

Citizen Journalism And Rural Development Advocacy In A Digital Era

EMMANUEL E. AKPOVETA, PhD & JOSEPH I. CHIADIKA

Department of Mass Communication,
Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria
akposemmaejoma@gmail.com; 08037424086
ifyjoe44@gmail.com; 08168403541

Abstract

This paper explored the paradigm shift in a digital era and the impact of citizen journalism on rural development. With the advent of the internet or otherwise called the “digital age or era”, journalism practice has taken a paradigm shift as citizens and indeed the ordinary people in the streets are now empowered to partake in the process of news gathering, reporting and sharing without the undue bureaucracy and hegemony that characterized the conventional journalism practice. This has not only made journalism practice less cumbersome but also very effective. The study focused on Ogwashi-Uku and the survey research was used to sample 398 respondents from the projected population of Ogwashi-Uku which includes 77,561 people. The questionnaire was used as instrument for gathering data and was administered to the respondents directly by the researchers. Based on the literature and empirical studies revealed, it was found among others that citizen journalism contributes greatly to rural development advocacy as rural dwellers and development agents have effectively utilized the new media and the opportunities presented by citizen journalism to advocate for rural inclusiveness in development drives in Nigeria. It was thus recommended among others that to achieve greater efficiency in the use of citizen journalism for rural development advocacy, there is need to ensure that citizen journalists are trained on the codes and ethics of the journalism profession.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism, Rural Development, Advocacy, Digital Era and Globalization

Introduction

Citizen journalism refers to the method through which ordinary citizens engage in journalism practise. It is the act of a citizen or a group of people actively participating in the process of gathering, reporting, evaluating, and distributing news and information (Bowman and Willis, 2003, p.10). This type of journalism has been referred to as "public journalism," "participatory journalism," "citizen journalism," "guerrilla journalism," and "street journalism," among other terms. Overall, it is a fast growing kind of journalism in which ordinary persons take the initiative to report or spread news or voice their opinions about events in their society. It is news made by the people, for the people.

Citizen journalism has grown in popularity across the world over the years. Citizen journalism, sometimes known as "We media," is widely regarded as the total democratisation of journalism. The consequence of this viewpoint is that any human being, regardless of class, creed, or vocation, may now conduct journalism without requiring having journalistic training. Ordinary folks, who were previously banned from expressing their opinions due to the bureaucracy of traditional media, have found refuge in citizen journalism. Social networking and media-sharing websites, as well as the rising ubiquity of cellular phones, have made citizen journalism more available to people all over the world, who can now report breaking news far faster than traditional media institutions.

Citizen journalism has been variably referred to as "public," "participatory," "democratic," "guerrilla," or "street" journalism. This type of journalism is defined by Bowman and Willis (2003) as "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, actively participating in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information," noting that "the intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging, and relevant information that a democracy requires."

Citizen journalism is the polar opposite of the mainstream media's shackled, nearly unilateral top-down communication paradigm. "Participatory journalism is a bottom-up, emergent phenomena in which there is little or no editorial control or conventional journalistic process dictating the actions of a team," write Bowman and Willis (2003). Instead, it is the outcome of numerous concurrent, scattered dialogues across the Web's social networks that either flourish or swiftly atrophy. "They notice that 'the flexibility of this method places more focus on the posting of information rather than the filtering. Conversations take place in public places for all to witness. Traditional news institutions, on the other hand, are designed to filter information before it is published.'" Citizen journalism, by definition, does not allow for gatekeeping. In this type of journalism, information is sent to members of the public who are actively involved in content creation in its raw, 'naked,' and unadulterated form.

More than 60% of Nigeria's population is thought to live in rural settlements, with the remaining 40% living in urban and semi-urban regions. With the rural regions housing the bulk of the people, the rural areas are characterized by a lack of well-structured building areas, inadequate road networks, insufficient water supply, and a low level of life. Rural regions are cities and villages that lack appropriate access to water and sanitation and secure tenure; and their buildings are of low structural quality with insufficient living area.

Rural areas foster poor health and insecurity and are the most apparent manifestations of poverty in cities. While there have been significant attempts to alleviate poverty at the national, state, municipal, and global levels, efforts to successfully improve the lives of individuals living in rural regions have been either absent or less than anticipated.

As a beginning point, development cannot occur without communication; numerous works on rural development issues in Nigeria show a wide range of perspectives on the source of the problem.

According to available statistics, more than 80% of her population lives in the rural area; however, the majority of her development efforts; providing basic facilities such as electricity, roads, and water supply, to name a few, are concentrated in the urban centre, while the rural area remains outside the dynamics of modern development processes.

