

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND CITIZEN JOURNALISM: A DRIVE FOR FAKE NEWS PEDDLING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines ICT and the citizen journalist practice and the likelihood of promoting the spread of fake news in Nigeria. The study is anchored on technological determinism. Survey research design was adopted for this study and the population of the study was 250 members of NUJ, Niger State chapter and census sampling technique was used. The study revealed that the use of ICT has made it easier for citizen journalists to report on events as they unfold, without being hindered by the constraints faced by traditional media, there is high possibility of citizen journalism practice being used for peddle fake news in Nigeria, and it can be harnessed for credible news reporting if the journalists are well trained and taught the need for credible reporting, factual reporting and ethical conducts. The study also identified potential ways in which citizen journalism can be deployed, such as establishing citizen journalism networks and training programs, collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional media, and use of emerging technologies.

Keywords: Information Communication Technology, Citizen Journalism, Fake News

Introduction

The growth of modern technology and the sophistication of society over a period of time became a big challenge for traditional media of communication. In order for the media to survive this challenge, it resorted to the coverage of news with economic benefits as against the interest of the citizens. On the other hand, the citizens having discovered this development, decided to look for a way out in satisfying their quest to know the happenings around them.

The consequence of this development became a situation where the citizens would source for news themselves without it passing through the normal journalistic process. Many mass media organisations are busy repackaging and becoming more interested in meeting advertisers' needs rather than readers' or audiences' needs, while many people through the help of information technology most especially, the internet are redefining the rules and roles of the game (Adelabu, 2008). The advent of simple handheld mobile phones and smart android gadgets, wider spread of World Wide Web, information communication and telecommunication service provide data that can enable anyone who wishes to connect to it have access to information on contributes to the space of discussion all over the world. This made the larger number of Nigerian to be aware that the happenings around far supersede the manifest content of traditional mass media. This simply means that most events occur without being reported either because there were no conventional journalists on site or they were not assigned to cover such beat. Burkholder captures the essence of this statement when she notes that more often than not, major news happens and there is no one around to report it (Burkholder, 2010). Hence, citizens resulted to sorting for information and disseminating such information according to self view as against journalistic editorial independent power vested on conventional journalists, as enshrine in the journalism code of ethics. Evolving information communication technologies and cyber space connection further boost what is called citizen journalism in Nigeria. Citizen Journalism practice is a term which describes the act of individual within a given society, community, state or nation engaging in the gathering, processing and

publishing of news materials. In this case, individuals on their own create web pages where they publish news material collected within the society. They are able to do this due to the prevalence of modern technology. In most cases, they employ mobile phones and other recording materials which enable them to snap and cover event which are letter posted on the web. It can also be refers to as “the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information, in order to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democratic system requires” Bowman & Willis (2018).

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that evolvement of information communication technology has been applied to wide variety of practices and boost popular participation of many Nigerians in the dissemination of information among themselves. This underpinned the idea that active participation in media production by non-professional actors is potentially a mode of political engagement (Markham, 2019). This singular power and enthusiasm to report events as they unfold in real-time as widening the need to question the ‘credibility’ of several information emanating from natural attribute of eyewitness or people’s desire to share their stories and publish the ‘supposed truth’. The idea produced a number of challenges, including the spread of fake news and misinformation (Elmasry, 2018). Many Nigerians had caused serious of pandemonium, misinformation, distortion and fanning the ember of crises, through the practice of citizen journalism. This had caused a lot of setback economically, politically and social interaction in Nigeria (Nwodu & Odii, 2020). Citizen journalists in Nigeria have used social media to peddle series of fake news on political protests, natural disasters, and human rights abuses. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak, citizen journalists circulated several remedy or prevention for the spread Ebola which made Nigerians bathing or soaking themselves in a salt and water bucket (Oliver, 2020). Similarly, during the #EndSARS protests in 2020, citizen journalists used social media to document series of unbalance police brutality and raise awareness of the protests, which eventually led to the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Kazenga, 2021).

