(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Tackling the misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism

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Abstract

The study focus on ways of tackling the misconception and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism. citizen journalism is a process of collecting, processing, analyzing and dissemination of news or information by untrained journalist using the social media platforms. This study aims to examine the various misconceptions and prejudices that give rise to ethical concerns about citizen journalism practice in Nigeria, to find out the legal concerns about citizen journalism practice in Nigeria and to find out ways of tackling misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism practice in Nigeria. The study is anchored on theory of public sphere and technological determinism theory. The study adopted survey method of research with an in-depth interview as instrument for data collection. Interview was conducted with four journalists, three working in the mainstream news organizations in Nigerian. The results of the study indicated lack of legal provision that will guide the practice of citizen journalism, sentimental attachment to issues by citizen journalist, lack of censorship are the reasons for the misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism. It was recommended that legal provision and censorship to guide the practice of citizen journalism, stated punishment for defaulters, use of artificial intelligence to control information or news publish by citizen journalists, training of citizen journalists among others will help to tackle the misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism.

Keywords: Citizen journalism; Misconception; Prejudices; Tackling; internet

1. Introduction

Development in information technology has given birth to a new form of journalism called "Citizen Journalism". This form of journalism uses social media platforms for information dissemination to the public. According to Okoro, Diri and Odii (2013), the practice of citizen journalism in Nigeria and the world is emerging as a powerful phenomenon. The street journalism as fondly called is the reverse of the straightjacket journalism that is the mainstream journalism with the gatekeeping rules and ethics.

Citizen journalism is the spontaneous creation, dissemination, and evaluation of current happenings by regular citizens and media users using modern technology, instead of reporting by a professional reporter. Nowadays, citizen journalists have become regular contributors to current news, reporting information and sharing some of today's most iconic images, especially where professional journalists have limited access or none at all (Jurrat, 2011). The growth of this form of journalism is tied to the proliferation of social media platform and the obvious speedy growth of technology in today's world that has contributed to all areas of human existence Odey, Igiri and Ugo (2021). This is in tandem with Bowan and Willis (2003) who noted that citizen journalism involves citizens playing active role in the process of collecting, analyzing and disseminating news and information through the social media. Every citizen who can operate the mobile phone is now a journalist as long as you can manipulate the social media and update people with the

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happening around your environment. Odey et al. (2021) opined that the growth of this type of journalism is as a result of the advancement in technology which gave birth to the internet and in return gave rise to social media that is used in communicating and getting an instant feedback. The internet has given a new platform for ordinary people outside of the journalism profession to become content creators and content users. Distance which was a barrier as it were in the case of the traditional media of communication is no more owning to the advent of the social media. The process of waiting anxiously for news to be published the next day is a thing of the past. People can get the latest news instantly as the event happens directly from their smartphones and other mobile gadgets as long as they are connected to the Internet. Before the birth of the Internet, most people will be glued in front of their television or listening to the radio to gain insight into breaking news on current issues and happenings. Now, with technology people can even share the news with others in social media platforms that make the dissemination of information becoming more pervasive Taibi and Teh Yin Na (2020).

