



The Influence of Social Media on Citizen Journalism and Its Impact on Mainstream News Credibility in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of social media on citizen journalism and the credibility of mainstream news outlets in Nigeria. It explores how social media affects the news consumption habits of Nigerian youth, the influence of citizen journalism on news credibility, and the relationship between social media engagement and perceived credibility. The study also identifies the most trusted and distrusted social media platforms for news. Data was collected through an online survey of 340 Nigerian social media users, focusing on social media use for news, trust in citizen journalism versus traditional media, and news source credibility. The findings reveal a significant shift toward social media in shaping youth news preferences, with citizen journalism seen as more reliable, affecting the credibility of mainstream media. The study recommends enhancing media literacy initiatives among Nigerian youth to improve critical thinking and fact-checking skills. It contributes to the discourse on the evolving media landscape in Nigeria, highlighting the role of social media and citizen journalism in shaping public perception of news credibility.

Keywords: Social media; Citizen journalism; News credibility; Mainstream media; Nigeria; Youth; Pearson correlation; Spearman correlation

INTRODUCTION

The advent of citizen journalism has revolutionized how news is created, distributed, and consumed, with social media platforms playing a pivotal role in this transformation. Citizen journalism refers to the reporting of news by non-professionals, often through platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, where ordinary individuals contribute to the dissemination of news and information. This democratization of news has empowered individuals to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, creating a more participatory media environment. Social media platforms, in particular, have accelerated this shift, allowing for real-time news sharing, live reporting from the scene, and diverse viewpoints that might not be covered by mainstream outlets.

In countries like Nigeria, where traditional media faces challenges such as political interference, limited resources, and sometimes government censorship, citizen journalism has become a critical alternative. Social media allows Nigerians, particularly those in rural and marginalized regions, to access

news that is often unavailable or distorted by mainstream outlets. This is especially important in a media environment where bias and corruption can skew news coverage. However, despite its potential to provide alternative narratives, citizen journalism also raises significant concerns about the credibility and accuracy of news, as social media is often unregulated, leading to the proliferation of misinformation.

The impact of citizen journalism on the credibility of mainstream news outlets has been the subject of much debate. On the one hand, some scholars argue that citizen journalism enhances media pluralism by offering a broader range of perspectives and holding traditional media accountable [1]. This perspective suggests that citizen journalism can act as a check on the mainstream media, providing alternative viewpoints that are often underrepresented. On the other hand, the lack of editorial oversight and regulation on social media platforms allows misinformation, sensationalism, and political propaganda to spread easily, undermining the credibility of news. This is especially concerning in countries like Nigeria, where

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misinformation has the potential to exacerbate political and social divisions.

The shift toward social media as a dominant news source is particularly pronounced among younger populations, who are the primary users of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Research has shown that youth are more likely to consume news *via* social media than through traditional media outlets, and they tend to trust social media more than established news sources. This generational shift poses a unique challenge to traditional journalism, as younger audiences may begin to perceive mainstream media as less trustworthy, leading to a decline in its overall credibility.

To understand the dynamics between social media, citizen journalism, and news credibility, this study utilizes the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that individuals actively seek media that fulfills specific needs, such as information, entertainment, and social interaction. Applying UGT to the Nigerian context helps to explore how youth engage with social media for news, the perceived credibility of these platforms, and their trust in traditional news outlets. UGT suggests that trust in media is influenced by how well the media satisfies personal needs, such as providing reliable information or offering emotional connection through peer interactions [2]. In the case of Nigerian youth, their increasing reliance on social media for news raises important questions about how their engagement with citizen journalism influences their perceptions of the credibility of mainstream media.

The objectives of this study are to examine the influence of social media on the news consumption habits of Nigerian youth, assess the impact of citizen journalism on mainstream news credibility, and identify the most trusted and distrusted social media platforms for news consumption. This research aims to fill a gap in the literature by providing insights into how Nigerian youth's media habits shape their trust in traditional journalism. Through this exploration, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on media credibility, particularly in the context of Nigeria's rapidly evolving digital media landscape.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative survey design to examine the impact of social media on citizen journalism and its influence on the credibility of mainstream media among Nigerian youth. A survey approach is particularly useful for gathering numerical data from a large sample, facilitating statistical analysis to identify patterns and relationships between social media usage, trust in citizen journalism, and perceptions of news credibility. The study utilizes a deductive research approach, testing hypotheses based on established theories about media consumption and credibility. This methodology is designed to provide reliable, generalizable results regarding how social media influences the news consumption behaviors of Nigerian youth.

Study design

This study utilizes a quantitative survey design, which is an appropriate choice for collecting numerical data from a large sample. Survey research enables the examination of social media

use and its influence on citizen journalism and the credibility of mainstream media by capturing the perceptions and behaviors of a broad population. The survey design is particularly advantageous in this study as it provides a reliable way to collect data from a geographically diverse sample, ensuring that the results are generalizable across Nigeria. By employing a standardized approach, the survey ensures consistency in the questions posed to all participants, thus increasing the reliability of the data.