Given the significant impact of ICT on citizen journalism in Nigeria and around the world, there is a need to assess the role of ICT in the effective practice of citizen journalism. This research project aims to contribute to this important area of study by examining the benefits and challenges of using ICT in citizen journalism and how it has impacted the practice of citizen journalism in Nigeria. By doing so, this study hopes to shed light on the ways in which ICT can be used to promote responsible and effective citizen journalism.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The emergence of the information and communication technologies, specifically the Internet has given citizens the opportunity to be heard and equally contribute their quota to the happenings in and around their environment, citizen journalists have become regular contributors to mainstream media. They provide information and some other latest and interesting pictures especially in a scenario where professional journalists have little or no access to. The participatory nature of citizen journalism has helped in reducing the censorship nature of the professional journalism practice that dictates who should or should not participate in journalism.

Citizen journalism has emerged as a significant force in the media landscape, with the advent of information communication technologies providing a platform for citizen journalists to report news and disseminate information to a wide audience. While the rise of citizen journalism has the potential to democratize the media and increase transparency, the use of information communication technologies by citizen journalists also raises questions about the quality and credibility of the news they produce, as well as the ethical and legal implications of their activities. Thus, the problem statement for this study is: What are the strengths and weaknesses of information communication technology in citizen journalism, and how do these technologies impact the quality and credibility of the news produced, as well as the ethical and legal implications of the activities of citizen journalists?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess the role of ICT in citizen journalism and its tendency of peddling fake news in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the effects of ICT on citizen journalism in Nigeria.
2. Evaluate ICT and Citizen Journalism's likelihood of promoting fakes news in Nigeria
3. Establish how ICT and Citizen Journalism can be harness for credible journalism practice in Nigeria

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What are the effects of ICT on citizen journalism in Nigeria?
2. Do ICT and Citizen Journalism promote fakes news in Nigeria?
3. How can ICT and Citizen Journalism be harness for credible journalism practice in Nigeria?

Review of Concepts

Overview of the Concept Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism refers to the act of individuals playing an active role in the process of gathering, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. This form of journalism has gained traction in recent years due to the widespread availability of information communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet and social media platforms. The assessment of ICTs in citizen journalism is an important aspect to consider as these technologies have revolutionized the way news and information is produced, distributed, and consumed. ICTs have enabled individuals to bypass traditional gatekeepers, such as news organizations and media outlets, and share their own perspectives, experiences, and observations with a potentially global audience.

For instance, the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook has allowed individuals to quickly and easily share breaking news and updates from the scenes of events. This has led to a significant increase in the amount of eyewitness and real-time information available to the public. However, it is important to note that the use of ICTs in citizen journalism also has its challenges. The abundance of information available online has made it difficult for individuals to distinguish credible and reliable sources from those that are unreliable or biased. In addition, the rapid spread of misinformation and fake news on social media has raised concerns about the potential negative effects of ICTs on the quality and accuracy of news and information.

Citizen journalism has emerged as a response to the changing media landscape, where traditional news organizations and media outlets are no longer the sole gatekeepers of information. The rise of ICTs, such as the Internet and social media, has created new avenues for individuals to participate in the news-gathering and dissemination process. The impact of ICTs on citizen journalism has been transformative, enabling individuals to bypass traditional media outlets and reach a potentially global audience with their perspectives, experiences, and observations. This has resulted in a significant increase in real-time and eyewitness information available to the public. For example, the use of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook has allowed individuals to quickly and easily share breaking news and updates from the scene of events. However, the abundance of information available online also presents challenges. The rise of fake news and misinformation on social media has made it difficult for individuals to distinguish credible and reliable sources from those that are unreliable or biased. This has raised concerns about the potential negative impact of ICTs on the quality and accuracy of news and information.

Citizen journalism has become a major player in the world of news and information, with the use of information communication technologies (ICTs) playing a crucial role. These technologies have empowered individuals to report, gather, and disseminate news and information to a potentially global audience, bypassing traditional gatekeepers such as news organizations and media outlets. The impact of ICTs on citizen journalism has been substantial, with individuals able to provide real-time updates and breaking news from events using platforms like Twitter and Facebook. This has resulted in an increase in the availability of eyewitness and real-time information for the public. In addition, ICTs have given citizen

journalists the ability to reach a wider audience and potentially have a greater impact on public opinion and decision-making.

However, the use of ICTs in citizen journalism also poses challenges. With so much information available online, it can be difficult for individuals to differentiate credible and reliable sources from those that are unreliable or biased. Additionally, the rapid spread of fake news and misinformation on social media has raised concerns about the quality and accuracy of the information being disseminated. It is essential to continuously assess the use of ICTs in citizen journalism in order to fully understand the opportunities and challenges they present. This can help identify best practices for using these technologies and develop strategies for addressing the challenges posed by fake news and misinformation.

