

Perception and Credibility of citizen journalism among Mass Communication students and Journalists of ABU Samaru FM

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Authors' Contributions

Yakubu Amayindi was a student in the Department of Mass Communication, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He is the principal investigator in the study, responsible for introducing the study, conducting a literature review, developing the methodology, collecting data, analysing the data, discussing the findings, and writing the manuscript before submitting it for publication.

Habiba Mohammed Sani is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. She supervised the entire study, ensuring that ethical standards were followed, and proofread and edited the manuscript.

Abstract

The advent of new media technologies and the internet has provided a seamless platform for citizens of a country to be actively involved in the collection, reporting, and dissemination of information that affects society, working together with others. This study examined the concept of citizen journalism and further examined the credibility of citizen journalism in the Nigerian media landscape through a holistic approach, drawing data from ABU FM Samaru 101.1 and undergraduate mass communication students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The SurveyMonkey online sample size calculator was used to determine the study's 225 respondents, based on a total student population of 750. The study, grounded in source-credibility theory as its theoretical framework, employed a mixed research methodology that combined quantitative survey and interview methods. A questionnaire was issued to the 255 respondents, and interviews were conducted with three professional journalists from ABU Samaru FM Radio 101.1. Findings from this study revealed that citizen journalism in Nigeria is a credible source of news. However, it should be treated with caution, especially when

addressing critical issues that concern society as a whole. Additionally, findings indicate that citizen journalism patterns of news reportage are brief and supplementary, whereas mainstream journalism patterns of news are in-depth and more insightful. Importantly, the study's findings concur that the source of news has a significant influence on its credibility. The study therefore recommends that gatekeeping, source credibility, information verification, and journalism training will further enhance the credibility of citizen journalism in the Nigerian media landscape.

Keywords: Citizen-Journalism, Media Landscape, Source-Credibility, Perception, Nigeria,

Introduction

The inventory of information and communication technology (ICT) has made it easier for information to be disseminated to a large number of audiences, even by a single person with the proper internet connectivity. To buttress this point, Okeye et al. (2019) opined that the Internet has become an integral part of our daily lives and modern journalism practices. This has brought about the democratisation of information, transforming people from being content readers to publishers and reporters. Ever since the emergence of the Internet and the new media, journalism no longer enjoys the monopoly it had over the past century in terms of exclusive gathering and dissemination of information in society as a result of opportunities brought about by web 2.0 social networking sites such as Facebook, TikTok, Reddit, WordPress, Wikipedia, and Twitter that made people who are not professionals in the field of journalism engage in sharing user-generated content on a large scale with the Internet's network. The advent of the Internet has enabled anyone with the ability to operate a computer or smartphone to become a journalist, regardless of their professional background.

Therefore, citizen journalism is the act of communication where an ordinary citizen, without the requisite journalism skills, training, and proper understanding of the ethics of the profession, transmits information. To further elucidate, Maryam (2014) asserts that citizen journalism enables people without formal journalism training to have the opportunity to utilise the tools of modern technology and the Internet's limitless reach in order to create and disseminate content.

In Nigeria, several blogs and websites are created by individuals or media influencers in society, where they produce content and disseminate it online across these platforms. For example, the Nairaland Forum, created by Seun Osewa on March 8th, 2005, took its name from the Nigerian Naira currency. Linda Ikeji blog.com is also a popular Nigerian blog created by Linda Ikeji, a prominent Nigerian social media influencer. Conventional media outlets now allow reports from citizen journalists; prominent among them is the Channels TV eyewitness reports (Apuke, 2016).

Consequently, citizen journalism has enabled citizens to become active participants in the communication process. That is, they are not just consumers of information but also create and transmit messages using modern technologies without the interference of gatekeepers and agency regulators (Apuke & Ayih, 2020). To further support this point, Otuya-Asohro (2024) opined that citizen journalism has created an enabling environment for citizens to actively participate in promoting good governance and facilitating democracy.

Several studies have shown an increase in citizen journalism practices in Nigeria across various blogs and social media platforms. Citizen journalists disseminate information ranging from eyewitness reports to in-depth reports on corruption charges against government officials, business people, and other high-profile personalities. In addition, Dare (2011) noted that citizen journalism in Nigeria is on the rise, citing the example of Sahara Reporters, which has served as a pacesetter in the Nigerian citizen journalism landscape. Furthermore, Sahara Reporters has exposed corrupt practices by high-profile government officials. He further stated that Sahara reporters have taken the traditional media in Nigeria by surprise by engaging in full-fledged investigative reporting that they are complacent about.

