

# Together We Are Richer: A Qualitative Analysis of the Practice of Collaborative Journalism in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

This study seeks to find out the extent to which collaborative journalism is practiced in Nigeria by professional and citizen journalists. Using in-depth interview as a research design, the study interviewed 50 respondents. Twenty-five (25) professional journalists and twenty-five (25) amateur reporters participated in the research, giving a total of 50 respondents sampled. Public sphere theory was used as the theoretical framework of the study. Data are presented qualitatively. It was revealed that collaborative journalism is currently being practiced in Nigeria and that it manifests in different forms. In some cases it manifests in the I-Report page of mainstream newspapers (whether print or soft copy), created to collect and publish news stories sent in by citizen journalists, while in other cases, it manifests in the form of comments added at the end of a news story in online media outfits. It was also revealed that the perception of most professionals and amateur reporters is that the issue of collaboration be welcomed with both hands.

*Key words:* .*Citizen Journalism* .*Collaborative Journalism* .*New Media*  
. *Conventional Media* .*Mainstream*

## **Introduction**

In recent times, the growth of new media technologies has engineered the reporting of news by people who ordinarily do not have the means to do so. These creams of reporters have been referred to as citizen journalists. In some quarters, they are seen as amateur reporters, who report events that professional reporters usually overlook or consider irrelevant. Okafor and Onyike (2013, p. 80) noted that “the new media space has been hijacked by amateurs and people who are not trained in the field of journalism. For this reason, most reports are not in line with journalistic ethos”. Some of the events reported by mainstream media are completely different from report posted on the Internet by citizen journalists. Their account of an event usually comes from an eyewitness perspective, with many unethical issues overlooked. Daniel (2012) averred that the activities of citizen journalists have increased the attack on journalism profession, as most of their publications are offensive to good taste.

Not minding the complaint from various quarters about the style of reporting of most citizen journalists, they remain an important aspect of the society in information gathering. Doing away with them will not be possible especially with the presence of the new media technologies. Scholars, like Coles (2009), King (2009), Akpan and Onyebuchi, (2010), have called for a form of collaboration between the professional journalists (with all the knowledge of the profession) and the citizen journalist (who is considered as amateur reporter). This situation is called collaborative journalism.

Explaining the tenets of collaborative journalism, Coles (2009) noted that it has to do with professional journalists piecing together their stories, by using photos and already gathered information from citizen journalists. This practice gives journalists far more flexibility in writing their stories, and more room to improve the quality of their stories. Therefore, collaborative journalism is “a system of storytelling that encompasses many different people, from professional journalists, to faceless bloggers weighing in on a subject” Coles (2009).

Corroborating Coles’ definition, King (2009) averred that collaborative journalism is the logical knitting of information from different sources into one news story. It usually manifests in the form of a reporter researching into an area to borrow information that will enhance the

quality of the final piece written. It is possible, therefore, for one to read one single news story that has the views and contributions of different people. King (2009) further noted that "Newsvine and Wikinews founded in 2005 and 2003 respectively are some early examples of the beginning of collaborative journalism. While Newsvine carries stories from well established news sources and from the ordinary contributor all over the world, Wikinews, on the other hand, runs a volunteers website with the aim of establishing a community of citizen reporters around the world, who will collaborate to report different human interest events as they are currently unfolding. Writing further about collaborative journalism, Coles (2009) noted that:

The way that news is delivered is rapidly being altered, and with new systems of reporting, like Link Journalism, collaborative journalism is just another twist in the sporadic development of reporting. Stories can come to light much quicker, and can satiate the thirst of the public for breaking news. Collaborating with other journalists also gives a different perspective on a subject, perhaps something that was overlooked by the initial writer. Since, collaborative journalism is a news story that has been pieced together by more than one source, these other sources are often from a different area, and have added information to a story. This process is fairly new, and with the way the Internet is readily accessible, and with CNN news feeds on sites such as Twitter, this new structure of writing and reporting is proving powerful. Collaborative journalism has been on the rise over the past several years, with sites such as Wikinews gaining in popularity (Coles, 2009, para. 5-7).