Research approach

A deductive approach was adopted for this study, which involves starting with established theories and hypotheses and testing them through empirical data collection and analysis. In this case, the study explores theories related to social media's influence on journalism and the credibility of news sources, applying these frameworks specifically within the Nigerian context. This approach is fitting for the study's aim of investigating whether increased social media use correlates with changes in the perception of news credibility, particularly when comparing citizen journalism to traditional media outlets. As Creswell suggests, deductive research is effective in exploring well-defined variables and measuring their relationships, which aligns with the focus of this study.

Quantitative research design

The research follows a quantitative design, rooted in positivism, which assumes that reality can be objectively observed and measured. This approach enables the study to quantify variables, such as the frequency of social media use and trust in different news sources, and to test hypotheses based on existing theories. Quantitative research is particularly effective in studies aiming to produce results that can be generalized to larger populations. Through structured instruments such as surveys, the study captures measurable data that can be analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and correlations. This design is ideal for testing the hypothesis that higher social media usage leads to increased trust in citizen journalism, as suggested by previous research [3].

Participants and sampling

The target population for this study consists of Nigerian youth aged 18 to 35 who are regular social media users. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that the sample represented key demographic groups, such as age, gender, and educational background, which are likely to influence media consumption behaviors. Initially, the study aimed for a sample size of 400 participants, but a total of 340 responses were collected. This sample size is adequate for statistical analysis and provides sufficient power to detect meaningful trends in the data. The sample was diverse, including participants from different regions of Nigeria, thus enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Data collection

Data was gathered through an online survey administered via Google Forms. The survey included a mixture of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items designed to capture participants' media consumption behaviors, trust in citizen journalism versus traditional media, and perceptions of news credibility. This method was chosen because it allows for efficient data collection from a large and diverse sample, and the use of Likert scales ensures that the responses are quantifiable, facilitating statistical analysis. The survey was distributed through popular social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, ensuring broad reach and accessibility to the target audience.

Procedure of data collection

The survey link was shared across various social media platforms and relevant online communities to ensure wide access. Participants voluntarily completed the survey, having been informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. The responses were automatically recorded in Google Forms, and after the survey was closed, the data was exported to Excel for cleaning and preparation [4]. The dataset was then imported into SPSS for analysis, where it was processed for inconsistencies and missing data to ensure the quality and reliability of the results.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and to identify general trends in social media usage and trust in news sources. Pearson's correlation was employed to assess the relationship between the frequency of social media use for news and perceptions of news credibility, while Spearman's rank correlation was used to analyze the relationship between trust in citizen journalism and trust in traditional media outlets. These statistical methods are appropriate for examining the strength and direction of relationships between variables, as they account for both continuous and ordinal data.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained before data collection, and all participants provided informed consent. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured, and no sensitive personal data was collected. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. This study adhered to ethical standards set forth by Babbie regarding participant rights and data privacy.

Limitations

The study's reliance on self-reported data is a limitation, as participants may have over-reported or under-reported their media consumption behaviors, which could introduce bias. Additionally, the geographic concentration of respondents in the South-West region of Nigeria may affect the generalizability

of the findings to other regions. Future research should seek to include a broader sample from various regions of Nigeria to mitigate these limitations.

The results of this study provide insights into how Nigerian youth engage with social media for news consumption and how this engagement impacts their perceptions of news credibility. Data analysis revealed several key findings, which are discussed below.

Descriptive statistics

The survey sample comprised 340 Nigerian youth, aged 18 to 35, with a balanced representation of gender (48% male, 52% female). The respondents were primarily university students (58%), followed by employed individuals (25%) and unemployed individuals (17%). Geographically, the majority were from the South-West (45%), followed by the South-East (25%), North-Central (15%), and other regions (15%).

The results revealed that social media is the dominant source of news for Nigerian youth. Over 70% of participants reported using social media daily for news consumption, with Facebook (40%) and Twitter (35%) being the most popular platforms. This trend is consistent with studies highlighting the growing role of social media in news consumption, particularly among younger populations. Additionally, 50% of participants spent at least 3 hours per day on social media for news-related purposes, emphasizing the extent to which digital platforms have become integral to news access [5].

Trust in citizen journalism vs. traditional media: The survey data indicated a significant preference for citizen journalism over traditional media. 65% of participants reported trusting citizen journalism more than mainstream media, with key reasons being the immediacy and relatability of content shared on social media platforms. This is in line with Obijiofor and McCorkle, who argue that citizen journalism is seen as more authentic and less influenced by institutional biases. In contrast, only 25% of respondents expressed trust in traditional media outlets, citing concerns about bias, sensationalism, and a lack of transparency in reporting.

These findings reflect broader global trends, where youth often perceive traditional media as less credible compared to alternative, user-generated content on social media.

