of citizens. Findings also indicate that citizen journalists are involved in pushing the agenda of terrorists. The study therefore recommends that pupils and students should be exposed to social media education. This will help in grooming them to become responsible social media users who would not engage in activities that could constitute security threat to the state.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism, Security challenges, New media, Insecurity

Introduction

In today's world, the speed at which information including misinformation and disinformation flows is unprecedented. This is as a result of new media technologies on one hand and the activities of citizen journalists on the other. While no nation can succeed without the use of modern technology especially digital technologies, the security of citizens is often threatened, twisted and sometimes, thwarted especially in developing countries. Hence, Nigeria, as a developing economy, is daily confronted with the issue of



insecurity that has become a re-occurring decimal across different regions and states. The media is daily awash with news of such insecurity as perpetrated by bandits, *Boko-Haram*, hoodlums, militants, unknown gunmen, killer-herdsmen, Islamic State of West Africa (ISWAP), ritual murderers, kidnappers and their likes.

Amidst these, Uche, Nwabudike and Anho (2017) note that the conventional media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, etc no longer enjoy the exclusive right of reportage as was the case in times gone by. Social media platforms are taking their own share of the media market; with high patronage, thus signifying communication landscape liberalization with the consequent challenges thrown at the professional journalism practitioners. Citizen journalists sometimes in a bid to generate large followership, traffic and patronage often fuel the already tensed security atmosphere in the country. Bloggers, social media influencers and their fellow cyber citizens seem to be in a frenzy to outdo one another in showcasing, announcing and sometimes fabricating security related news; thus, jeopardizing the move towards nationhood.

The questions confronting discerning minds are: what is the level of citizen journalists' involvement in Nigeria's security challenges? Is citizen journalism for the interest of the nation or for subservient and subversive motives? Perhaps, this study could offer some insights to the above rattling questions.

Statement of the Problem

In recent times, online activities in the digital space have been blamed for aiding, fuelling and fanning the embers of the fire of insecurity; thus, making it conflagrated and as such complicated. This is as a result of the advancement in technology evident on the internet, which has brought about a new communication order that welcomes all and sundry to partake in the distribution of contents which was hitherto reserved for the media organizations. Thus liberated, citizens are now putting on the garb of creation and consumption of contents without let or hindrance.

New media technologies have indeed brought about a paradigm shift in the business of reportage, content creation, distribution and consumption. Journalism practice is no longer an exclusive field for trained and certified professionals. It has become an expansive and ever-expanding field welcoming as it were all with just a minimal digital skill-set, namely ability to operate any internet enable handheld device. Many a would-be forgotten or would-be-unreported stories and events are not only highly reported but seamlessly and simultaneously reported as breaking news across different media platforms; both conventional and new media with unprecedented reach and speed. This development is because of the activities of citizen journalists. These journalists of different and diverse



backgrounds with no borders, restrictions and reservations are indeed on the increase as the days go by.

If it's all about positive news reportage, contents creation and dissemination, one would have been happier and our modern society better for it. But alas! Citizen journalists sometimes, regrettably, become tools in the hands of some highly placed individuals who are bent on self-seeking, self-centeredness and self-projecting to perpetrate acts and actions that constitute security challenge to the generality or section of the citizenry; thus, inimical to nationhood. These citizen journalists have often become tools in the hands of political parties and those vying for elective positions; thereby sowing the seed of division instead of building consensus. Nigeria being part and parcel of the global community truly has her own share of the effects and implications of new media technologies. Yet, in a democratic society like Nigeria, citizen journalists have often helped in deepening and sustaining democracy. Nonetheless, citizen journalism largely contributes to public cynicism and democratic instability.

Objectives of the Study

Issues bordering on nationhood are not only challenging but complex in a developing economy. Those in government often point accusing fingers to young people who on several occasions have been described as lazy, citizens without any focus and major contributors to insecurity especially those who are alive and active on social media networks. This study therefore seeks to explore the following objectives:

- ❖ To find out how citizen journalists are contributing to insecurity in Nigeria
- ❖ To unveil the level at which citizen journalists are regarded as the major cause of Nigeria's insecurity
- ❖ To determine government's response to the activities of citizen journalists in Nigeria

Research Questions

Arising from the objectives are the following research questions:

1. How are citizen journalists contributing to insecurity in Nigeria?
2. What is the level at which citizen journalists are regarded as the major cause of Nigeria's insecurity?
3. What should be government's response to the activities of citizen journalists in Nigeria?