Concept of ICT in Citizen Journalism

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has become an integral part of the daily lives and is increasingly being used in a variety of fields, including journalism. In the context of citizen journalism, ICT refers to the digital tools and platforms used by individuals to report on events and issues. One of the key advantages of ICT in citizen journalism is that it allows for a more democratic distribution of information. With the rise of social media and other online platforms, citizens now have the ability to bypass traditional gatekeepers and share their perspectives and experiences directly with the public (Deuze, 2005). This has the potential to broaden the range of voices and perspectives in the media and to provide a more diverse and nuanced picture of the world. Another benefit of ICT in citizen journalism is the ability to report on events in real-time. With the rise of mobile technologies, such as smart phones and tablets, individuals are now able to quickly and easily document and share events as they unfold (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). This can be particularly valuable in crisis situations, where traditional news organizations may not have a presence or may be restricted in their ability to report.

However, ICT also presents a number of challenges in the context of citizen journalism. One of the biggest concerns is the potential for the spread of misinformation. With the ease of access to digital technologies and the speed with which information can be shared, false or misleading information can spread quickly and widely (Woolley, 2016). This raises questions about the reliability and credibility of information in the digital age and underscores the need for media literacy programs that educate citizens about how to critically evaluate information.

Another challenge is the impartiality of algorithms used to disseminate information. As more and more news is consumed through social media and other online platforms, algorithms play an increasingly important role in determining what information is presented to users (DelliCarpini & Keeter, 1996). There is a risk that these algorithms may reinforce existing biases or perpetuate the spread of misinformation, raising questions about the impartiality of the information being presented to the public. In addition to the benefits and challenges mentioned above, ICT also has the potential to transform the traditional power dynamic in journalism. With the rise of citizen journalism, individuals now have the ability to hold powerful institutions and individuals accountable by reporting on events and issues that may not have been covered by traditional news organizations (Deuze, 2005). This can have a democratizing effect on the media landscape and can lead to increased public engagement and participation in the democratic process.

Another important aspect of ICT in citizen journalism is the role it plays in creating and maintaining communities. With the rise of social media and other online platforms, individuals are now able to connect and collaborate with like-minded people from all over the world (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). This has the potential to create a more engaged and informed citizenry and to promote greater understanding and empathy among people with different perspectives and experiences. In terms of the impact of ICT on the quality of journalism, opinions are divided. On one hand, some argue that the rise of citizen journalism has led to a decline in the standards of journalism, with the spread of misinformation and the lack of professional training among citizen journalists (Woolley, 2016). On the other hand, others argue that the increased diversity of voices and perspectives in the media brought about by ICT has had a positive impact on the quality of journalism and has provided a more accurate and nuanced picture of the world (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). ICT has had a significant impact on the field of citizen journalism and has both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, ICT has allowed for a more democratic distribution of information and has enabled individuals to report on events in real-time. On the other hand, it has also raised concerns about the

spread of misinformation and the impartiality of algorithms used to disseminate information. It is therefore important to critically evaluate the role of ICT in citizen journalism and to consider both its potential benefits and drawbacks in order to fully understand its impact on the field.

Theoretical Framework

Technology Determinism

One suitable theoretical framework could be the theory of technological determinism. Technological determinism is a perspective that views technology as the primary driver of social and cultural change, and argues that technology shapes and defines human behavior and social structures. This theory is relevant to the study of ICT in citizen journalism because it highlights the ways in which technology can shape the nature and scope of journalism and the public sphere, and can have significant impact on the ways in which news and information is produced, reported, and consumed. By examining the role of technology in shaping citizen journalism, this theoretical framework can help to shed light on the potential benefits and drawbacks of ICT in this field, and can inform efforts to promote responsible and ethical uses of technology in journalism” Technological determinism is a perspective that views technology as the primary driver of social and cultural change, and argues that technology shapes and defines human behavior and social structures. This theory holds that technological advancements play a decisive role in shaping society and the ways in which individuals interact with each other and the world around them. In the context of the assessment of information communication technology (ICT) in citizen journalism, technological determinism is a suitable theoretical framework as it sheds light on the ways in which technology is affecting the nature and scope of journalism and the public sphere. Adopting a technological determinist perspective in the study of ICT in citizen journalism, researchers can gain a better understanding of the ways in which technology is shaping this field and the implications of these changes for journalism and the public sphere. This knowledge can inform efforts to promote responsible and ethical uses of technology in journalism, and to ensure that the benefits of ICT are maximized while minimizing the risks.