Citizen journalism operate through social media platforms such as the Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, Snap Chat and WhatsApp with major advantage like immediacy which is capable of spreading instant information on any happening issues of the day in any part of the world being it fake or real. People are shifting towards the online platform as their medium of choice for expedient reading and immediate information in politics, entertainment, business health news etc. Kirby-Petruccio (2017) expressed that with constant notifications being sent to phones and trending topics on Twitter and Facebook, digital users of today can now be up-to-date with issues elsewhere in the world within a matter of seconds. Breaking news is posted as soon as the news occurred with instant reactions from the people in the comment section which allow the people to air their opinion on the issue. Odey et al. (2021) argued that the essence of journalism is truth-telling, be it bad, good, pleasant or unpleasant, to the parties involved and It must be told objectively and accurately. Truth telling which is a watch word for professional news writers and reporters has lost its place in the digital world with dissemination of information quickly on Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, Snap Chat and WhatsApp. The social media which is just a data and a click away has become an easy tool being used by citizen journalists to practice unethical journalism. For instance, the drinking and bathing with salt in 2013 during the spread of ebula disease and the false story of the death of President Muhammadu Buhari and his supposed replacement by a Sudanese Clone, in December, 2018 spread like wildfire on Facebook. The question is should citizen journalism be stopped to curb the misconception and prejudices surrounding it based on its growing effect in the society? This study aims to tackle the misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The social media age has produced a culture whereby everyone could now, in some form, be journalists in their own right. Citizen journalism has and still is growing to become increasingly prominent in contemporary media, further redefining the traditional journalistic roles, values and practices. The internet with the ability to access news and information with just a click, is raising concerns among professional journalist that citizen journalism will come to replace professional and mainstream journalism. Especially in this current digital information age, the influence of citizen generated news on society is gaining wave daily as result of the interactive nature of social media that is the major for citizen journalists. It has already been noted that citizen journalism offers professional and non-professional journalists alike opportunities to be active participants in news content creation However, in most cases, citizen journalists are not trained and may lack the understanding of the rigors and ethics involved in reporting news or basic rules of journalist practice. The social media is currently experiencing a high wave of false, misleading, and inciting information with direct harm to the society. Citizen journalism as a subset of the mass media has little or no external government control of the information being publish since has no room for gate keeping as such, information gets to the members of public, who are directly involved in content creation, raw, 'naked' and undiluted. In view of the aforementioned consequences, this study seeks to examine ways of tackling the misconception and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism.

Objectives of the Study

This study therefore seeks to:

- To examine the various misconceptions and prejudices that give rise to ethical concerns about citizen journalism practice in Nigeria.
- To find out the legal concerns about citizen journalism practice in Nigeria.
- To find out ways of tackling misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism practice in Nigeria.

1.2. Research Questions

- What are the various misconceptions and prejudices that give rise to ethical concerns about citizen journalism practice in Nigeria?
- What are the legal concerns about citizen journalism practice in Nigeria?
- What are the ways of tackling misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism practice in Nigeria?

2. Literature Review

Citizen Journalism is a journalistic practice that allows citizens to collect, process, analyses and disseminate information or news to the public through the use of technological device like the internet and the social media. It is the process by which public citizens play active role in collecting, processing, analyzing and dissemination of news and information. It is a journalistic practice that allow the ordinary people with new media technology such as social networking, media-sharing website and smartphone to become main content creators and distributors of news. This kind of journalism can be done by anyone who owns a smartphone and can manipulate the social media. This is in positon with Bowman and Willis (2003) view that this brand of journalism as "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information.

Mark Glaser (2006), a freelance journalist, explains that: The idea behind citizen journalism is that people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others. For example, you might write about a city council meeting on your blog or in an online forum. Or you could fact-check a newspaper article from the mainstream media and point out factual errors or bias on your blog. Or you might snap a digital photo of a newsworthy event happening in your town and post it online. Or you might videotape a similar event and post it on a site such as YouTube. All these might be considered acts of journalism, even if they don't go beyond simple observation at the scene of an important event.

2.1. Pros and Cons of Citizen Journalism

Apeh and Didiugwu (2017) state that Citizen journalism has been trailed by mixed reactions over the years. While some commentators have spoken so glowingly about the benefits of this brand of journalism, others have almost over-emphasized its downsides. There is, therefore, a need to strike a balance through a dispassionate assessment of the pros and the cons of citizen journalism.

It has already been noted that citizen journalism offers professional and non-professional journalists alike opportunities to be active participants in news content creation. Members of the public are no longer passive consumers of news, they are now active creators of content.

Citizen journalism has broken the hitherto seemingly endless monopoly of the mainstream media. As such, journalism is today democratic and participatory. It allows for even participation of all people without any limitation as long you have a smart that can connect the internet.