These issues are prevalent in most African nations, but they are particularly significant in Nigeria, where the British colonial system failed to develop rural regions. During the colonial period, growth was limited to urban areas that served the political and economic objectives of colonial powers and their collaborators. Thus, two significant mutually opposing factors may be recognised as the foundations of Nigeria's rural underdevelopment: imperialism and neocolonialism. Second, in the past, nationalist governments relied on the notion that with a high rate of urban development, rural modernization will be accomplished or at least visible.

However, in recent years, this paradigm has been proven to be obsolete since different government development plans and other policies have failed to substantiate this premise. To obtain large collective engagement by the people, effective communication techniques are required. Without this, any long-term economic or social planning would either be far less effective than it could have been, or it may even move in the opposite direction.

The proliferation of mass communication, as well as the emergence of citizen journalism, has resulted in development via the various rural development programmes that are constantly produced and disseminated to the audience. Journalism is no longer the sole domain of professional journalists and the major media. With the rising popularity of new media technology, ordinary folks without professional journalistic training are now practising journalism.

Development communication is the use of communication or citizen journalism to promote rural development. Development communication is the use of all kinds of communication in reporting, publicising, and supporting development at all levels of society. It takes the form of a transaction between the source and the recipient, is participatory and collaborative in character, and the desired outcome is behavioural change.

Furthermore, Okorie (2016) stated that the main goal of such communication is to improve the economic lives of people in a given society by encouraging them to understand the development agent, accept to participate by developing their capacity and skill, and change from unprogressive and underdevelopment conditions of the past to a better condition.

A distinguishing aspect of development communication is that it is exclusively concerned with people's wellbeing as defined by them. Thus, television placed the people's self-determined wants at the centre of development communication. In this research, rural development refers to gradual economic transformation aimed at improving the rural areas and, by extension, the society's conditions. Since a result, development is not possible without communication, as most of the articles or contents of citizen journalists are packed with the development requirements of rural residents in mind, such as agricultural information, health education, cultural awareness, environmental alerts, and so on.

Statement of the Problem

Citizen journalism exemplifies the concept that the experiences of those intimately involved with an issue give a different—and often more complete—picture of events than can be drawn from an outsider's perspective. Traditional reporting risks being biased due to access and time constraints, as well as ulterior incentives to give only one side of a subject in some circumstances. Citizen journalism is branded as “public” or “participatory” form of journalism whereby the “public” or “citizens” involve actively in the process of gathering, producing and consuming news or information (Campbell, 2015, Wall, 2015).

Citizen journalism, by allowing anybody to cover the news, provides a more personal, nuanced view of events and has the ability to develop communities of individuals who have a shared interest. Citizen journalists have broken news about government corruption, police brutality, and other topics of interest to local and national populations using blogs and other platforms. Citizen journalism has elicited a range of reactions. While supporters argue that it is beneficial to society, opponents argue that it is detrimental to the society's peace and government.

As media outlets focus on earning money in order to keep the organisation functioning, citizens are sometimes overlooked. The majority of the news coverage does not accurately represent the public's interests. As a result, dissatisfied with the progress, individuals turn to citizen journalism. However, the role and impact of citizen journalism on rural development has been a source of contention among communication and development researchers. The debate will continue since the impact of media communication would be a contentious subject among scholars in any community for a long time.

In light of this, Ebeze (2012, p.282) stated that some schools of thought believe that communication has no effect on economic development in society (Null effect media school of thought), while others believe that certain people, under certain conditions, respond differently to certain mass media messages (Minimalist media school of thought). The first

claims that mass media have no influence on society, whilst the later indicates that some kind of communication on some kind of topics brought to the notice of some kind of individuals in some kind of situation has some kind of effect. As a result, the researcher's goal is to determine experimentally if citizen journalism aids in rural development, with a particular focus on Ogwashi-Uku.

Objective of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Know whether citizen journalism have been making positive impact in the development of Ogwashi-Uku
2. Find out the challenges militating against citizen journalism in promoting rural development
3. Know the main contributions of citizen journalism in the development of the rural areas of Ogwashi-Uku

Literature Review

Traditional forms of communication have faced significant challenges as a result of the development of contemporary technology and the complexity of society over time. The media turned to covering news that would benefit them financially rather than what would be in the best interests of the public in order to survive this challenge. On the other side, after learning about this development, the locals made the decision to hunt for solutions to satiate their curiosity about what was going on in their surroundings. As a result of this growth, there is now a scenario where individuals gather their own news and report it without following the traditional journalistic "process."