Despite the growing popularity of collaborative journalism, which promises to help improve the quality of news reports by having professionals collaborate with amateurs in disseminating information professionally to the people, the knowledge and practice of the concept appears to be very low in the country. With citizen journalism, the power of news reporting was handed to everyday citizens, thereby creating a global digital community of writers, from people who previously had something to say but were essentially left out of the reporting community. As a result, their activities have been described as far from professional journalism. But collaborative journalism appears to bridge this gap. However, collaboration will only make more sense if journalists in Nigeria are predisposed to it. That is why it is important to find out whether Nigerian journalists are aware of the prevalence of collaboration between professional reporters and citizen journalists; and whether they practice collaborative journalism in their day-to-day practice; and to find out the perception(s) of amateur/professional journalists on the practice of collaborative journalism.

#### **Statement of Problem**

The practice of collaborative journalism may look like a welcome development, yet there seem to be much tension and lack of decisiveness as to the way and length such collaboration would go. This challenge may not be unconnected to the fact that most amateur reporters might not want to collaborate with media houses that would downplay the information-load of their reports under the guise of gate-keeping. Another issue that may arise from this arrangement is the attribution of by-line. Most collaborators would want their names as part of the by-line to the news story, while most main stream media would not want that kind of arrangement. In some other cases, the credibility of reports presented by the citizen journalists may be another issue to contend with.

Amidst these issues, proper understanding of the concept of collaborative journalism may help bring to foreground its practice in Nigeria; but as it stands, it appears that the concept is relatively new to most practicing journalists, both professionals and citizen reporters. This study, therefore, sought to find out whether Nigerian journalists are aware of the prevalence of collaboration between professional reporters and citizen journalists; and whether they practice collaborative journalism in their day-to-day practice; and to find out the perception(s) of amateur/professional journalists on the practice of collaborative journalism.

#### **Objectives of Study**

1. Find out the extent to which Nigerian professional journalists and citizen reporters are aware of the prevalence of collaboration between both parties to produce rich news reports.

2. Determine the perception of amateur and professional journalists about the practice of collaborative journalism in Nigeria.
3. Find out the extent to which amateur and professional journalists practise collaborative journalism in their day-to-day reporting activities in Nigeria.

#### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent are Nigerian professional journalists and citizen reporters aware of the prevalence of collaboration between both parties?
2. What are the perceptions of amateur and professional journalists about the practice of collaborative journalism in Nigeria?
3. To what extent do amateur and professional journalists practise collaborative journalism in their day-to-day reporting activities in Nigeria?

#### **Literature Review**

##### **Professionalism and collaborative Journalism Practice**

The question of professionalism has always risen with the coming of new media technology which has given the power to collect information and publish them to the masses. Today, anyone with an access to the new media is a potential publisher, depending on the person's area of interest. And because of this, the issue of professionalism has always risen to question the professionalism of reports presented by those who are recognised as citizen journalists.

For instance, the study conducted by Akpan and Onyebuchi (2010), entitled "Rethinking Objectivity in News Reporting in The Digital Age" revealed that news objectivity which is an ethical aspect of journalism be re-defined or re-examined to guard against disrepute of journalism profession. This result is based on data collected through questionnaire shared to a population of 220 respondents, from which 22.3% agreed that the absence of news objectivity will pose threat to journalism profession in the country, while 33.2% of the respondents opined that the absence of objectivity might affect ethical codes of the profession, 31.7% also confirmed that in cases where professionalism is undermined by lack of objectivity, it would affect people's perception of news.

The researchers recommended that, "scholars and media professionals should re-examine the whole essence of news objectivity and propose better definition that can take care of the issue of news objectivity or better still re-examine the profession to see if the concept of "news objectivity can be removed from the code of the profession, so as to protect the dignity of the profession" (Akpan & Onyebuchi, 2010, p. 485). It was also recommended that "media professionals in the academia and media houses should ensure that the issue of news objectivity is properly taught at the formative stage of most journalists, so that they won't depart from it when they start practicing and posting materials online" (Akpan & Onyebuchi, 2010, p. 485).

In another related study conducted by Oguegbulu (2005) entitled "The Imperative of Professionalism in Broadcast Journalism in Nigeria," it was found that inadequate educational attainment is a hindrance to professionalism. Against this backdrop, the researcher recommended that broad educational preparation and specific professional training for journalists be put in place to help educate them on the issue of professionalism. These training programmes can be conducted at national and regional levels. The researcher also observed that, if Nigerian journalists are given the freedom to do their legitimate work without being harassed, censored and starved of their professional rights, they would have better days ahead (Oguegbulu, 2005, p. 38).