According to Educause Learning Initiative (2007), by granting access to just anyone to cover the news, citizen journalism presents a more personal, nuanced view of events and has the potential to cultivate communities of people with a common interest. Through blogs, citizen journalists have broken stories about political corruption, police brutality, and other issues of concern to local and national communities.

Another rather amazing benefit of citizen journalism is it instantaneous delivering of news almost at the speed of lightning which has surpassed the immediacy of the broadcast media (radio and television). Citizen journalism, via the social media, spreads news like wild wildfire just in split seconds, apparently because the news does not need to wait for any editor to process it. Feedback is also immediate. The audience has the opportunity to react to the news instantly, and even add to the content. Irrespective of the aforementioned pros of citizen journalism, it has cons. One of such is the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation that is capable of bring uprising to the society.

It has way of spreading falsehood and other unethical practices in the name of journalism.

Potential false news reports are just one of the many possible ramifications of sourcing news from anonymous sources. Most times news stories from citizen journalist lack objectivity, impartiality and balance.

Application of gatekeeping which is a process of verification and checks to weed out any inaccuracies and biases is not obtainable in citizen journalism.

Gate keeping, that is an ethical practice in the mainstream journalism carried out by experienced and trained journalists and editors, using tools and skills like knowledge of the law is not allow in citizen journalism

2.2. Prejudices Surrounding Citizen Journalism

Prejudices involves exploitative manipulation of the language and conventions of news categories that are fraudulent and capable of bring instability in the society publish on social media by citizen journalist who lack professional training of journalistic practice. Here, information that is misleading and misinforming capable of bring uprising to the society are publish by untrained journalist without minding the devastating effect in the society.

According to UNESCO (2018), disinformation is generally used to refer to deliberate (often orchestrated) attempts to confuse or manipulate people through delivering dishonest information to them. This is often combined with parallel and intersecting communications strategies and a suite of other tactics like hacking or compromising of persons. Misinformation is generally used to refer to misleading information created or disseminated without manipulative or malicious intent. Both are problems for society, but disinformation is particularly dangerous because it is frequently organized, well resourced, and reinforced by automated technology. Misinformation are mostly consuming as a results of the easy ways in accessing the public sphere by people who cannot afford to pay for quality journalism, or who lack access to independent public service news media, are vulnerable to both disinformation and misinformation. The spread of disinformation and misinformation is made possible largely through social networks and social messaging, which begs the question of the extent of regulation and self-regulation of companies providing these services UNESCO (2018). The internet that is readily available for use by citizen journalist is taking advantage of the vulnerable in spreading fake news through the social media. The impact of disinformation and misinformation on the public especially during elections can be very devastating as politicians use misleading information to opposed their opponent in winning the attention of the masses for their political interest not minding the harm or the effect of this malicious information to the society. What disinformation seeks, particularly during a poll, is not necessarily a concern to the politicians, all they want is to convince the public to believe that their content is true as to enable them achieve their goal or impact on agenda that can weaken the people's voting choices.

2.3. Triggers of Misconceptions and Prejudices in Citizen Journalism Practice

Sentimental Attachment to Issues: the tendency to portray emotional attachment to issues during content conception occasioned by the leeway of User Generated Content (UGC). It provides comfort and remind you of the past of how thing once were. It triggers the past feelings while at present and build you for the future. It is bond to something which you depend on for everything. Citizens that are so attach to certain issues that they bond with can use the social media in publishing wrong misleading information without considering it implication to the society. This is in tandem with Janine Cohen (2010) view that journalism is not a science and cannot be objective in the same systematic sense because it relies on value judgements.

Specific Political, Cultural and Economic Interest: political interest is another remote cause of prejudices in citizen journalism. Most times they tend to propagate certain political interest or economic interest by making citizen journalists to align with politicians, interest of those they will want to gain favor from, most times make them to be very toxic information dissemination. Cultural stereotypes, some people believe that some culture are not actually strong, cultural superiority are some of the causes that make citizen journalists believes that they have the right to publish whatever they like not minding the implications to the society. For instance, hate speech which is an ethical consideration in the mainstream journalism could be used by citizen journalist on issue of particular culture or individuals without minding the implication since they know that there is no legal law to regulate their activities.