Adelabu (2008, p. 364) paints a clear picture of this trend when he asserts that:

Many mass media organisations are busy repackaging their content and shifting their focus from serving the needs of their readers and audiences to serving the needs of advertisers. Meanwhile, many individuals are redefining game rules and roles with the aid of information technology, most notably the internet.

The fact that the events occurring around us considerably outweigh the evident substance of traditional mass media is another problem that contributed to the development of citizen journalism in Nigeria. Simply put, this means that most events don't get covered since there aren't any traditional journalists there or none assigned to cover such a beat.

Burkholder (2010, p. 1) accurately summarises this assertion by noting that:

Major news frequently occurs while no one is around to report it. Reporters can recreate the incident for the morning paper using interviews and event records. Sadly, there is rarely an opportunity to take a snapshot of news while it is happening. On the other hand, images of the July 7, 2005, bombing of the London Underground were posted on websites and blogs and reached the general public. Instead of reporters, it was individuals with camera-equipped cell phones who took the pictures.

People have long used their freedom to express their individual ideas and opinions on matters of public concern. This practise dates back to the dawn of modern man. Participation of citizens in communication has always occurred, in one form or another. The printing press, which served as a platform for the pamphleteers of the 17th and 18th centuries, the telegraph, tape recorders, and television all provided new ways for people to contribute to the sharing of news and commentary. Over the years, citizen journalism has benefited from these

technological advancements. The advent of digital technology has given individuals access to tools, production, and distribution like never before.

The term "development" has evolved to mean expansion, modernisation, and social change since the middle of the 20th century. Since they are immature, these concepts—which are most frequently used to describe the "Third World"—have been the subject of several academic researches. Due to the concept's complexity, researchers have been unable to come to a consensus on a single definition of development.

According to Servas et al. (2016, p.82), some academics believe that the definition of development varies depending on where in the globe it occurs. This is because each country is seen to have unique physical characteristics, cultural traditions, natural resources, and general ways of life. There are, of course, some commonalities (common traits) here and there, but each nation continues to be distinct in its own context.

Development communication, in the view of Okunna (2004, p. 293), entails conveying development messages. She continued, quoting Edeani, by defining development communication as the use of all kinds of communication for reporting, promoting, and bringing attention to development at all societal levels. Okunna quoted Quebral in an effort to provide a vivid explanation of the idea, who saw it as the art and science of human communication applied to the quick change of a nation and the majority of its people.

Development communication can also be referred to as communication for development, development journalism, or communication for social change, as Asadu (2019, p. 8) indicates. He went on to say that it simply entails applying communication concepts to societal development goals. It is a multi-communication strategy designed to inform, educate, empower, and inspire people to live better lives over the long term. This kind of development exposes local specialists and technology to the town on a local level.

Communication for development, as defined by Frazer and Restrepo-Estrada and cited in Asadu (2019, p.9), is the use of communication processes, techniques, and media to help people come to consensus, plan actions for change and sustainable development, help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need, improve their condition and the condition of society, and increase the effectiveness of institutions. People are the architects of their own growth when it comes to development communication. Additionally, it acknowledges and values the people's culture, outlook, intelligence, and traditional wisdom.

Nigerian citizen journalism concerns have drawn a growing corpus of study with a variety of findings. For instance, the development of citizen journalism has significant consequences for democracy. This backs up Bowman and Willis's (2003, 54–58) list of the advantages of citizen journalism, which also included better journalism, a shared obligation to inform democracy, and an improvement in media confidence.

According to Dare (2011, p. 44), 86 out of 120 respondents viewed Sahara Reporters, a website run by citizen journalists, as a significant source of breaking news. This hypothesis suggests that citizen journalism has posed a serious threat to Nigeria's mainstream media owing to its interactivity and capacity to deliver news in only milliseconds. It has also increased people's access to a range of news during emergencies.

Dare (2011, p.44) found that just 33 of the 120 people polled trusted Sahara Reporters in a research on the emergence of citizen journalism in Nigeria. The Sahara Reporters, on the other hand, received good marks as a source of breaking news, with 86 respondents citing it as such. In addition, 58 of those polled said the website (Sahara Reporters) offered them a voice in public affairs.