Writing on collaboration in journalism practice, Sehl (2002) carried out a study entitled "diversity in local reporting", which revealed that collaborative journalism could be a better opportunity for greater diversity in reporting. The study was able to arrive at this finding from the data elicited from some selected editions of three newspapers in a year. These newspapers include: *Braunschweiger Zeitung*, *Rheinische Post* and *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*.

The results of the study revealed that the studied newspapers integrated their readers into the process of content production both online and offline. It was observed that the most common way of integrating the readers was through participatory formats that limited the readers to the content produced by professional journalists; meaning that during the process of

news production (i.e., access/observation, selecting/filtering, processing/editing, distribution), the reader dialog forum played little or no part in the production process. The professional journalists continued to produce the main content of the news only for readers to comment at the end of the news dialog/comment box. It was against this backdrop that the vast majority of the chief editorial offices stated that readers' contributions are usually in reaction to previous journalistic reporting. This result showed that many newspapers see participatory journalism first as an opportunity to receive feedback to their own reporting and to strengthen readers' loyalty. In some other cases, selected users' online contributions were seen to have been published in the printed product as well, mostly in the local section (Sehl, 2002).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was built on the Public Sphere theory propounded by Jurgen Habermas' in 1962. Price (1999, p. 9) citing Habermas (1962) noted that "the public sphere is an area in social life where individual can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems and through that discussion influence political action. It is a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and where possible, to reach common judgment." Invariably, this theory sees the new media as a market place of ideas where anyone who thinks he/she has something to say comes to air his/her view(s). The theory of public sphere, in the account of McQuail (2010, p. 179), refers to a notional 'space' which provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate. Access to the space is free, and freedom of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed. The space lies between the basis and the top of society, and mediation takes place between the two. The basis can also be considered to be the private sphere of the life of individual citizens, while the political institutions at the centre or top are part of the public life". McQuail further observed that "positive expectation concerning the role of the media in the public sphere have often been expressed in relation to new media" (2010, p. 180).

According to Ingrid Volkmer, "public sphere" is defined as a process through which public communication becomes restructured and partly disembodied from national political and cultural institutions. This trend of the globalized public sphere is not only as a geographical expansion from a nation to worldwide, but also changes the relationship between the public, the media and state (Volkmer, 1999, p.123). "The idea of a public sphere as an open arena for public conversation, debate and exchange of ideas seems open to fulfilment by way of forms of communication (the internet, in particular) that allows citizens to express their views and communicate with each other and their political leaders without leaving their homes" (McQuail, 2010, p. 151). This theory, therefore, sees the new media as a fertile ground for the harmonization of thought, projection of policies and the mobilization of citizens for a common goal. "Since the translation into English in 1989 of Jurgen Habermas's book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public sphere* (1962), there has been much reference to the concept of a public sphere in speaking of the role of the mass media in the improvement of people's lives" (McQuail, 2010, p. 179).

The relevance of this theory to the study is that the new media can be used as a village square for projection of ideas got from different sources, made possible through the same new media. Here, people who are trained journalist and amateur reporters can come together with their varied pieces of information, especially on related area(s) for the consumption of the public. The new media now becomes a platform for journalist to cooperate amongst themselves and with citizen journalist to report information for the benefit of the people. This situation is made possible as a result of the diverse features of the new media.

### **Methodology**

The research design of this study is in-depth interview methods. In-depth interview, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 139), "is a qualitative method which provides detailed background information about respondents and elaborates on data concerning respondents' opinions, values, motivations, reconciliations, experiences, and feelings". Wimmer and Dominick added that "the most important advantage of the in-depth interview is the wealth of detail that it provides and the more accurate responses it gives on sensitive issues" (2011, p.

139). This method was, therefore, used to gather more information from the respondents concerning the issues under investigation.

The population of the study consists of professional journalists and citizen journalists from media houses in Southern Nigeria, and selected online news media outfits (like Sahara reporters, Tabloid and Pointblank.com; and eye report sections of some Nigerian newspapers like *Vanguard*, *Guardian* and *ThisDay*): Because these professionals have core knowledge of journalism practice and also fall under the umbrella of the study, while the amateur reporters/citizen journalists also have pedestrian knowledge of the profession. Twenty-five (25) professional journalists and twenty-five (25) citizen journalists constituted the population of the study. Using purposive sampling technique, the researchers interviewed selected journalists with over five (5) years experience in the field, while selected citizen journalists with at least five (5) years online presence were contacted for the purpose of the study. The interview guide was face validated by professionals in Mass Communication from UNN and UNILAG. The data collected from respondents were qualitatively analysed.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The analysis of data was presented qualitatively. The fifty respondents were interviewed properly with an average of 52 minutes for each person. Due to the length of the interview, a summary of the responses was presented with few facts introduced in indented form. The responses were presented according to how they answered the research questions raised in the study.

