

Evaluation of the Credibility of Citizen Journalism: A Case Study of Nairaland.Com

Blessing Udo Edward

Department of Mass Communication, Heritage Polytechnic, Eket, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The study assessed the view of the audience on the news credibility of citizen journalism using nairaland.com as a case study. The researcher focused on series of objectives such as understanding the extent of changes in audience interests for mainstream news with the advent of citizen journalism and discovering the yardsticks by which the audience measures news credibility of online media such as nairaland.com. Source credibility theory was used, while survey research method was adopted in the study. Simple frequency and percentage table was used to present and analyze results of the study. The study made several findings among which is that people patronize both main stream and online media and that the presence of online news media have given the people more access to news. Hence, the study recommended that online news media and indeed all media of communication should adhere to the ethics and laws of journalism in order to ensure credibility.

Keywords: Citizen Journalism, Digitization, Media, Credibility, Nairaland.com

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of new media has made it possible for all forms of information to converge in digital domain, thereby enhancing communication convenience. [1] states "new media are forms of media that are native to computers or rely on computer related gadgets for information distribution. Information from this source is usually interactive, digital borderless and audience created. Different new media such as internet, blog sites online newspapers etc has given new direction to today's Journalism by making information readily available and accessible. [2] observes that "the web had lived from the older model of static pages, towards a means of enabling a wide range of goals to be achieved through networked software services." Until 1980s, media relied primarily upon print and analog broadcast models, but the media have since then witnessed transformation that are predicated upon the use of digital technologies, such as internet and video games [3]. The coming of World Wide Web (www) in 1990 is a practical example. Since its birth, new face was given to newspaper stories as it aided people to meet, discuss teach, learn and share information on any subject matter. [4] says "this has allowed the user to be a sender, receiver and a narrow caster in a

bi-directional or multi-directional flow of information". The internet is the largest computer network in the world and can be used for teaching and for sharing information. [5] observes that "the internet provides the technical capability for a user to read an article, examine its sources and interact through a natural conduit that other media do not provide." [6] adds that "the emergence of digital technologies such as internet signals a potentially radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and resources. But [7] suggests "we are witnessing the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication." He went further to point out that new media such as internet will "alter geographical distance, allow for increase in the volume of communication, increase speed of communication, provide interactive communication and allow forms communication that were previously separated to over-lap. For this, [8] state, "internet provides the potential for a democratic postmodern public sphere in which citizens can participate in well informed, non-hierarchical debate

pertaining to their social structures.” The above points are showing that the coming of internet has brought unimaginable transformation in virtually all works of life. Newspaper industry is however, not exceptions.

The advent of internet has brought changes in sourcing, packaging and circulation of newspapers [9] state “the internet breaks down the geographical boundary that previously defined the newspaper industry, issues of leadership and revenue in comparative texts” Different internet connection platform such as social media has made it possible for people to be a producer and receiver of information. Different blog sites exist, Facebook exists, twitter, YouTube are all existing. Through them, people can send and receive information at a cheap and fast rate. [10] pointed that this has led to a gradual decline in the readership of the printed edition. He continued “online journalism is changing the traditional role of the reporter and editor with advance technology. The world wide web and the internet have obtained the power to establish a specific agenda for the rest of the media and public”. Transmission of information freely and rapidly has been made possible as a result of advent of internet and new media. [11] state “The fourth kind of journalism next to radio, television and print is online journalism, seen as gathering and distributing news content on the internet”. But the presence of web and digitization has made online journalism even first before other kinds of journalism identified.

Online journalism has come to become the contemporary phase of journalism where lengthy interviews can be published in whole. Noteworthy is the fact that space constraints usually hamper full publication of lengthy interview (word, audio and video) in mainstream journalism. This has been replaced by online journalism as audio and video files of interviews can be uploaded onto news site. In the world of media, two different people exist- the news producers and news consumers. These different people have interests which are working hand in hand. The

media who are the producer of news have interest to get the happenings around to the knowing of the public, and the interest of the public who are the consumer of news is to know the happenings around them. This has placed the media and the public with possession of different power. The media respect the power of the public as news consumers and the public respect the power of the media as the news producers. The respect is built on the fact that the media cannot produce and consume news stories and the public cannot be the consumers and producers of news stories. But [2] add “as a result of change in the world of media, power is shifting from the people who produce the news, be they journalists or bloggers, to the people who consume it”. However, the purpose at which audience seek information varies from individual to individual. Some audience seeks information for comfort, knowledge, and empowerment. This was why the uses and gratification theory states that people put specific media and media content to specific use in the hope of having some specific need or set of needs gratified [10]. As a result of this, the audiences have begun making choice of media and their contents based on factors that will gratify their needs. These factors include accessibility, credibility, news source and others, coupled with the present trend where the audience is sometimes both the producer and consumers of news contents, the question of credibility has risen. Citizen journalism has been criticized mostly from professional journalists for lacking some journalistic qualities (credibility inclusive). This paper examined the credibility of citizen journalism with special focus on Nairaland.com.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted credibility theory. The theory posits that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source present itself as credible. [4] add that “the perceived credibility of a source determines how the audience will react to the message. The credibility of all communication, regardless of format, has been found to be heavily influenced by

Edward

the perceived credibility of that source. [7] state “source credibility theory is based on the assumption that high credibility source will produce more usage of a medium”.

Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism is an online news production, usually by ordinary citizens who have no formal journalistic training. It could also be produced by journalist with formal journalism training. What makes this kind of journalism different from mainstream journalism is that it involves nonprofessional, user-generated news gathering and dissemination practices [1]. The advent of citizen journalism has brought into practice, members of the public taking active role in news gathering, analysis and dissemination. This trend has made it difficult to differentiate journalist and a blogger. [4] adds “Our media ecology has become a chaotic landscape, evolving at a furious pace. Professional journalists now share the journalists sphere with tweeters, bloggers, citizen journalist and social media users”. However, the practice of citizen journalism has recorded a tremendous success both in generating quality news and in attracting stream of users. Citizen journalism has made it possible for people without professional journalism training to use the tools of modern technology to create augment and check media on their own or in collaboration with others [9]. [8] observes that when the people, formally known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that is citizen journalism. New media technologies, such as social networking and media-sharing websites, in addition to the increasing prevalence of cellular telephones, have made citizen journalism more accessible to people worldwide. Due to the availability of technology, citizen often can report breaking news more quickly than traditional media reporters. But [5] states “citizen journalism is not only driven by technology but is also embedded in social structure” As such, institutional support for democracy can easily translate into enhanced form of citizen journalism”.

www.iaajournals.org

Citizen journalism as a form of alternative media, presents a radical challenge to the professionalized and institutionalized practice of the mainstream media. That was why [11] states “citizen journalism is thus aimed at de-institutionalizing and de-professionalizing the practice of journalism”. The contemporary citizen journalist movement emerged after journalists began to question the predictability of their coverage of events. Those journalists became part of the public, or civic journalism movement which sought to counter the erosion of trust in the news media and the widespread disillusionment with politics and civic affairs [6]. Initially, discussions of public journalism focused on promoting journalism that was for the people, by changing the way professional did their work. With today’s technology, the citizen journalist movement has found new life as the average person can capture news and distribute it globally. However, citizen journalism is criticized for lack of objectivity. It was the view of many traditional journalists that citizen journalism lacks the training to understand the ethics involved in reporting news. Other professional journalists and some news organizations claim that citizen journalism is unregulated, too subjective, amateur and haphazard in quality and coverage.

Credibility

Credibility has to do with trustworthiness and reliability of something. For anything to be credible, such a thing must be true which makes it reliable and trustworthy. [10] observe that credibility comprises the objective and subjective components of the believability of a source or message. In their words “credibility has two key components trust worthiness and expertise, which both have objective and subjective component. Trustworthiness is based more on subjective factors, but can include objective measurements such as established reality. Expertise can be similarly subjectively perceived, but also include relatively objective characteristics of the source or message”. The point here is that credibility does not exist on its

own, but dependent upon some factors. People who are popular and expert are usually believed to be credible than unpopular and amateur. That is to say that credibility is concerned with believability, accuracy and completeness of information. People tend to agree with information when it is seen as complete and accurate.

The media carry credibility as the first and number one obligation. Any media organization or journalist that lost honesty has lost it all. That is why [11] state "credibility is tied to reputation as it affect utilization and circulation of a medium". The media form that is seen as more credible enjoys better circulation and patronage from the audience. A study conducted by Pew Research Centre for the people and the press found that major news organization is losing credibility. [3] identify that the loss of confidence in traditional news outlets by the audience cause them (the audience) to

METHODOLOGY

This paper used survey method in the study. The study was conducted in Abakaliki Capital Territory. A total of three hundred and fifty (350) respondents

place expectation on the internet as a rescue to the situation. The wide spread use of the internet has helped motivate journalists to become more credible. The reason for this is that the competition of providing news increased when the consumers had the chance and ability to choose the media that they consume through online source. The internet has provided a chance for anyone to report news. In order to increase credibility and therefore increase readers of their articles, journalists should be objective, accurate, trustworthy and reliable. [7] add "the internet raises the issue of accuracy, reliability and adequacy of information and that news push on the internet may not be check carefully as a result of the need to speedily push the information on the internet. But [5] observes that people have been exposed to searching for and making decision based upon information from various sources even before the advent of the internet.

were drawn as sample size for the study. Thus, 350 questionnaires were distributed out of which 345 copies were returned.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Table 1: Evaluation of the rate at which the respondents get news update.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Regular	315	91.3%
Rare	30	9%
Never	-	-
Total	345	100%

Table 1 sought to find the rate at which the respondents get news update about what is happening around them. 91%

representing majority of the respondents attested that they receive news update on regular basis, 9% said they did not.