Ignorance and Poor Media Knowledge: lack of knowledge or training can make people believe any kind of information that comes their way. Lack of awareness or a commonly held belief that is later found to be in error can also be perceived as ignorance. Citizen journalists who have no knowledge of the ethics of journalism can publish unedited news and information which consume by some time the literate and no literate. For the instance the issue of bathing and drinking of salt in 2013 during the Ebula outbreak in Nigeria. The information was disseminated through the social media and was consumed by many Nigerians as a result of ignorance.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The study anchored on two theories of communication to drive the work, the public sphere postulation and technological determinism theory.

The Public Sphere is a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space. The public sphere is an area in social life where people can get together and freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. In its ideal form, the public sphere is "made up of people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (Habermas, 1991, p.176). Harbermas's work actually relies on a description of a historical moment during the 17th and 18th centuries when coffee houses, societies and salons became the centers of debate, and extends this to an ideal of participation in the public sphere today. Through acts of assembly and dialogue, the public sphere generates opinions and attitudes which serve to affirm or challenge - therefore, to guide - the affairs of state. In ideal terms, the public sphere is the source of public opinion needed to.

The public sphere mediates between the "private sphere" and the "Sphere of Public Authority" (Habermas, 1991). The private sphere comprises civil society in the narrower sense whereas the Sphere of Public Authority deals with the State, or realm of the police, and the ruling class. The public sphere crosses over both these realms and through the vehicle of public opinion, it puts the state in touch with the needs of society. This area is conceptually distinct from the state: it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state (Habermas, 1991). The people themselves came to see the public sphere as a regulatory institution against the authority of the state. The basic belief in public sphere theory is that political action is steered by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere.

2.5. Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism theory is a particular technical developments communications technology, media or most broadly, technology in general are the sole causes of changes in society as technology is seen as the fundamental condition in shaping the pattern of citizen journalism and the social media Interaction. Technology determinism is believed to have originated from Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) an American sociologist and economist Odey at el. (2021). In the same vein, Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) assert that technology determinism theory was propounded by Everest Rogers in 1986.

Muhammad (2018) noted that technological determinism is a reductionist theory that presumes that a society's technology drives the development of its social structure and cultural valves. He further assert that the bearing of the theory stems from the fact that the internet as a technological development has enhanced social media use which is making dramatic influences with great effect on societies. Changes from one technological generation to another has shapes how individuals in a society thinks, feel, act as well as society behaviour.

According Odey at el. (2021), Technological determinists interpret technology in general and communications technologies in particular as a basis of society in the past, present and ever the future. Thus the integration of technologies such as audio, visual, and print into a digital form 'changed society'. In its most extreme form, the entire form society is seen as being determined by technology: new technology transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals. The theory form major in the society through the social media as one of its assumptions is that technology of a given society is a fundamental influencer of the various ways in which society exists. Relating the theory to this study, indicates that developments in technology which has certain unhindered access to the internet has embolden citizen journalistic practice through the social media interactivities and instant feedback characterized by the internet. while the theory of the public sphere as used in this study indicates that social media world which is imaginary community or an area in social life where people can get together and freely discuss and identify societal problems are used by citizen journalist for publication of news and information.

3. Material and method

This study adopted survey method of research with an in-depth interview as an instrument for data collection. Interview was conducted with four journalists, three working in the mainstream news organizations and one, working in an online news portal in Nigerian. Interview was used as an instrument for data collection because it allows respondents to express themselves from different perspectives on the issue. All respondents have vast experience in journalism, both in the traditional newsroom and online news portal. Explanatory building technique was used for the analyze. The study of journalism, whether citizen-based or mainstream news, involves media and society, both of which often go hand-in-hand Taibi and Teh Yin Na (2020).