The glaring importance of citizen journalism cannot be overemphasised; all over the world, citizen journalism practices have shaped various phenomena, events, and trends that transcend domestic and national concern, extending them to the global level, which the world

pays keen attention to. A notable example is the Arab Spring of 2010. Likewise, in 2012, protests in Nigeria against government decisions to remove fuel subsidies achieved success due to the activities of citizen journalism, where posts by people went viral on the Internet, attracting attention from global communities (Anorue et al., 2013; Odii, 2013).

Despite the benefits of citizen journalism in bringing to light issues that the mainstream media would have otherwise ignored, it has, however, been received with mixed reactions from some scholars. While some view it as a development in the field of journalism, others have raised concerns because it has empowered ordinary citizens to harness the power of digital technologies and become actively involved in information dissemination without proper adherence to journalism ethics. Okeke et al. (2022) opined that citizen journalists often disregard journalism ethics and regulations. Questions about the credibility of citizen journalism still linger despite its resourcefulness, largely due to a lack of expertise in the field of journalism.

The subject matter of citizen journalism as a news source has been examined by Okeke et al. (2022), whose study focused on audiences in Nsukka, in the eastern part of Nigeria. However, their research did not account for perspectives from other regions, particularly the northern part of the country. Given the evolving nature of communication practices and the growing influence of citizen journalism, this study investigates the perceived credibility of citizen journalism among journalists and Mass Communication students in Zaria, located within northern Nigeria. It identifies emerging trends that may inform media practitioners and policymakers.

In light of concerns arising from the practice of citizen journalism by inexperienced individuals in society, this study examines the issue of credibility in citizen journalism within the Nigerian media landscape. This research is timely, as several studies have raised sharp criticism concerning the genuineness and trustworthiness of citizen journalism (Nnanyelugo et

al., 2013). Therefore, this study investigated the credibility of citizen journalism in the Nigerian media landscape with a holistic approach, sourcing data from ABU FM Samaru 101.1 and undergraduate mass communication students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, with the aid of the following research questions to properly inquire and assess the problem:

1. How credible is citizen-journalism as a source of news?
2. What is the pattern of citizen-journalism reportage of news versus mainstream reportage of news?

Literature Review

The Concept of Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism involves the active participation of citizens in gathering, reporting, transmitting, and disseminating information. Although the concept of citizen journalism is an evolving aspect of journalism, it has, however, been defined by several scholars. Bowman & Willis (2003) defined citizen journalism as participatory journalism, which is an act of a citizen actively participating in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information. It is a new brand of journalism that enables citizens without traditional journalism training to participate in gathering and disseminating information through connected smart devices. To further support this point, Wiredu (2022) posits that citizen journalism is the practice where individuals with access to technological tools and internet connectivity engage in the work typically undertaken by professional journalists.

In Nigeria, Twitter played a significant role in the execution of the #EndSARS protests, which began at the Lekki toll gate, marked by the popular hashtag. Consequently, during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria on February 25, 2023, many netizens used their smartphones to record and post information about electoral malpractice by officials, post-election violence in places like Lagos, and ballot box snatching by hoodlums. Due to the impact of these citizen journalism reports, such events and issues are now reported in the mainstream

media, especially the EndSARS protests, which received a special CNN programme report and were subsequently frowned upon by the Nigerian government upon broadcast. (Daily Trust Newspaper, 2021.)

Empirical Review

The term "citizen journalism" has been examined from various perspectives by scholars and has elicited mixed reactions. While some see its importance and how it can complement journalistic practice, others go an extra mile by issuing caution about its usage, albeit in a non-offensive manner. Wiredu (2022), in his study on Citizen Journalism in Ghana, asserts that the content of citizen journalists is prone to fake news and misinformation because there are no gatekeepers, editors, or guides by any ethics or code of conduct. Mainstream journalism prides itself on upholding ethics and professionalism, which it deems essential for responsible and truthful journalism. Professionals in this field are typically trained in institutions using a curriculum approved by the authorities of communications for a specified duration and are then certified to engage in journalism services (El Semary & Khaga, 2013; Hood, 2011). Most professional journalists have attempted to justify their disdain for citizen journalists, citing the unethical nature of their work. Akpe & Tartsea-Anshase (2022) opined that if journalism is a profession just as medical practice, engineering, pilot, architecture, and nursing, how acceptable would it be to have a carpenter walk into a hospital theatre ready to carry out a brain surgery, or a bricklayer jump into an aircraft's cockpit, ready for a flight?