Dare's study provided insight into the use of social media in Nigeria. In it, Facebook received the most representation (54), followed by Twitter (17), YouTube (10), blogs (4), and 32 of the respondents reported utilising a mix of the first three. According to Dare (2011, p.24), "national recognition came for social media when on June 28, 2010, Nigeria's

President, Goodluck Jonathan, opened his Facebook fans page to reach out to the young and Nigerians with a view to gathering comment on electoral reform and other national concerns." He noticed that during the 2011 presidential elections, Nigerian politicians used social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as SMS messaging, to promote their campaigns and disseminate their manifestos in order to improve their popularity.

Salawu (2011, p.192) conducted off-line research on citizen journalism, focusing on the Nigerian Punch model. He discovered that, despite the newspaper's premise of allowing readers to produce their own news, the Punch's concept of citizen journalism had several restrictions. "Compared to online citizen journalism, particularly that done through blogs, the Punch model is lacking," he said. The professional in charge of the page would still serve as gatekeepers in the model."He stated that the pros will "judge what tales to go public and what should not go. Even if they were to go public, the articles would have been edited, stripping them of their uniqueness and misrepresenting the genuine reports of the authors."

He stated that the pros will "judge what tales to go public and what should not go. Even if they were to go public, the articles would have been edited, stripping them of their uniqueness and misrepresenting the genuine reports of the authors."

Theoretical Framework

Certain theories have been developed as factors of communication impacts on audiences. As a result, this research is built on the framework of the democratic participant media theory and the development media theory. Both theories are two of the new theories Dennis McQuail added to the first four normative media theories.

The democratic participant theory was proposed in recognition of new media developments and the increasing criticism of the dominance of the mass media by private or public monopolies (Virtual University of Pakistan, 2012). This theory advocates media support for cultural pluralism at grassroot level. The theory stressed the need for everybody to get involved in information gathering and dissemination without any form of inhibition. According to Yaroson and Asemah (2008), the democratic participant media theory stresses the need for access and right to communication by anyone who wishes to. The theory is relevant to this study because it advocates access to information by all. The relevance of this theory lies in the general shift by most countries undergoing development towards participatory actions facilitated by participatory development communication (Odunola and Kolade, 2012).

The development media theory on the other hand states that the fundamental purpose of the media in utilising this theory is societal development especially at the grassroots level. The principles of this theory underpin the notions of television-mediated communications and rural development. Folarin (2015, p.32) describes the media as an instrument for national integration, socioeconomic modernisation, literacy development, and cultural inventiveness. All of the preceding factors, as well as others, demonstrate why the researchers performed this study within the theoretical framework of Development Media Theory.

The justification for using this theory for this study is based on the fact that the theory is centered around the use of the media for development purpose while the study is centered around the use of citizen journalism for rural development advocacy.

Methodology

The survey research design was chosen for this study due to the large population. According to the 2006 National Population Census, there are 50,234 persons resident in Ogwashi-Uku. However, because the census was conducted a long time ago, the researchers did a projection of the population with the formula suggested by Owuamalam (2012). With a population index increase of 3.2% over a period of 15 years (between 2006 and 2021) the

researchers arrived at a projected population of 75, 954. The Taro Yamane sample determination formula was used to draw a sample of 398 respondents from the study population. The sample size for this study was determined using a simple random sampling procedure. The questionnaire was utilised as the data collecting tool, and it was administered directly to the respondents. This study's results were provided in tabular form and evaluated using frequency and simple percentage.

Presentation of Findings

A total of 398 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Out of 397 copies of the questionnaire provided to respondents, 300 were correctly filled and returned, while 98 were not. The following presentation and analysis are based on this return rate.

Table 1: Responses on awareness of the concept of citizen journalism in Nigeria

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	300	100%
Agree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Data on the above table shows that all the respondents are aware of the concept of citizen journalism in Nigeria. This implies that citizen journalism has become popular among the people even rural dwellers.

Table 2: Responses on participation in citizen journalism practice?

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	300	100%
Agree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Data on the above table reveals that all the respondents representing 100 percent said that they participate in citizen journalism.

Table 3: Responses on the platform in which citizen journalism is most practiced.

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Facebook	60	20%
WhatsApp	45	15%
Instagram	90	30%
Twitter	75	25%
Others	30	10%
TOTAL	300	100%

Data in the above table shows that Instagram is mostly used in citizen journalism practice followed by Twitter, Facebook and Whatsapp. Only a few of the respondents make use of other platforms.

Table 4: Responses on whether citizen journalism can help in the development of Ogwashi-Uku as a rural community

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	300	100%
Agree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Data in the above table reveals that all the respondents strongly agreed that citizen journalism can help in the development of Ogwashi-Uku as a rural community.