Table 2: Determining whether the respondents get news update from Naij .com.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	238	69%
No	107	31%
Total	345	100%

Table 2 shows that 238 respondents signifying majority said they have access and get news update from nairaland.com,

while 107 representing 31% of the respondents said they do not have access to nairaland.com.

Table 3: Information on whether the audience still patronizes mainstream print media with the advent of online newspapers

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	293	85%
No	52	15%
Total	345	100%

The data in the above table show the distribution of information on whether respondents still patronize mainstream print media with the advent of online newspapers. Out of the 345 respondents that were engaged, 293 representing 85% of the respondents agreed that

mainstream print media still enjoy their readership, while 52 representing 15% of the respondents said they no longer patronize print newspaper. This shows that majority of the respondents still patronize print media.

Table 4: Assessment of whether the respondents now get more information from online news media like nairaland.com

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	203	59%
No	142	41%
Total	345	100%

The table shows that 203, representing 59% of the respondents said they have more information with online news media such nairaland.com, while 142,

representing 41% of the respondents disagreed. This means that majority of the respondents get more information from online news media.

Table 5: Respondents' credibility rating of Nairaland.com

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	65	19%
High	116	37%
Average	97	28%
Low	53	15%
Very low	14	4%
Total	345	100%

Data in Table 5 indicates that 65 respondents, representing 19% rated Nairaland.com very high in terms of credibility, 116 of the respondents representing 37% rated it high, 97 respondents, representing 28% rated it on

the average, 53 respondents standing for 15% rated it low and 14 respondents representing 4% rated Nairaland.com very low. This means that the credibility of Nairaland.com is high as greater number of the respondents attested to it.

CONCLUSION

With a click, information of all sorts can pop out of the internet, but the case of credibility of the information from the web has been an issue of concern. Many have argued that the internet has kept raising the issue of reliability and accuracy of information. Often, information published on the internet are released in haste which makes fact check impossible. This singular fact has kept the question of credibility of information on the internet rising. It follows that people should evaluate information on the internet, checking the source to be

able to determine its credibility. Owing to the increasing challenge of source credibility in online publication, information providers online now use a number of different methods to make the information they provide seem convincing and trust worthy. These they do by engaging in linkage to reputable sources, building a good reputation, attribution of sources and the like. Meanwhile, the study found among other things that even with the advent of online newspaper, people still patronize mainstream newspapers but that the

Edward coming of online newspaper has increased the sources of information. News from Nairaland.com was also discovered by the study to be highly credible. Based on these findings, the

www.iaajournals.org study recommends thusNairaland.com should employ all the rules and regulations and code of ethics of journalism so as to ensure credible.

REFERENCES

1. Anaeto, S. and Anaeto, M. (2010). *Development Communication: Principles and Practice*. Ibadan. Stirling-horden publishers Ltd.
2. Atton, C. (2003). What is "Alternative Journalism"? *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* 41(3); 267-400.
3. Baase, S. (2008). *A Gift of Fire: Social, Legal and Ethical Issues for Computing and The Internet* (3rd Ed) Prentice Hall.
4. Banda, F. (2010). *Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa. An exploratory study*. Highway Africa: south Africa
5. Baren, S. J. and Davis, D. K. (2009). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundation, Ferment And Future* (5th Ed) New York: Wadsworth Engage Learning
6. Chadwick, A. (2009). *Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Information Exuberance*. *A journal of Law and Policy for Information Society*; 5(1), 9-24
7. Chu, S. and kamal, S. (2008). *The effect of Perceived Blogger Credibility and Argument Quality on Message*.
8. Comas, E. (2004). *The challenges of Internet Development in Nigeria Rural Communities*. *Journal of the Theatre and Communication Studies*, 4(2).
9. Dominick, J. R. and Wimmer, R. G. (2006). *Mass media research: an Introduction* (8th ed.) Canada. Thomson Wandworth.
10. Flanagin, K. L. and Metzger, G. E. (2008). *Digital Media and Youth. Unparallel Opportunity and Unprecedented Responsibility*. Cambridge, the MIT press.
11. Flew, T. (2005). *New Media: An Introduction*, South Melbourne, V K, New York: Oxford University Press.