Hughes (2011) stated that, due to this disassociation from the institutional media, citizen journalism appeals to many because of a common belief that traditional media are biased, out of touch, and ignore important issues. However, Okeke et al. (2022), in a study titled "Citizen Journalism and Security Challenges: Audience Perception of Ethical and Security Issues in Nigeria's Online Journalism Practice," revealed that citizen journalism practiced by online journalists is violating journalistic principles and ethics. Consequently, the

credibility of citizen journalism is a major concern, which has continued to hinder its success in Nigeria. “Citizen journalism credibility is a major concern as they have easy access to abundant sources, but also run the risk of getting false information and passing it to the public without verification.” (Okeke et al, 2022, p.46) On several occasions, false information has been disseminated by citizen journalists, negatively impacting the people and the country as a whole.

A study carried out by Dare (2011) titled “The Rise of Citizen Journalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Sahara Reporters” revealed that citizen journalism in Nigeria is on a steady rise, though slightly below expectations. The study reveals how citizen journalism practices by Sahara Reporters have played a pivotal role in exposing corruption in the Nigerian political arena, which the mainstream media has been unable to execute effectively due to government interference and sanctions. However, the findings reveal that there are issues that need to be addressed before meaningful collaboration can occur between citizen journalism and mainstream journalism.

Furthermore, in examining the status of citizen journalism in Nigeria, Okeye et al. (2019) found that citizen journalism is on the rise in Nigeria; however, citizen journalists lack the requisite journalistic and professional knowledge to engage in journalistic practice. Hence, they do not adhere to the ethics and tenets of journalism; although the majority of respondents believed that citizen journalism reports are credible, their reports have nonetheless enhanced the dissemination of professional journalism in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Source Credibility Theory propounded by Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelly in 1953. The theory posits that the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of a source of information or communicator determine whether the message will be accepted or not. The source credibility theory posits that the perceived expertise and

trustworthiness of the source determine the credibility of the information. The theory further explains that people are more likely to believe and accept information from a credible source than from a less credible one (Seman & Sims, 2022). This theory is crucial for this study because it helps us understand how people assign trust to information they receive in the media, which may determine whether they will be persuaded or not. In the case of citizen journalism in the Nigerian media landscape, the questions asked in this study, guided by the assumptions of this theory, will give an explanation of the credibility of citizen journalism in Nigeria and show the level of trust people have in citizen journalism in comparison with mainstream journalism (Umeogu, 2012).

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative descriptive survey design with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and personal interviews. The study's dual population comprised professional journalists and undergraduate students of Mass Communication at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The student population, obtained from the departmental examination officer, consisted of 750 undergraduates from various geopolitical zones in Nigeria, as well as a small number of international students. Using a stratified sampling technique, the students were divided into four independent strata based on academic level. The SurveyMonkey online sample size calculator was used to determine the sample size, based on a total student population of 750, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, resulting in a recommended sample size of 255 respondents. Convenience sampling was then applied within each stratum to select approximately 64 students from each undergraduate academic level. In addition, employing convenience sampling, three professional journalists from ABU FM Samaru 101.1 were selected and interviewed to complement the quantitative data with expert insights. **Analysis**

A total of 225 copies of the questionnaire were administered, and the study achieved a 100% return rate. Three journalists from ABU FM Samaru 101.1 were interviewed (two female and one male) for this study. Hence, the data collected for the study is presented and analysed in the sequence of the questions in the questionnaire and the interview guide.

Q1. How credible is citizen-journalism as a source of news?

Table 1: Responses regarding the credibility of citizen journalism as a source of news

Scale	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	12	4.705
Disagree	42	16.47
Fairly Agree	94	36.86
Agree	76	29.80
Strongly Agree	31	12.15
Total	255	100

Table 1 vividly shows that, out of the total respondents, 31 (12.15%) strongly agree that they find citizen Journalism credible as a source of news, 76 (29.80%) respondents agree, 94 (36.86%) respondents fairly agree, 42 (16.47%) respondents disagree while 12 (4.705%) respondents strongly disagree, they find citizen Journalism credible as a source of news. This, therefore, means that the majority of respondents accept that they find citizen journalism a credible news source.