Table 5: Responses on whether citizen journalism can help establish healthy relationship between the government and the governed in the interest of economic development

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	213	71%
Agree	66	22%
Strongly Disagree	21	7%
Disagree	-	-
TOTAL	300	100%

Above data reveals that all the respondents are of the opinion that that citizen journalism can help establishes healthy relationship between the government and the governed.

Table 6: Responses on the factors militating against the use of citizen journalism in Nigeria

RESPONSE	FREQUENC Y	PERCENTAGE (%)
Poor electricity supply	150	50%
Spread of falsehood	60	20%
Social media censorship	30	10%
Others	60	20%
TOTAL	300	100%

Data in the table above shows that poor electricity supply ranked highest in the factors militating against the use of citizen journalism in Nigeria, followed by spread of falsehood, other factors and social media censorship.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that citizen journalism is popular in Nigeria, with 100% of respondents agreeing that they are aware of it and that they engage in it. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Agbo and Ukozor (2010), who said that there has been a paradigm shift from traditional media Practices to more contemporary and internet-

controlled media operations in which citizens are free and capable of disseminating information to a targeted audience.

The survey also discovered that the majority of respondents utilise Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. This conclusion is consistent with Fisher (2011)'s observation that numerous social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, have become veritable instruments in the hands of Nigerians, particularly youngsters. The study also found that citizen journalism may aid in the development of Ogwashi-Uku as a rural community and that the qualities of citizen journalists can cause the rural development programme to fail. The study discovered that issues such as low electrical supply, the propagation of untruth, social media censorship, weak network signal, and others operate against the practise of democratic journalism in Nigeria. Folarin (2015) stated that the new media or citizen journalism is befuddled by a slew of militating circumstances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to determine the role of citizen journalism in rural development in Ogwashi-Uku. So far, the researcher's results have demonstrated that citizen journalism may significantly contribute to development in Ogwashi-Uku. Indeed, the study concludes that citizen journalism is a valuable instrument for rural development and equitable development in third-world nations, particularly Nigeria. This study's suggestions are as follows:

1. Citizen journalists should discover methods to encourage more regular people and grassroots leaders to participate in talk shows, phone-ins, and other programmes, either as guests or contributors.
2. Citizen journalists interested in driving Nigeria's development could seek funding from NGOs, local governments, institutions, or businesses with goals related to rural development in general or specific programmes. This is likely to minimise commercials since television stations will receive the funds they require, allowing them to devote more time to such sponsored development programmes.
3. The government should introduce affirmative action in favour of citizen journalism.

References

- Agbo .B. &Ukozor N. F. (2010).*Mass communication: purpose, principle and practice*. Enugu: John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd.
- Adelabu, O. (2008). Citizen journalism practice: The 21st Century challenges for Nigerian journalism. In Mojaye, E.M., Oyewo, O.O., M'Bayo, R. and Sobowale, I.A. (ed). Globalization and development communication in Africa. Ibadan: University Press.
- Bowman, S & Willis, C. (2003). "We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news & information." Retrieved September 19, 2003 from http://www.ndn.org/webdata/we_media/we_media.htm.
- Burkholder C. (2010). Citizen Journalism, Cell Journalism. Available at http://www.journalismethics.ca/citizen_journalism/cell_journalism.htm. Retrieved August 20, 2012.
- Dare, S. (2011). The Rise of Citizen Journalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Sahara Reporters. An Academic Research Project for the Reuters Institute for the study of journalism. Available at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fellowship/journalist-fellows/prev-journalist/2010-11/Sunday-dare.html>
- Ebeze, U.V. (2012) *Media and society* in Okunna C.S (ed.). *Teaching mass communication: a multi dimensional approach*.Enugu: New Generation Ventures Limited.
- Folarin .B. (2015).*Theories of mass communication*.Lagos: Bakinfo Publication.
- Okorie .P.U (2016).*Communication challenges of reform policies in Nigeria*. Aba: POU Ventures.
- Okunna, C. (2004). The Role of Information and Communication Technology in Reporting Rural Issues. In: O. Uwakwe (ed), *Media Technology: Issues and Trends*.Owerri: Afrika-Link Books. Pp 17-31.
- Salawu, A. (2011). *Citizen journalism off-line: The (Nigerian) punch's model*. <http://www.ec.ubu.pt/ec/09/2011mai-10.pdf>.
- Servaes, Jan, Jacobson, Thomas L. & Shirley A. White (2016).*Participatory communication for social change*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Yaroson, E. and Asemah, E. (2008).*Theories and models of mass communication*.Jos: Great Future Press.