Review of Literature

The Concept Citizen Journalism

In a globalized world of digital media, information is no longer left for only the professionals. Everyone can have a say with just a mobile device. It is an all-comers



participatory journalistic practice. There are no needed training and qualifications except the ability to use a mobile device such as smartphone. These are the reason why Uche, Nwabudike and Anho (2017) posit that citizen journalism is making steady progress in the “comity of Journalism.” Citizen journalism is therefore the unregulated journalism practice by untrained individuals in the society whose centre of operation is the new media.

It a practice that welcomes all individuals irrespective of tribe, talent, training or taste in the news gathering and dissemination process either as a past-time or business. Citizen journalists are untrained people who use their internet enabled devices like smartphones to send information whenever they want and how they want, both within and beyond their immediate geographic space.

Most individuals who engage in citizen journalism are youths who have been described as Internet champs, cyber stars, cyber nymphs, cyber stalkers, online fellows and citizens of the now (Uche, Nwabudike, Ezeigbo & Inah, 2017). Citizen journalism is also described as online citizen journalism (Nip, 2010); journalism of the people (Salawu, 2011); participatory journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003); we journalism (Dare, 2011); publish-and-filter journalism (Moretzsohn, 2006). Citizen journalism has as well been described as a situation whereby individuals play a major role in the process of news gathering, reporting, analysis and information dissemination (Onyebuchi, 2010; Anorue, Obayi & Onyebuchi, 2013).

Citizen Journalism, Media Laws, Ethical Issues and Security Concerns

The advent of new media technologies such as social networking: Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Blogs, etc., has given everyday citizens the overall accessibility to information vis-à-vis the ability to disseminate information globally, a power which was once reserved for large media corporations.

With the explosion of information in the new media as predicted by Marshall McLuhan, there seems to be a lack of control in the messages people give out or receive. The use of digital devices has made access to these messages a lot easier, which makes almost everyone a media creator, owner and actor instead of passive user (Ezeibe & Nwagwu, 2009 cited in Talabi, 2011). Citizen journalism sometimes threatens to destroy the circulation of factual news, through spreading incorrect, misleading information and opinion rather than truth thereby posing security threat to the corporate existence of any nation.

Adhering to laws and ethics guiding the media practice has been noted to be of immense benefit towards gaining audience trust (Adeyemi, 2013) and as such the application of



media laws cannot be over-emphasized. As a result of the delicate nature of information, it is pertinent for the providers of information to be regulated. Media audiences sometimes are keen to have factual information and tend to verify sources of information they see online.

Citizen journalism confers on individuals the ability to report on-the-spot events as well as breaking news not only to a larger, global audience but also more quickly than traditional news reporters. This practice can be seen as becoming fundamental to journalism due to the fact that citizen journalists are almost everywhere unrestrained, unrestricted and poised to capture scenes and sights of events as they break. Going by its rate of ascendancy and popularity as a means by which members of the public play an independent and perhaps unchecked role in collecting, reporting and dissemination of current and breaking news events, professionalism has often been compromised.

Existence of laws and ethics guiding journalism practice enables practitioners to be abreast of rightful or wrongful actions and inactions that could enhance or jeopardize professional journalism practice (Nwanne, 2008). To citizen journalists, such is not the case. There is more or less no professionalism involved in citizen journalism. Odii (2013) in his study posits that citizen journalism tends to lean more towards issues that pertain to politics and governance. The study also revealed that citizen journalism has both negative and positive consequences for the Nigerian democracy. While in the positive sense, citizen journalism is seen to have contributed to the growth of Nigerian democracy; on the other hand, it spreads a lot of harmful lies and contributed to electoral violence in the country. This also raises security concerns because electoral violence has often snowballed to wars and consequently, to death, displacement of citizens and disintegration of nations.

El Semary and Al Khaja (2013) noted that young people are sceptical about information that comes through social networks thus, raising issues concerning the safety of citizens swallowing news emanating from citizen journalists hook, line and sinker. According to Nwamah (2007) it is important that the media is regulated owing to its delicate nature. A media void of ethics is a media without identity, bewildered and unbridled, and a chaotic field to disseminate unfounded news (Motamednejad, 2000) cited in (Babran & Ahadzadeh, 2010). In a similar development, Uche, et al. (2017a) argue that owing largely to the unregulated nature of citizen journalism, citizens' rights could be jettisoned and truth compromised while the rights of individuals become threatened, compromised and sometimes outrightly flouted and trampled in the mud. Odii (2013) in Uche, et al. (2017b) laments that as a result of the unedited nature of social media; some of the contents are capable of inciting people to violence. Okoye (2010) postulates that media practice demands the practitioner should owe certain moral obligations to society. But the question



remains, how much of these obligations are observed by the practitioners of citizen journalism especially as it relates to matters of security and nationhood?