Methodology

For this study, a survey research method was employed. The study population consists of journalists in Niger State, Nigeria. According to data from Nigerian Union of Journalist, Niger State chapter (2021), the population of journalists is estimated to 250. Hence, 250 journalists were sampled for this study.

S/N	NUJ CHAPELS IN NIGER STATE CHAPTER	NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS
1	Nigeria Television Authority (NTA)	Journalists 45
2	Niger State Television (NSTV)	Journalists 40
3	Radio Niger (Crystal FM)	Journalists 30
4	Power FM, Bida.	Journalists 25
5	Prestige FM Radio (91.7 MHZ)	Journalists 35
6	Landmark Radio, Kontagora.	Journalists 20
7	Correspondents (Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, The Nation Newspapers etc)	Journalists 55
TOTAL		JOURNALISTS 250

Source: NUJ 2021

NUJ, the Nigerian Union of Journalists, is a professional organization that represents the interests of journalists in Nigeria. It is a recognized and authoritative body that has a register of its members, including those in Niger State. Census sampling is a research method used to collect data from a population of interest by surveying every member of that population. In other words, it involves gathering data from every single individual or unit within a population. The primary method of data collection in this study was through the use of a questionnaire, which was selected as the most appropriate means of gathering opinions from a large number of participants. The questionnaire was distributed to a representative sample of journalists in Niger State. Participants were instructed to respond to the questions in the questionnaire, which was designed to be completed in writing. The researcher collected and analyzed the responses to gain insight into the use of information communication technology in citizen journalism among Niger State journalists. The

questionnaire was self-developed by the researcher and was administered in person. After completion, the researcher retrieved the questionnaire and used the data gathered to reach conclusions and provide recommendations for improving public perception and understanding of the issue. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed using a combination of statistical techniques. First, the data was organized and cleaned to ensure its accuracy and consistency. Then, descriptive statistical methods were used to give a general overview of the responses.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Out of the 250 questionnaires distributed 238 were recovered, hence, 238 respondents' views were used for the analysis in this study.

The results of findings showed that a large percentage of the respondents 201 were male (84.5%) while female respondents were 37 (15.5%). It also showed that the respondents from the Nigeria Union of Journalists Niger State Council sampled are mostly reporters 238 (100%). It also established that most of the respondents (100%) were degree holders with majority of them having nothing less than 10 years of working experience.

The fundamental analysis on the first objective which sought to examine the effects of ICT on citizen journalism in Nigeria, majority of the respondents (98%) acknowledged that ICT has had a positive impact on citizen journalism. Specifically, the emergence of citizen journalists who report on local issues neglected by traditional media has been facilitated by the use of ICT. They argued that the use of ICT has made it easier for citizen journalists to report on events as they unfold, without being hindered by the constraints faced by traditional media. Majority of the respondents (100%) also opined that the use of social media platforms has also enabled citizen journalists to reach a wider audience with their news reports. These submissions corroborate the proponents of the theory used in this study, technological determinism theory which views technology as the primary driver of social and cultural change, and argues that technology shapes and defines human behavior and social structures.

The second objective that seeks to evaluate ICT and Citizen Journalism's likelihood of promoting fake news in Nigeria shows that the strength of citizen journalism in providing information at a speedy time, wide coverage, allowing person editorial independence and so on, as also constitute a serious problem to citizen journalism practice in Nigeria. This is evident from the majority respondents (96%) submission. The respondents opined that one of the key challenges is the dependence on social media platforms for news dissemination. The respondents (100%) said citizen journalism also comes with limitations, they said the platforms are owned by private entities and their algorithms can change without warning, resulting in a decrease in the reach of citizen journalists' news reports. It also has been characterized with high possibility of being used to peddle fake news. (100%) of the respondent cited the issue of fake news peddling during President Muhammadu Buhari's Administration and the threat of the then Minister of Information and Culture to gag the media for fake news peddling, ignoring the activities of citizen journalists on social media and multimedia platforms.