#### ***Research Question One: To what extent are Nigerian professional journalists and citizen reporters aware of the prevalence of collaboration between both parties?***

Analysis of data collected from professional journalists indicated that most of them have not heard of the concept of collaborative journalism, but may have thought about it in a different form. A majority of them noted that in some cases they have discussed with colleagues or thought about gathering information from citizen journalists and passed it off, as if it were theirs, but could not do it because some of the information that would be needed by the editors were lacking in the stories. The excerpt from one of the professional journalists reads:

*Respondent F: I have not heard of collaborative journalism before as a term. What we are used to is the idea of citizen journalism, which is the trend today. And I know that in most cases, the reports from these citizen journalists are good sources of information for people.*

From data collected, it appears that most professional journalists in Nigeria may not be aware of the concept of collaborative journalism. They appear not to look out for terms in their profession, even though they go about their duties on daily bases. This does not mean they do not do their job, but that they may not be conversant with issues in their field as they manifest in the digital age.

Responses from the citizen journalists also indicated that they have not come across the concept of collaborative journalism. They seem to be enjoying their work but do not go beyond that to get more from the field of study they imitate.

*Respondent h: Well I don't think I have heard of the term collaborative journalism but if you explain it to me I may find a way to relate to it.*

However, few of the professional reporters interviewed noted that they have heard of the concept of collaborative journalism; and that as things stand they are currently looking for ways of incorporating citizen journalists in their mainstream newspaper production.

#### ***Research Question Two: What are the perception(s) of amateur and professional journalists about the practise of collaborative journalism?***

Data collected and analysed in respect to this research question revealed that the perception of a majority of the professionals and amateur reporters varied in different aspects. Responses from most of the professional reporters indicated that it would be a good development if they collaborated with citizen journalists. They noted that it would help them to navigate through their profession effectively.

**Respondent A:** I think it would be a nice idea to collaborate with citizen reporters and those who post important materials online. Besides, they post their materials in order for people to see and read. We are also in the business of giving people information for their consumption. Collaborating with these people will not harm us rather it will help spice up the profession.

**Respondent B:** Collaborating with these non-professionals will not be a problem if the information they supply to us are factual. The problem will only arise when they mislead us to publish what isn't real.

**Respondent T:** Everyone knows that there are some of the information we read online that are true and they were not published by the media houses you know. They are the hand work of the people we now call citizen journalists. You see, if they can be reporting information that the conventional media houses do not report, that means they are serving a very important purpose. When we look at their place in society today, we have no option than to look for ways they can help us report news better to the people. This is why I feel it will be good if we collaborate with them in our news reporting process.

As for the citizen journalists, majority of them noted that collaboration would not be a problem; rather the nature of collaboration will have to be dictated by the mainstream media. They said that collaboration will motivate them to some extent in doing what they like doing most.

**Respondent B:** In as much as collaboration does not necessarily mean that one will no longer post materials online for the people to read and make comments, there is no problem at all. I can collaborate with one or two journalists from the normal media houses and still have the leeway to publish interesting issues in my blog and all these online news sites.

**Respondent D:** I think there is nothing wrong with collaboration if only we are allowed to cover and send whatever we see at any time. The only problem is the frustration that might come as a result of rejection of someone's news story.

**Respondent J:** Collaboration will be a very good idea. It means for any event one captures live, he already knows the particular media to send it and it would be used for the next day story.

This means that most amateur reporters do not necessarily see anything wrong with collaboration, given that it would not mean imposition of restrictions on them and the way they go about covering their assignments. Invariably, most professional and amateur reporters (citizen journalists) see collaboration as a welcome development. The opinion and perception of professional and citizen journalists based on the data gathered revealed that they may not be totally wrong. As Mercedes-bunz (2010) noted that:

*Social media surely isn't representative, but it enables journalists to get access to "a wider range of opinion, and gives them access to a whole range of voices" as BBC World Service director Peter Horrocks once put it. Finally, social media change how journalism understands the role of a 'source'. Today, social media gives journalists a chance to reach out to the people more easily, and that changes the role of a source. As the media expert Dan Gilmore explains correctly each single source within social media can't be checked, and doesn't need to be.*

This means that collaborative journalism might not be a problem, as the issue of source may not necessarily affect the quality of facts presented. Besides, the cover of the professional journalists will help protect the issue of credibility.