Theoretical Framework

This work being domiciled in the new media is anchored on the technology determinism theory. The theory posits that human actions are influenced by technology. According to this theory by McLuhan (1962), media technology influences the reasoning, feelings and actions of human beings. Although it has been criticized for laying more emphasis on technology and thus assuming humans to be helpless in an environment hemmed in by technology. Citizen journalists' activities are more of a social media phenomenon. Therefore, it is determined by new media technologies without which its practice and ubiquity cannot be a reality. New media technologies accommodate popular participation; negate elitism, commercialization and bureaucratization which are in line with the tenets of citizen journalism.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey design. The sample size of 200 respondents studied were mostly young people whose age bracket falls between 16 and 30 years. Primary data were gathered through 12 item structured electronic questionnaire. A purposively targeted sample of 200 students from the Mass Communication Department of the School of Information and Communication Studies at the Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State Nigeria were sent the e-Questionnaire via social media platforms, viz: WhatsApp and Facebook. This is because this set of individuals is deemed to be knowledgeable about the new media and their uses and being students of communication are deemed more knowledgeable about issues bordering on journalism practice and Nigerian security challenges. The researchers crafted the data collection instrument via Likert 5-point scale format, where: SA= strongly agree; A=agree; U=undecided; D=disagree; SD= strongly disagree. Analysis of data collected were done and presented with statistical tools of frequency and percentage tables.

Data analysis and Discussion of Findings

Of the 200 expected number of respondents, only 178 respondents (89%) properly attended to our research instrument. Thus, 178 e-questionnaire copies were valid and thus deployed for this analysis.



Table 1: Frequency table for demographics.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	71	40%
Female	107	60%
Total	178	100

The above table on demographic details indicates that out of the 178 respondents, 71 (40%) were males while 107 (60%) were females. This result points to the fact that bulk of the respondents were females.

Table 2: Frequency table on age range of respondents.

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
16-20	18	10
21-25	139	78
26-30	21	12
31-35	0	0
Total	178	100

Respondents were categorized under four age brackets. 18 (10%) of them were within 16-20 age bracket, 139 respondents (78%) were within 21-25 age bracket, 21 (12%) were within 26-30 age bracket while none was within 31-35 age bracket.

This indicates that the bulk of the respondents were aged between 21 and 25. This group is usually referred to as young adults, digital natives (Prensky, 2001), cyberchamps, citizens of the now or netizens (Uche, et al. 2017a).

Table 3: Frequency table on students' class level.

Level of Study	Frequency	Percentage
ND 1	0	0
ND 2	92	52
HND 1	66	37
HND 2	20	11
Total	178	100



Students' level of study indicates that none of the respondents was in ND 1, 92 respondents (52%) were in ND 2; 66 respondents (37%) were in HND 1 while 20 respondents (11%) were in HND 2.

It should be noted the results presented here have been structured to reflect respondents' answers to the three main research questions, namely:

Research Question One: How are citizen journalists contributing to insecurity in Nigeria? In order to answer the first research question, items 5 and 7 of the questionnaire were recalled and presented hereunder:

Table 4: Terrorists use citizen journalists as tools to push their agenda.

Level of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	28	16
Agree	91	51
Undecided	27	15
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	32	18
Total	178	100

On terrorists using citizen journalists as tools to push their agenda, 28 (16%) respondents strongly agreed; 91 (51%) agreed; 27 (15%) were undecided; none disagreed while 32 (18%) strongly disagreed. This means that the respondents were of the view that terrorists' agenda are also pushed through citizen journalism. To this end, citizen journalists also contribute to Nigeria's insecurity.

Table 5: Citizen journalists post fake news that brings fear to the people's heart.