Majority of the respondents also attribute the advancement of ICT and other media technological aids as the build-up for strong fake news peddling in Nigeria, they decried that non-censored activities of the citizen journalist as great influence on peddling of fake news, making reference to most fake news during the 2019 to 2023 general elections, the news of the death of President Muhammadu Buhari, the news of Peter Obi having a son among the Indigenous People of Biafra, the news of ASUU president having a daughter in foreign university graduating while Nigeria students are on strike and many more. These submissions are akin to the many studies that highlighted the need for training and capacity building programs to enhance the skills of citizen journalists in utilizing ICT tools and how to manage credibility in news reporting (Abdulrauf & Abdulazeez, 2019; Yusuf et al., 2019). With the ease of access to digital technologies and the speed with which information can be shared, false or misleading information can spread quickly and widely (Woolley, 2016). No wonder the Technological determinism theory argued that the rise of social media and other digital platforms, citizen journalists have been able to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and disseminate news and information directly to the public. This raises questions about the reliability and credibility of information in the digital age and underscores the need for media literacy programs that educate

citizens about how to critically evaluate information, as well as, how to avoid media bias, fakes news and false news among the citizen journalists in Nigeria.

The third objective which also seek to establish how ICT and Citizen Journalism can be harness for credible journalism show that advancement in ICT and citizen journalism can be harnessed for better citizen journalism. Majority of the respondents (98%) is in line with the argument that the use of emerging technologies can enhance citizen participation and engagement with news content (Molyneux & Lee, 2019). The study establishes that ICT and citizen journalism practice can be harnessed for credible news reporting if the journalists are well trained and taught the need for credible reporting, factual reporting and ethical conducts. Most respondents' submissions align with the argument that citizen journalism is challenging the traditional media's monopoly over news production and dissemination (Gillmor, 2004). However, the study also notes the potential for collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional media to enhance the quality of news coverage and increase the reach of citizen journalism.

This finding is in line with previous research that has shown the benefits of collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional media in promoting more diverse news coverage and improving the quality of reporting (Zamora & Lewis, 2016; Nyamjoh, 2012). The results of this study suggest that citizen journalism can be deployed in Nigeria to promote transparency and accountability. Citizen journalists can use ICT tools to share information on government activities and policies, facilitate public participation in decision-making processes, hold government officials accountable for their actions, and advocate for policies that promote transparency and accountability. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the role of citizen journalism in promoting transparency and accountability in both democratic and authoritarian contexts (Gallagher & Prior, 2013; Zhou, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The fundamental finding in this study reveals that the advancement in Information Technology ICT has increased the practice of citizen journalism in Nigeria. It provides an opportunity for citizens to participate in news production, which promotes diversity of voices and perspectives. The study exposes that advance of ICT and increase in the practice of citizen journalism has pave way for the increasingly peddling of fake news among the citizen journalists in Nigeria. It anchored the submission on the empirical study conducted by (Molleda & Kiouisis, 2010; Zamora & Lewis, 2016) that opine that citizen journalism practice if it is not check may be an instrument for peddling fake news, enforcing personal interest, medium for bias reporting and all the likes in any given environment. There is a risk that these algorithms may reinforce existing biases or perpetuate the spread of misinformation, raising questions about the impartiality of the information being presented to the public.

Study found that citizen journalists can use ICT to promote credible and factual reports, as well as, transparency and accountability by sharing information on government activities and policies, facilitating public participation in decision-making processes, holding government officials accountable for their actions, and advocating for policies that promote transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the study suggests that there is potential for collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional media to enhance citizen journalism in Nigeria..

Overall, the study contributes to the literature on citizen journalism in Nigeria and provides valuable insights for policymakers, media organizations, and citizen journalists. It underscores the need to address the challenges facing citizen journalists, promote collaboration between citizen journalists and traditional media, and harness the potential of ICT to promote credible news story or reporting in Nigeria.

The study recommend that The use of Emerging technologies like virtual and augmented technologies should be encouraged to provide citizens with a more immersive news experience and enhance their understanding of the news. It recommends that Government and all the stakeholders in communication should ensure that citizen journalism practice in Nigeria is well monitored to ensure credible and factual news reporting. Traditional media outlets should work with citizen journalists to produce news reports on local issues, which could then be disseminated to a wider audience through traditional media channels.

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