

Appraisal of the Influence of Citizen Journalism on Gatekeeping in the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Channel 10, and *The Guardian* Newspaper



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Abstract

This study assessed the influence of citizen journalism on the gatekeeping role of the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Channel 10, Abuja, and *Guardian* Newspaper. The aim is to determine the influence citizen journalism has on the gatekeeping role of the mainstream or traditional media. The study employed a qualitative research method with the interview as the instrument for eliciting data from the respondents. The study is anchored on the Gatekeeping Theory of the Media. The major findings of the study showed that the emergence of citizen journalism has broken down the gates of conventional media. Therefore, traditional media no longer hold the monopoly of deciding what information is released to society. The main tools of citizen journalism include smartphones, digital cameras, and the Internet which enable them to source for and disseminate any information of their choice directly to society. Further findings revealed that despite the challenges that citizen journalism poses to the gatekeeping functions of the conventional media, the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) Channel 10 and *Guardian* Newspaper still maintain their relevance as they remain the authentic sources for verifying information disseminated by citizen journalists, among others. Based on the findings, the study concludes that with the emergence of citizen journalism the mainstream media are no longer the sole gatekeepers or purveyors of information in society. The study recommends, among others, that citizen journalists should undergo training in the basic skills and ethics of the journalism profession.

Keywords: *Citizen Journalism, Gatekeeping, Nigeria Television Authority, The Guardian*

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Introduction

In the past, mass communication scholars were concerned about the various forms of theories that could explain the type of communication impact that the society would have and the form or shape it would take on the individuals. This led to the formation of theories like the hypodermic needle theory to the two-way model of information and communication flow and several others all aimed at finding explanations for the type of communication behaviour that is tenable in society. To further lend credence to this assertion, it is easier to notice the level of complication that came with the birth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which has placed the power of the media in the hands of ordinary citizens. Social media are opening up the Nigerian social space in new ways. It is now the new equalizer that is breaking the information monopoly that was previously enjoyed by the state and other media corporations in the world when to operate a media system it was necessary to acquire a permit or license to do so.

Journalists by their professional calling are mandated to set agendas and act as a watchdog to monitor happenings around the world that affect society. It appeared as if this mandate was tempered at the time that the power to gather, process, and finally decimate information is concentrated in the hands of a coterie of individuals. This, unfortunately, no longer gave journalists the power to also act as agents of checks and balances of other powers in society. Citizen journalism as it were, is an extension of this role to act as checks on the powers that be which also requires that an arm popularly referred to as the fourth estate of the realm must not only exercise her mandate but be seen to be doing so. Political thinker, Edmund Burke referred to it as the "Fourth Estate of the realm" (McNair, 2009). In this context, it suggests that journalism has become part of the governance process which means that while the power of law-making lies with the legislators, the power to implement the laws and policies of government is with the executive, and the judiciary interprets the laws. Within this arrangement, journalism regulates the conduct of these three arms through constant exposure of ills in the function of governance and reportage and so regarded by members of the public as the powerful "*fourth estate of the realm*". However, recent developments in new media technology and journalism have brought about what has been termed *citizen journalism*, (McNair, 2009p.239).

Be that as it may, citizen journalism with its several branches, which include social media, blogs, online newspaper forums, and the like has not only gained prominence but has also become so powerful that it may be right to call them the "*fifth estate of the realm*" a term that McNair, (2009) takes full ownership of (p. 22).

According to Banda (2010), Citizen Journalism is a: "rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community" The definition given by Banda (2010) comes with its implications especially place side by side with the elemental understanding of the gatekeeping function of the media.

The important thing to learn in this regard is that the birth of the new media made it possible for big media organizations to lose their monopoly over news through citizen journalism. According to Riaz, (2011) "whereas earlier citizen journalists were discouraged by professionals in the past, now bloggers, amateur journalists, and Citizen Journalists are not only invited to provide feedback on articles but also to take part in the research that goes into them." Impliedly, citizen journalism is invited to reshape the

entire concept of the conventional gatekeeping role of the media, this study assumes. This assumption is sacrosanct to enable us to have a basic grasp of this study vis a vis the gatekeeping functions of the selected media organizations which form the crux of this dissertation.