Level of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	35	20
Agree	77	43
Undecided	16	9
Disagree	50	28
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	178	100

From the table above, 35 (20%) respondents strongly agreed that citizen journalists post fake news that brings fear to people's hearts; 77 (43%) respondents agreed; 16 (9%) were



undecided while non strongly disagreed. Posting of fake news that brings fear into people’s hearts is also seen as an act which contributes albeit subtly to insecurity as it makes citizens to be placed on a panic mode. When people are tensed up, waiting with bathed breath, not knowing what is in stock for them, these make people feel insecure and to that extent heighten insecurity.

Research question 2: What is the level at which citizen journalists are regarded as the major cause of Nigeria’s insecurity?

To answer the question, items 9 and 10 of the questionnaire were recalled and presented hereunder:

Table 6: Citizen Journalists are the major cause of Nigeria’s insecurity.

Level of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	18	10
Agree	57	32
Undecided	18	10
Disagree	67	38
Strongly disagree	18	10
Total	178	100

On the level at which citizen journalists are regarded as the major cause of Nigeria’s insecurity, data revealed the following responses: 18 respondents representing 10% strongly agreed; 57 respondents representing 32% agreed; another 18 respondents representing 10% were undecided; 67 respondents representing 38% disagreed; another 18 respondents representing 10% strongly disagreed. Respondents’ answer indicates that citizen journalists are not the major cause of Nigeria’s insecurity.

Table 7: Nigeria’s insecurity will reduce if there are no citizen journalists.

Level of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	20	11
Agree	62	35
Undecided	14	8
Disagree	70	39
Strongly disagree	12	7
Total	178	100



From the above table, 20 respondents representing 11% strongly agreed; 62 respondents, representing 35% agreed; 14 respondents representing 8% were undecided; 70 respondents representing 39% disagreed while 12 respondents representing 7% strongly disagreed to the submission that Nigeria’s insecurity will reduce if there are no citizen journalists.

Research Question 3: What should be government’s response to the activities of citizen journalists in Nigeria?

In order to determine the answer to the above question, item 10 of the questionnaire was recalled and presented here:

Table 8: Activities of citizen journalists should be regulated by the Government.

Level of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	43	24
Agree	103	58
Undecided	14	8
Disagree	18	10
Strongly disagree	0	0
Total	178	100

On government’s regulation of the activities of citizen journalists, 43 respondents, representing 24% strongly agreed; 103 respondents, representing 58% agreed; 14 respondents, representing 8% were undecided; 18 respondents, representing 10% disagreed while none of the total respondents strongly disagreed. From this data, we could deduce that majority of the respondents would want government to regulate the activities of citizen journalists.

Based on the objectives of this study, findings have shown that problem of insecurity in Nigeria is not majorly caused by citizen journalism even though citizen journalists are involved in the posting of fake news that causes panic in the hearts of citizens. Findings also indicate that citizen journalists are involved in pushing the agenda of terrorists; thus, setting terrorist agenda for the populace. This view is in line with the agenda setting theory of the media which posits that media can actually influence the audience to think about a particular phenomenon. Perhaps that is why the respondents agreed that activities of citizen journalists should be regulated by the government.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that citizen journalists have played a crucial role in the news media, stepping in for professional journalists in their absence to capture and distribute news



material during major global events. Nonetheless, citizen journalists are untrained, with little or no knowledge of journalistic ethics and principle of accountability; they are therefore at risk of using unreliable sources and publishing incorrect or nonfactual news or even reporting events in unacceptable style or form. This scenario constitutes a major threat to peaceful co-existence and national security.

The above notwithstanding, Merrill and Lowenstein (1979) posit that journalism ethics is primarily personal for individual journalists and must be internalized within the journalist for it to be meaningful. Therefore, it is arguably impossible for a citizen journalist who is not trained as a professional journalist to internalize the professional ethics of journalism. This is because citizen journalist as an outsider from the environment of journalism cannot be acquainted with the media process, its laws and ethical codes that govern the practice. This lack of ethical knowledge and professional conducts often result in disservice to nationhood.

Recommendations

- ❖ Nigeria media organizations should organize trainings and enlightenment programmes for citizen journalists across all media platforms.
- ❖ Pupils and students should be exposed to social media education. This will help in grooming them to become responsible social media users who would not engage in activities that could constitute security threat to the state.
- ❖ Bloggers' activities should also be evaluated by media regulatory agencies to ensure compliance with media laws and ethics.
- ❖ Citizen journalists should also become gatekeepers and watchdogs on their own bearing in mind that any security breach has implications both to them as citizens and the generality of the polity and not just on the government of the day.

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