They further notes that the correlation between media and social beings requires that an in-depth nature of research be carried out to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon to be explored. The study tackling the misconception and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism could be looked into far beyond its surface level through survey methods. A survey approach to conducting social science research is particularly good as it addresses research questions that require a more detailed explanation or understanding of social phenomena and their contexts (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Data was collected using an in-depth interview with four journalists, with three working in the mainstream media. Interviews have a long and rich history as a methodological tool for better sense-making of social actors, drawing out the rhetorical construction of their experiences and perspectives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002 as cited in Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010).

4. Results and discussion

As mentioned earlier, data was collected from four respondents from four different professional journalists. Three of the journalists work in the mainstream news industry whereas one respondent works for an online news portal but with some years of experience working in the print media. Two of the respondents have over 20 years of experience working in the mainstream media and hold the post of chief editors in their respective organizations. Another respondent has been working in the mainstream media for 18 years and the remaining one respondents had started their career as journalists in their current respective organizations for a total of 5 years. The respondents fall between the ages range of 30 and 55. All respondents possess a higher education background in journalism, with one having completed a Doctor of Philosophy in Journalism, two had a Bachelor's Degree in Communication, one respondent with a Bachelor's Masters in Public Relations. From the interview with the respondents, so many issues were raised on the misconception and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism as well as proffering solution in tackling these misconceptions.

4.1. What are the Various Misconceptions and Prejudices that Give Rise to Ethical Concern about Citizen Journalism Practice?

4.1.1. Respondent 1

Generally, citizen journalist in the lay definition should be seen as the type of journalism practice undertaken by a common citizen or normal citizen that are not train journalist in the journalism profession. The internet has given room to untrained journalists to copy pest, create and share content. Today we have the Sahara Reporters as high breed citizen journalists. The train journalist doesn't consider news from citizen journalists as news because some of the news stories from citizen journalists lack credibility which is one of the ethical concerns. Ethical concerns are those ethical guidelines that professional or train journalist need to adopt in his professional practice. Citizen journalists most times, their source is not always credible as such they spread misinformation, disinformation and false news because they share everything without minding the implications to the society. Accuracy is another ethical issue in citizen because they are copy card. They copy information anywhere without source credibility. This is in tandem with respondent 2 view that citizen journalists believe that they have the power to generate contents using the social media platforms such as twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, because it gives them lead way feel that they are in charge of the information architecture. He ascertains that these prejudices make them feel that they know everything about journalism and as such, whatever they post should be right. Respondent 2 went further to state what give rise to these misconceptions as follow:

- Poor or lack of training- most of them lack journalism training and they know nothing about the subject matter.
- Lack of knowledge about background information on a given issue- they don't treat issues deeply the way they come; so, they misconceive that since it is about citizen journalism, they have an authoritative knowledge. So, such issues actually embolden them to send information the way they like on the social media space. That is why it has given a lot of people misconceptions < Sentimental attachment to various issues and the believe that they know it all with the tendency of manipulating stories to harass the interest of their viewers.

The various misconceptions surrounding citizen journalism which berths ethical concerns is the seeming compromise of objectivity, which is the hallmark of journalism.

According to Respondent 3, lack of prerequisite training and knowledge about the profession by perpetrators is the reason for dissemination of misinformation and disinformation capable of causing civil unrest in the society which agreed with the assertion of respondent 1 in his view that citizen journalism is the type of journalism practice undertaken by a common citizen or normal citizen that are not train journalist in the journalism profession.

Respondent 4 said Lack of medium credibility is also an ethical concern that give rise to prejudice and misconception of citizen journalism. Citizen journalist create and share content using social media platforms that cannot be verify which make it difficult to trace the source of the information which as well agreed with respondent two view that citizen journalists news or information lack source credibility.