This position is taken from the view shared by Riaz, (2011) that: "ordinary individuals who cannot comment on stories in news in the past but today, they are providing resources and information beyond the scope of the mainstream media". In countries without freedom of the press and they are many in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, citizen journalism has provided the means through which underrepresented and underprivileged individuals in society can have a voice to express themselves and add to the media diversity. In many parts of the world, citizen journalism has made a real difference in terms of news production, dissemination, and consumption. Lessons that this development has brought and of which this study intends to dissect are about the operations of citizen journalism across notable media both on the online version and the conventional contents of the media like the *Guardian*, Daily Trust, African Independent Television (AIT), etc. Let it be clearly stated that citizen journalism has been contributing to modern journalism starting from Europe where it makes a remarkable feat and has been achieving and contributing to the information needs of the world since its emergence (Flew 2008).

Flew (2008) describes the experience in Europe during the initial inauguration of citizen journalism in 1999 as rewarding after the development of open publishing architecture by Matthew Arnison and others involved in the 'Active Sydney group'. Riaz (2011) further added that the suicide bombing in London on July 7, 2005, increased the role of citizens' participation in the news process, people with cell phones and digital cameras became some of the first citizens on the scene to report on this event, Kovach & Rosenstiel (2007). Dare (2011) argues that Odili.net having been established in 2002, leads the pack in online media use and the establishment of blogs in Nigeria. The Nigerian Village Square (NVS) followed in 2003. Nairaland was thereafter established in 2004 and named after the Nigerian currency by Seun Osewa CEO of the blog in Lagos. Other online media sites include Africa.net, Sahara Reporters, Naija Community, and Naijapals.com, among others, (Riaz 2011p. 22).

This study seeks to assess the influence of citizen journalism on the gate-keeping function in the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Channel 10, and the *Guardian* Newspaper.

Statement of the Problem

Citizen journalists are not necessarily trained journalists but are engaged in generating and disseminating information to society. Therefore, the problem of what kind of information gets to the public and what influence such dissemination of information has on the gatekeeping role of the conventional media arises. With this graphic portrayal of the activities of citizen journalism, this study seeks to investigate how the gatekeeping function of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Channel 10, and the *Guardian* Newspaper are being influenced by the role citizen journalism plays in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study is designed to:

- 1) find out the modes of citizen journalism practice;

- 2) ascertain the gatekeeping role of the NTA Channel 10, Abuja, and the Guardian Newspaper
- 3) identify the effects of the gatekeeping of NTA Channel 10, Abuja, and the Guardian Newspaper;
- 4) find out the challenges posed by citizen journalism in the gatekeeping of the

Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What are the modes of citizen journalism practice?
2. What are the gatekeeping roles of the *Guardian* Newspaper, and NTA Channel 10, Abuja?
3. How has citizen journalism affected the gatekeeping role of *Guardian* Newspaper and NTA?
4. What are the challenges posed by citizen journalism in the gatekeeping function of the NTA Channel 10 and the *Guardian* Newspaper?

Clarification of Concepts

Citizen Journalism

According to Banda (2010, p.13), Citizen Journalism is a "rapidly evolving form of journalism where every citizen takes the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community. In support of this argument, Kolodzy (2006, p.218) opines that:

Citizen journalism is a form of participatory journalism that takes the shape of media convergence a step further and requires sharing of information between producers and consumers; it requires audiences to be part of the team, part of the conversation. And audiences sometimes share among themselves, leaving conventional journalism out of the loop.

Franklin (2009) states that it is as giving a voice to the voiceless. This is because many segments of society are unrepresented by the mainstream media, a position that Goode (2009) captured in his commentary that Citizen Journalism is the portend weapon for democracy. This view reflects the fact that citizen journalism allows poorer or underprivileged citizens who are hardly heard or seen in the news, the opportunities to be involved as creators, receivers, and contributors to the news process in the mass media to provide for proper democratic participation.

Kolodzy (2006) states that citizen journalism is a situation where "A citizen or citizens play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information" (p.220). This presupposes that people without proper journalistic training and experience can use modern technology like computers, software, and the internet to share their creations, arguments, and criticism and disseminate their information on available media outlets (Allan, 2006).