Table 2: Responses regarding the source of news as a determinant of news credibility in Journalism

Scale	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	8	3.137
Disagree	8	3.137
Fairly Agree	37	14.50
Agree	76	29.80
Strongly Agree	126	49.41
Total	255	100.0

Table 2 shows that, out of the total respondents, 126 (49.41%) strongly agree that the credibility of news stories is important in journalism, 76 (29.80%) respondents agree, 37 (14.50%) respondents fairly agree, 8 (3.137%) respondents disagree while only 8 (3.137%) respondents strongly disagree that the credibility of news stories is important in journalism. This, therefore, implies that the majority of the respondents agrees that the credibility of news stories is important in journalism.

Interview

Question One: How credible is citizen-journalism as a source of news?

The responses of the second and third interviewees concur that citizen journalism is a reliable source of news, although they cautioned that the news must first be validated before it can be accepted. In contrast, the first interviewee claims that citizen journalism lacks credibility as a news source because it incorporates human emotions into its reporting.

Question Two: What is the pattern of citizen-journalism reportage of news versus mainstream reportage of news?

The three respondents' answers addressed the topic of this question. Every interviewee agreed that citizen journalism does not report news in-depth, rather, it keeps people informed about events as they develop. Citizen journalists report news as it is, without providing context for greater comprehension. Unlike the reports of citizen journalists, those of mainstream journalists are typically in-depth and include news features like the 5Ws and H. The interviewees claimed that before publishing information as news, mainstream journalists perform additional background checks and investigations on it.

Another notable distinction between mainstream journalism's reporting of news and citizen journalism's reporting of news is that mainstream journalists report on real-life happenings, whereas some citizen journalists simply pick up a story they find interesting from mainstream journalism reports and develop it before reporting it, especially on social media or their blogs. The third interviewee referred to citizen journalism as "armchair journalism" because most citizen journalists watch and report on events from the comfort of their homes, automobiles, or offices, whereas mainstream journalists are typically present on the ground to cover live events. According to the interviewees' comments, mainstream journalism's coverage of the news is firsthand, while citizen journalism is supplemental.

Discussion of Findings

RQ1: How credible is citizen-journalism as a source of news?

Findings from Table 1 and the interviews with professional journalists revealed that most respondents consider citizen journalism a credible source of news. This outcome stands in sharp contrast to the findings of Okeke et al. (2022), who reported that citizen journalism was perceived as relatively not credible among respondents in Nsukka, within eastern Nigeria. Nevertheless, participants in the present study emphasized the need for caution and verification before accepting information from citizen journalists, underscoring the importance of accuracy in news reporting. These results align with the Source Credibility Theory, which posits that the credibility of information is primarily determined by the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of its source. As further shown in Table 2, the credibility attached to news content depends significantly on its source, a principle that reinforces factuality as a core element of professional journalism.

RQ2: What is the pattern of citizen-journalism reportage of news versus mainstream reportage of news?

Furthermore, professional journalists interviewed consider the practice of citizen journalism in news reporting to be lacking in depth and somewhat unprofessional, mainly due to the freedom it affords. This agrees with Uche et al.'s (2021) study titled 'Citizen Journalism in Nigeria and Security Challenges' on the pattern of citizen journalism reportage of news; their work revealed that citizen journalists are unprofessional in their reportage of news.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Citizen journalism in Nigeria is a credible source of news, but it should be treated with caution, especially when addressing significant societal issues. Source credibility in journalism, as explored in this study, is crucial to the profession. Additionally, the findings show that citizen journalism patterns of news reportage are brief, whereas mainstream journalism patterns

of news are in-depth and more insightful. Notably, the study's findings revealed that the source of news has a significant influence on its credibility. For journalism, this is important because factuality is a core element of news.

The study recommends that gatekeeping, source credibility, fact-checking, information verification, and journalism training will further enhance the credibility of citizen journalism in the Nigerian media landscape. Citizen journalists should undertake basic journalism training on the core tenets and ethics of journalism and news reporting. Factuality, source credibility, source acknowledgement, clarity, and coherence of news should also be treated with serious attention by citizen journalists.

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