4.2. What are the Legal Concerns About Citizen Journalism Practice in Nigeria?

According to respondent 1, The misconception intends of legal angle is that citizen journalists practice is not back with any legal provision that will guide the practice of the profession and that no punishment is spelt out for defaulters. Citizen journalists are not censor that is why they can easily flag public confidentiality, tell lies and attribute information to certain persons, certain items and call names that are not actually accurate without source credibility.

In reacting to this, respondent two said that the practice of citizen journalism is toxic in the social media environment and in Nigeria environment since there is no legal law that regulate the activities of citizen journalists. According to respondent two, when toxic issues are publish in the social media, a lot of people tend to react, most time citizen journalist publish this toxic news or information to harass interest of the public because in journalism, bad news is news and when they bring up this toxic issues that they have no background knowledge about, they intend to gain more popularity. They engaged in things that are not balanced and publish things that are not meant for the public consumption using the internet and their social media space since there are no stated law to regulate their activities.

4.3. How Do You Think These Misconceptions and Prejudices Can Be Tackle?

According to the second respondent, the first step in tackling this misconception and prejudices is that they should be a regulation and that citizen journalists should ensure they stick to the rules of engagement. There should be a central hub where information can be stored once they are sent to be check before it gets to the public. This can be man by train professional or a software that should be develop to ensure that once information is sent to a particular social media space, it stay there for a while after which it will be given the green flag to go out on the social media space but if it is not approved, it should be given a red flag and be kill off. They should be artificial intelligence to control information or news publish by citizen journalists. Government should ensure social media mining activities are censor through effective collaboration with internet service providers that can monitor activities of citizen journalists online. Citizen journalists should be license by Nigeria press council to operate. Punishment should be stated for publishing anyone whose publication can result to civil unrest or instability in the society. Also, constant training should be given to this citizen journalist to ensure that their news treatment is advance towards objectivity rather than opinion tic aspects of presenting information to avoid being bias. The first respondent agreed with the second when he assert that in tackling the misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism, government or media professional should work towards the institutionalization of citizen journalism. institutionalization of citizen journalists is that citizen journalists should be register before they are allow to practice and share information to the public and should work in collaboration with the traditional journalists. There should be legal provision and censorship to guide the practice of citizen journalism. The third respondent in his view says misconception and prejudice surrounding citizen journalism practice is stemmed out of it ability to incite and fuel unnecessary violence in the society. He further stated that in tackling these misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism, the following issues should be consider:

Sensitization of the public on the dangers of giving in to uncertified news platforms with no proven integrity, prosecuting perpetrators of citizen journalism, finding possible ways of identifying news platforms and reports which are cooked and handiwork of mischief makers, strengthening the journalism ethical codes to help set standard for professionals. The use of censorship to regulate citizen journalism platforms. This is in tandem with the view of first respondent when he opines citizen journalists should be register before they are allow to practice and share information to the public and should work in collaboration with the traditional journalists.

5. Conclusion

Citizen journalism is a journalistic practice that allows citizens to collect, process, analyses and disseminate information or news to the public through the use of technological device like the internet and the social media. The growth of this form journalism is tied to the proliferation of social media platform and the obvious speedy growth of technology in today's world that has contributed to all areas of human existence. citizen journalism is practice by untrained journalist without knowledge of ethical guidelines that professional or train journalist need to adopt in their professional practice. Citizen journalists most times, their source is not always credible as such they spread misinformation, disinformation and false news capable of bring civil unrest because they share everything without minding the implications to the society.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations was make:

- Government should ensure social media mining activities are censor through effective collaboration with internet service providers that can monitor activities of citizen journalists online.
- Punishment should be stated for defaulters whose publication can result to civil unrest or instability in the society
- Legal provision to guide the practice of citizen journalism, use of artificial intelligence to control information or news publish by citizen journalists, training of citizen journalists among others will help to tackle the misconceptions and prejudices surrounding citizen journalism.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the kind contributions of the anonymous scholars who peer-reviewed this article.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors attest and confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest in the authorship of this article.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in this study.

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