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping has been traditionally used to regulate the news flow in the media and set news agendas for the public. From the gatekeeping concept, it is understood that not all stories no matter how important get to the public. The reason is that news stories undergo a systematic selection process that is biased and driven by a combination of

factors such as news norms, societal values, pressures, and organizational factors. According to Soroka (2012), the basic idea of gatekeeping has been cogently stated in Shoemaker's valuable review of the literature thus: "Simply put, gatekeeping is the process by which the billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day" (Soroka, 2001, p. 3). Thus, a story's success is subject to the decisions of its many gatekeepers who operate at different levels in the process. This "hierarchy of influences" explains "how news gets constructed by individuals within a social and occupational setting" (Reese, 2001). The concept of Gatekeeping exerts enormous influence on the voices heard and the faces seen in the news media. Gieber, (1956); White, (1950); items that failed to gain entrance into the public domain. Stempel (1985) states newspapers and television stations select approximately equal mixes of the types that meet their house policy, and media "gatekeepers" regulate the flow of information being channeled to receivers. "gatekeeping" refers to the process whereby a vast array of potential news messages is winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are transmitted by the news media". It is the process of "selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news" (Shoemaker, Vox & Reese, 2008, p. 73; (Shoemaker, 2001).

This process may be highly subjective given that story selection is chiefly guided by the gatekeepers' tastes, gender, and preferences, with minimal attention to the professional, organizational, technological, and cultural influences, (Dunu, & Okafor 2016). They contribute to the audience's constructions of social reality and their worldview (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). A news gatekeeper is whoever governs the journey of news items in the communication channel (Okigbo 2016).

New media

New media is a term used to describe a new generation of digital, computerized, or networked information and communication. This takes the form of blogs, wikis, social networking sites (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), e-news sites, podcasts, websites, electronic billboards, etc. that are popularized by citizen journalists.

The general functions of Mass Media, as listed by the Kerala Secondary School Board (2012) are: Information and education, Socialization, Entertainment, Political awareness, Cultural transmission, Catalyst to development, and Persuasion (added by Wilbur Schram, 1965). Ajesh (2015) notes that mass media have become a way around the world today and have entered into all the structures of daily human lives, hence, it can be used as a means of education.

The Role of Gatekeeping in the Mass Media

Gatekeeping is found in multiple fields of study, including communication studies, languages, social networks, political science, and sociology (Safdar *et al*, 2015). Their operations are similar because through this process they remove the unwanted, insensitive, and controversial information which are likely to lead society or a group of people astray. Gatekeeping in the mass media, therefore, plays the vital role of guiding society on the right path devoid of rancor. In both print and electronic media, for example, the editor and director of news play vital roles and decide which news will be published, telecast or broadcast, (Safdar *et al*, 2015). These considerations fit with what is called "news norms" today. However, Mr. Gates also admitted to preferring political

news to other types, trying to avoid sensationalism, and in fact, he confided to a friend that he did not like suicide stories (Safdar *et al*, 2015). In this way, the subjective interest of the editor or news director can constitute a gate.

Gate Keeping and Citizen Journalism in the *Guardian* Newspaper, Lagos, and the NTA Channel 10, Abuja

A large number of stories are daily brought to the attention of the audience by reporters through freelancers, wire services, and a variety of other sources. However, due to different practical concerns, only a limited amount of time or space is available in any medium. The remaining spaces are usually devoted to advertising and other content (Safdar *et al*, 2016). Today, not only in Nigeria's media practice but all over the world, it is a fact that every second of the electronic media content and every line of print media are sold, many times a reporter has to cover everything in one minute story on television and few lines of news for print media. Safdar *et al*, (2016) conclude that "copy editor has to edit every story of the news because of shorter time and space."

This perspective is based on economic needs, organizational policy, newsworthiness, conceptions of the audience, and obligations of journalists to society (Okigbo 2016). Due to these criteria, enormous stories often had to be cut out to fit the perspective expected of the media's definition of newsworthiness. The NTA and the *Guardian* are also concerned about ethics and norms of society; they can air or publish a story of rape for example, but cannot show the process or the identity of the victim. This provision is a norm in media practice not only in Nigeria but in other parts of the world but is often violated as a result of the unprofessional conduct of some journalists. Editors and directors news have to justify their selection according to the gratification of audiences, (Okigbo 2016). Looms (2011) submit that "this is why news about crime, showbiz, sports, and politics dominate media content in Nigeria and other stories are not as popular".