### **Research Question Three: To what extent do amateur and professional journalists practise collaborative journalism in their day-to-day reporting activities in Nigeria?**

Analysis of data collected indicated that the respondents (professional and citizen journalists) were of the view that collaborative journalism is currently being practised in the country. They said that most media houses in Nigeria have created an I-Report page in their daily publication; and that the online version of their newspapers has also created an I-report section for the people to post materials and news stories. Some of the respondents noted that in some online newspapers without a section for I-report, add comment is always attached at the end of a story for people to comment. Through this avenue, readers can read additional information not added to the main body of the story.

**Respondent A:** Based on our discussion so far, it is clear that collaboration exist between the conventional media and the citizen journalists. If you take a proper look at the pages of most national dailies in the country, you will see that some have created avenue for ordinary people to send in their comments on issues of interest for publication. Even in our online version here in The Guardian newspaper, the management has created a forum for people to send us breaking news in their areas; and make comments on the already published news stories.

**Respondent F:** we are already collaborating with these online reporters indirectly, because there are sites when I visit their site to gather more information for the development of any story am writing at that moment.

**Respondent M:** we are currently practising some forms of collaboration with citizen journalists, even though this collaboration is not official. There are cases when some of my friends will call to tip me on a current event happening somewhere. In some other cases, he will help me snap some pictures and ask me to follow up the story. Even people I don't know do call me once in a while to report one event or the other to me, with the belief that I will follow it up. But I have not had any occasion where someone I don't know will cover a story or event and send it to me for correction. No, that one doesn't happen.

Data analysed from citizen journalists also indicated that some level of collaboration exist between them and the professional reporters. They noted that they have seen several cases when the stories of those that are not trained journalists are published in mainstream media or their online edition. Though, only few reporters noted that they have sent short stories with pictures to conventional media houses for publication.

**Respondent A:** We practice collaboration in information dissemination in this country. When you flip through the pages of newspapers, you will find areas set aside for anyone to send in whatever he/she wants to report. This is a clear indication that these media outfits have started looking at us as partners in progress. Without the effort of some of us, most of the live pictures you see in sites and newspaper pages wouldn't be there.

**Respondent D:** On my own I have posted several materials online and in some cases, I send news materials to some media houses where some of my friends work. Through their influence I get my stories published but it will not come out with my name on it... The most important thing here is that you can see some level of collaboration in what constitutes information in our media reports.

Interpretatively, it means that collaborative journalism is currently being practised in Nigeria, even though data analysis revealed that it is still unofficial.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that most Nigeria professional journalists and citizen journalists are not aware of the prevalence of collaborative journalism as a concept. Even though they understand what it means if explained from a different perspective. This means that the concept has not been widely used in the country, hence, the low awareness rate. It was also revealed that the perception of most professionals and amateur reporters is that the issue of collaboration be welcomed with both hands. Further analysis of data collected indicated that collaborative journalism is currently being practised in Nigeria and that it manifests in different forms. In some cases, it manifests in the I-Report page created to collect and publish news stories sent in by citizen journalists, while in other cases it manifests in the form of comments added at the end of a news story.

### Conclusion

This study concludes that the practise of collaborative journalism in the country is a nice step in the right direction, as it will provide more quality information for the consumption of the people; and make journalism profession enviable in this era of digital communication. Collaborative journalism will also provide cover for news stories by making it appear credible to the readers. This is one of the ways to further secure the profession and improve its credibility in this era of new media technologies. Therefore, professional journalists should approach the issues of collaboration with open hand, while looking for a way to control all the short comings that come with its practice.

### Recommendations

The recommendations of this study are as follows:

Professional journalists should endeavour to constantly look out for information on the latest development in the profession.

Both professional journalists and amateur reporters should have open minds on the nature of collaboration that would ease their jobs.

Both professional journalists and amateur reporters should be encouraged to practice collaboration and try other sources for information that would help embellish their news stories, without breaking any of the ethics of the profession.

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