Challenges to Citizen Journalism

Citizen Journalism is passing through its evolutionary stage in different parts of the world and is facing a lot of problems, pressures, and criticism. In Nigeria and indeed other parts of the world, citizen journalism has added more voices in the public arena but this does not necessarily add to a livelier democracy according to Riaz, (2011). The decisive question to ask is: how do the media best serve the common good? If citizen journalists, bloggers, or content creators offer their subjective personal views on public concerns rather than facts striving for the most possible objectivity, then the common good is not well served, Riaz (2011) seems to conclude. He holds the same view where he asserts that supposing that the extremists propagate their convictions and try to prevail over those interested in objective problem-solving. It may still amount to serving primordial and bigoted interests than the general good of society.

This is why he submitted that readers should always ask the one but essential question: is the citizen media content opinion-based or fact-based reporting? Due to this position, Soroka (2012) insists that gatekeeping is an enduring concept of mass communication that is traditionally used to regulate the news flow in the media and set news agenda for the public. Thus, a story's success is subject to the decisions of its many gatekeepers who operate at different levels in the process. (Margalla 2011) noted that news sites, with their obvious and more cherished nature, are attracting citizen journalists that contribute and collaborate but most of the time, their content is not

reliable. Therefore, citizen journalism needs the potential to develop a more reliable relationship with its audiences.

Itule and Douglas (2000) contend that citizen journalists usually don't obey any code of ethics which is a requirement for the mainstream media. The duo noted that "A code of ethics hanging on the wall is meaningless; a code of ethics internalized within the journalist and guiding his actions is what is meaningful" (p.122). Ethical values are required from journalists all through life from several sources, such as religious organizations, family, and friends. Itule and Douglas (2000) concluded that "Reporters cannot separate the ethics of journalism from the values they hold as individuals" (p.201).

Literature Review

Citizen Journalism and the Mainstream Media Convergence

Conventional media practitioners argued that with time citizen journalism may take over the place of conventional media. Their argument is anchored on the fact that in countries where the press is gagged like in China, Iran, and other parts of Africa without freedom of expression, the World Wide Web plays a crucial role in informing people, (Riaz 2011). It, therefore, means that mainstream media proprietors are worried about the future of conventional media. On the other hand, many media scholars and journalists believe that citizen journalism is not a rival of the conventional media rather it complements them and extends big support to them. This calls for convergence between mainstream media reporters and citizen journalism. The reason is that Solana (2010) opined that conventional media are not always available in every place, unlike citizen journalists that are present everywhere. Global Voices started as a project of the Research Centre of the Harvard University, USA to help and encourage people to read one another and to share their reports, a variant of citizen journalism has added depth through blogging, (Solana, 2010).

Ali and Fahmy, (2013) did a study on "Gatekeeping and Citizen Journalism: The Use of Social Media during the recent uprising in Iran, Egypt, and Libya". The study focuses on the three major conflicts involving protests in the Middle East and North Africa. From a theoretical perspective, the study expands the research on gatekeeping by examining the characteristic of gatekeeping practices of citizen journalists. The overall findings suggest that traditional gatekeepers continue to maintain the status quo regarding news about conflict zones. The major difference between the two studies is that the former was done in the United States of America (USA) and it is about Iran, Egypt, and Libya, while the current one is done in Nigeria and it is a case study of two popular media organizations in Nigeria; the *Guardian* Newspaper and Nigeria Television Authority (NTA).

Theoretical Framework

Gatekeeping Theory

Formally, gatekeeping was identified in 1943 by Kurt Zadek Lewin through his research. Lewin was a great German Psychologist and pioneer in Social Psychology. His studies are more based on understanding a person's world, physical, mental, and social through frequent conversation between his pre-memories, desire, and his goals. Working during World War II, Kurt Lewin conducted field research initially among Midwestern housewives to decide how to effectively change their families' food consumption during

this time of war. Lewin recognized that for food to go from a store or a garden to the dining table, there were various decision-making processes it had to pass on the way there at a time when men were thought to control all household decisions. Lewin found that food does not move by its force, entering or not entering a channel and moving from one section of a channel to another are affected by a 'gatekeeper'. The gatekeeper in this case was typically the housewife or sometimes a maid in more well-off households. Lewin's research demonstrated that not all members of a family have equal weight in making household food decisions and that the wife, who typically shops for and prepares the food controls the gates, based on a variety of considerations.

Okigbo (2016) contends that a large proportion of mass communication research is concerned with the contents of the media and the characteristic structure of media institutions. Such research concerns have found eloquent expression in dominant and popular mass communication theories such as agenda-setting (McComb and Shaw 1972), uses and gratifications (Blumler and Katz 1974) media imperialism (Fejes 1981), and knowledge gap (Tichenor, 1970, Gaziano 1983).

In 1953, Theodore Newcomb presented a co-orientation model, which was modified by his students Bruce Westley and Malcolm MacLean, they introduced "C" the gatekeeper into mass communication research, and influenced by Lasswell's "who says what through what channels to whom with what effect." Their model remained a part of the dominant paradigm in mass communication research for decades, (Okigbo 2016). The most fundamental improvement to early gatekeeping theories of mass communication introduces the notion of multiple gatekeepers who control various functions along the news process. Criticism and development of the gatekeeper theory went on, and every decade new research was published on that particular concept more than fifty years after White's Mr. Gates study, in 2001, Pamela Shoemaker, Martin Eichholz, Eunyi Kim, and Brenda Wrigley studied the forces in news gatekeeping about coverage of Congressional bills. Forces may be newsworthiness, prominence, education, political ideology, work experience, ethnicity, gender, or behavior. Shoemaker's Gatekeeping theory which has been used as a basis for other publications provided a useful history of the theory, the process, and how gatekeeping is applied at the individual, communication routine, organizational, and institutional levels. Moreover, it concludes with a new gatekeeping model that acknowledges individual gatekeepers working within a single institution, internal and external forces along the channels, and feedback. Gatekeeping is a very important function of media, the channels and newspapers have their ethics and policies through this the editor decides the news items for publication or broadcast.

Gatekeeping occurs at all levels of the media structure, from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed or covered, and includes media outlet owners and even advertisers. Individuals can also act as gatekeepers, deciding what information to include in an e-mail or a blog. There are a lot of reasons for Gatekeeping in the media around the world; this process helps in protecting the ideology, norms, culture, and dignity of the media.

As a communication theory, gatekeeping like other theories is undergoing a series of scrutiny in research, although its origin dates back to the late 1940s. In the earliest study of gatekeeping, following the pioneering work of Kurt Lewin and David Manning White (1950) in their study of the telegraph newspaper editor code-named Mr. Gate, concluded that in his position as gatekeeper, the telegraph editor selected and rejected certain stories based on the criteria of fit and appropriateness. According to White, the editor

based his decisions on idiosyncratic and subjective perceptions. In this wise, Riaz (2011), and Gieber (1956) developed and elaborated on the White methodology. While White based his analysis on data gathered from only one telegraph editor, Gieber expanded the base of his investigation to include 16 daily newspaper telegraph editors. It was found that as gatekeepers, the editors considered their essential function to be providing the reader with 'the top news of the day. The pertinent value of consideration was the consequence of the factor of importance to the largest number of persons. The wire editors' perception of news is consonant with the axiom of relevance in the newsrooms of the *Guardian* newspaper and the NTA. News media organizations selected their news items based on information that would interest their readers. This is similar to the position of prominence given to a variety of news stories in the *Guardian* newspaper and the NTA (Riaz 2011, Buckalew 1969), (Bailey and Lichty's 1972) cybernetic gatekeeping by focusing on organizational structure and decision processes; (Waxman's 1973) and (Riaz 2011, Bass 1969).

Methodology

Qualitative research is employed for this study. The nature of the study is necessitated by the choice of method for collecting data. The qualitative method is a social science research method that focuses on finding the fact about people, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and behaviour. The choice of qualitative research method is informed by the fact that maintaining a cordial relationship is essential to a human-oriented discipline revolving squarely around human existence and development. According to Obiekezei in Adamu (2010), attempts to get an overview of all the subjects and a true picture of the situation of things based on practical experience at a given time using interviews or another related method. This is so because the method makes it possible to measure not only what a person knows, likes, or dislikes and what a person thinks of an issue, opinion, or situation, but also the personal experience of the play. In this case, the gatekeeping experience of the practitioners in the *Guardian* Newspaper, Lagos, and NTA Channel 10, Abuja is essential in the data collection.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Interview

The first interview question sought to identify the modes of citizen journalism in Nigeria. In responding to this question, Interviewee 1 (Inter 1) said and I quote, "The practice of citizen journalism is instantaneous, no editorial process is followed or observed" that is, without editorial process or any form of gatekeeping. The information is generated and disseminated without any form of verification of the facts or scrutiny. The interviewee recalled that citizen journalists through modern technology make use of their devices such as computers, smartphones, digital cameras, and so on to generate and disseminate information or content and post to the audience without observing the professional ethics of objectivity, balance, and factual. This is contrary to the Gatekeeping Theory whose main assumption holds that every news story should pass through the watchful eyes of the editorial board. The implication is that any citizen with modern technological devices can play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information as affirmed by Kolodzy (2006). Furthermore, Allen's (2006) position that anyone with something to say and has the right hardware becomes a

publisher, a pundit, and an observer of events no matter how big or small which is in total agreement with the response of the interviewees.

The second interview question sought to elicit information about the gatekeeping roles of the *Guardian Newspaper*, Lagos, and NTA Channel 10, Abuja. In answering this question, the interviewee asserts, and I quote, "we ensure that every source of information or news story is verified and the facts ascertained and we also make sure that other ethical issues are properly addressed before a story is disseminated to the public." This is not so with citizen journalism because they do not observe or allow news stories to go through the rigors of the editorial process. This role of the traditional or mainstream media is in line with the Gate Keeping Theory of the media.

The third interview question sought to determine the effect of citizen journalism on the gatekeeping roles of the NTA Channel 10, Abuja, and the *Guardian Newspaper*. The respondents revealed and I quote, "The mainstream or the traditional media no longer hold the monopoly of being the purveyors of information in the society." This is contrary to the concept of gatekeeping which according to Soroka (2012) all stories no matter how important get to the public due to editorial consideration and decisions. The implication is that citizens who could not ordinarily access information can get information because of the multiplicity of purveyors of information.

The fourth question of the interview bothers on identifying the challenges posed by citizen journalism in the gatekeeping roles of NTA Channel 10, Abuja, and the *Guardian Newspaper*, Lagos. In responding to this question, the interviewees said and I quote "The challenge of overwhelming subjective personal views and opinions over facts". Furthermore, the interviewees expressed the fact that not all issues, especially emergencies require such a long process of gatekeeping activity before both the public and particularly the agencies responsible for handling such situations are informed. This is in line with the position of Dare, (2011) that "citizen journalism has come to challenge the hegemonic powers of the conventional media forcing the latter to make adjustments".

Discussion of the Findings

The analysis shows that all the interviewees, though interviewed at different times and places and from different media organizations, have a uniform response to all the interview questions. They all assert that the news reports by citizen journalists do not follow the conventional role of gatekeeping. It is also safe to state that with the emergence of citizen journalism the conventional media are not the sole gatekeepers or purveyors of information in society; citizen journalists also decide what information goes to the public or society.

The analysis also reveals that citizen journalism poses a lot of issues in the gatekeeping functions such as unverifiable sources, and a lack of editorial process by which trained and experienced senior journalists filter the many stories or reports to ensure that the stories are factual and adhere to fairness, accuracy, balanced and objectivity. Professional journalists and citizen journalists need to seek common ground in terms of ethics. Urgent action needs to be taken on media literacy. Media consumers need to be duly educated on the information they regard as news in the media. Since the mainstream media is being watched by the citizen journalists, they (the citizen journalists) need to be watched and regulated also to curb some of their excesses noted in this paper. And whether or not the conventional media still have the monopoly of

deciding what information is released to society. The interviewees affirmed that the decision on what information goes to the public or society is no longer the monopoly of the conventional media as citizen journalists now generate and disseminate information to the members of the public at will. This they do through the use of digital media technology; creating websites, and blogs, and setting up Twitter and Facebook. Conventional media remain the sources where members of society who care, can go to verify the information which they receive through citizen journalism.

On the awareness and knowledge of the existence and practice of citizen journalism in Nigeria, all the interviewees confirmed that citizen journalism exists in the Nigerian media landscape. The majority of the interviewees affirmed that the nature of information citizen journalists disseminates include socio-economic, political, cultural, sports, entertainment, and a host of others. The findings also confirmed the responses of the citizen journalists that they disseminate information on virtually every aspect of human life. Concerning the challenges citizen journalism poses to the gatekeeping function of the Editors-in-Chief interviewed, they stated that the major challenges faced include the publication of information or news stories without verifying sources and facts of the stories.

The question of ethical code of conduct for journalists as per editorial independence; accuracy and fairness; privacy; privileged/non-disclosure by observing and not disclosing the source of information obtained in confidence; decency; avoid discrimination; journalists should not receive reward and gratification to suppress or publish information; journalists should not report acts of violence and crime in a manner that glorifies such acts; the names and pictures of children and minors involved in cases concerning sexual offenses, crimes and rituals or witchcraft either as victims, witnesses or defendants and these children should also not be interviewed should not be identified; journalists should employ open and honest means in sourcing for their information (except in cases that the interest of the public is at stake); reportage should be in the public interest; social responsibility; avoid plagiarism, and should enhance press freedom at all time. The interviewees unanimously assert that the emergence of citizen journalism has broken down the gatekeeping role which used to be the exclusive function of the conventional media. The decision on what information goes to society is now being handled by both citizen journalism and the mainstream media. The conventional media no longer monopolize the flow of information into society as citizen journalists are also actively involved in the business of disseminating whatever information they have to the members of the society at will.

Some of the challenges among others include attacking personalities who they consider not to be their favorites, which negates the principle of fairness and unbiased reportage. Another challenge is the abuse of the freedom of operation; citizen journalists tend to abuse or misuse the power or freedom of the dictates of "he who pays the piper dictates the tune". Citizen journalists do not adhere to balanced reportage; this sometimes causes falsehood or stories that are untrue. They are always in a hurry to publish stories which at times result into causing protests or crises such as the announcement of electoral results before the constituted authority finishes the collation of results, which is unethical. Difficulty in adherence to the ethical code of journalism by citizen journalists.

The aforementioned issues represent the ethical dimension of the citizen journalism practice in Nigeria. There is also the need to position the citizens themselves on checking

the authenticity of reports of citizen journalists before they accept them as fact. The social responsibility theory if exposed to citizen journalists will help them to understand that they should be responsible for their actions through responsible production of their content on different platforms. Social responsibility theory if understood and applied by citizen journalists should help them to be the voice of the voiceless, and support security, democracy, and social and cultural development of the Nigerian state. Citizen journalism should not be used as a weapon to cast slurs on opponents, be it social, cultural, or political. It should not be used to fan the embers of social, cultural, religious, and economic differences in Nigeria. It should be used to protect the corporate existence of Nigeria. This means that if done well citizen journalism should be used to promote democracy, political participation, and the sovereignty of the federal republic of Nigeria. There should also be a clear distinction between citizen journalists and rumour peddlers. Due to the spread of citizen journalism, the need to have a code of ethics for citizen journalism has now become important. However, it could be difficult to enforce. It is one thing to set ethics; it is another thing to ensure that people carry out their duties ethically. This is where social responsibility comes into play.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that citizen journalism is actively involved in deciding what information is released to society. It is also safe to state that citizen journalism news reporting is instantaneous, that is, it does not adhere to the editorial process or guidelines before disseminating information to members of the society. This is how citizen journalism is breaking the gates of the conventional media as the sole providers of information in society. From the findings, it is also safe to state that the *Guardian* Newspaper, Lagos, and NTA Channel 10, Abuja still maintain or adhere to the editorial guidelines of the conventional media such as accuracy, balance, objectivity, and authenticity. Hence, consumers of information from citizen journalism who care, usually check out the conventional media to verify the information being disseminated by the citizen journalists.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made:

- 1) The consumers of news from citizen journalists should endeavour to verify the information they receive from the various platforms used by citizen journalists.
- 2) Citizen journalists should harness all the potential, benefits, and good attributes of conventional journalism for the betterment of society.

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