Perceived credibility of news sources: Pearson's correlation analysis ($r=0.65$) revealed a moderate positive relationship between the frequency of social media use for news and trust in citizen journalism. This indicates that the more often participants used social media for news, the more likely they were to trust citizen-generated content over mainstream media. These results align with Severin and Tankard's argument that media use directly influences perceptions of credibility, with social media users generally trusting content that resonates more personally or offers diverse viewpoints [6]. Furthermore, Spearman's rank correlation showed a strong positive relationship between trust in citizen journalism and distrust of

traditional media outlets. These findings support the hypothesis that increased engagement with citizen journalism is inversely related to trust in mainstream news, as previously indicated by Okwori and Peters.

Most trusted and distrusted social media platforms: In terms of platform-specific trust, Facebook emerged as the most trusted platform for news, with 55% of respondents selecting it as their primary source of credible information. Twitter followed with 30%, while Instagram and WhatsApp garnered 15% and 10% of trust, respectively. These results corroborate previous studies, such as Wilding et al., which found that certain social media platforms are perceived as more reliable than others based on their content regulation and community engagement. Conversely, WhatsApp was one of the most distrusted platforms for news, with 40% of respondents expressing concerns about misinformation and lack of content verification. This aligns with Togunde and Wunmi, who highlighted the risks of misinformation on platforms where content is less regulated, such as WhatsApp, particularly in the context of political and social issues.

Inferential statistics

To explore the relationships between social media use and news credibility further, correlation analyses were performed. The first hypothesis, which examined the relationship between the frequency of social media use and the perceived credibility of news, was supported by Pearson's correlation ($r=0.65$). This result indicates a moderate, positive correlation between frequent social media use for news consumption and higher trust in citizen journalism. The study suggests that as social media engagement increases, so does the perception that citizen journalism is more trustworthy than traditional media outlets [7]. These findings mirror McLuhan's assertion that the medium significantly shapes perceptions of the message, particularly when the medium (social media) resonates with the audience's needs for immediacy and peer interaction.

The second hypothesis, which explored the relationship between trust in citizen journalism and distrust in traditional media outlets, was confirmed through Spearman's correlation ($r_s=0.72$). This indicates a strong association between the trust in citizen journalism and the decline in trust towards traditional media sources. The results align with Obijiofor and McCorkle, who found that citizen journalism often serves as an alternative to traditional news, offering perspectives that mainstream media might overlook or omit.

DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic profile

The study's socio-demographic profile reveals a predominantly youthful and educated population, with 52.4% of respondents aged 25-34 and 56.2% holding a Bachelor's degree. These findings align with Smith, who highlighted that younger, more educated individuals are more inclined to use digital platforms for news consumption. This can be understood through Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which asserts that higher

education enhances the ability to navigate diverse media sources, particularly digital platforms.

Influence of social media on news consumption

The study reveals that social media is the predominant source of news for Nigerian youth, with 80.3% of respondents accessing news multiple times daily. Twitter (39.4%) emerged as the most popular platform, followed by Instagram (21.2%) and Facebook (20.3%). This aligns with Newman et al., who noted that younger generations are increasingly relying on social media for real-time news consumption. Furthermore, the growing trust in social media over traditional media (40.0%) supports Castells' network society theory, where participatory culture and collective intelligence reshape information flows. However, the potential risks of echo chambers and filter bubbles remain evident, as social media's algorithmic design may limit exposure to diverse perspectives, reinforcing existing biases.

Citizen journalism and mainstream media credibility

Citizen journalism's impact on the credibility of traditional media is reflected in the fact that 34.1% of respondents view it as "somewhat reliable," with 18.2% indicating a decline in trust in traditional news outlets. This shift reflects the concept of media convergence where the rise of user-generated content challenges the authority and credibility of traditional media institutions. Giddens' notion of reflexive modernity also applies, as individuals increasingly reassess their trust in institutions, particularly in an era marked by media fragmentation. This is supported by Edelman's Trust Barometer, which highlights a global crisis of trust in traditional institutions, with audiences preferring more authentic, peer-generated content.

Social media engagement and news credibility

The study's findings show a positive relationship between social media engagement and news credibility, with 29.7% of respondents always verifying news stories on social media. This supports the information overload hypothesis, where users actively engage in fact-checking to manage the overwhelming flow of information. Rational choice theory and networked individualism provide additional insights, explaining how individuals rely more on digital networks for validation rather than institutional sources. The finding that 52.2% of respondents perceive social media news as more current but less accurate reflects cognitive load theory which posits that individuals prioritize the timeliness of news, sometimes at the expense of its credibility.

Trust and distrust in social media platforms

The study found that Twitter (46.8%) was the most trusted platform for news, while Facebook was both the most distrusted (40.3%) and the most associated with fake news (43.9%). These results reflect broader societal skepticism towards Facebook, particularly in the wake of significant misinformation scandals. The concept of technological determinism helps explain these findings, as the design and function of platforms such as Twitter

with its association with public figures and journalists likely enhance its credibility relative to other platforms.

Hypothesis one: Social media engagement and perceived news credibility

Pearson's correlation coefficient ($r=0.705$, $p<0.001$) shows a strong positive relationship between social media engagement and the frequency of news verification, confirming that increased social media use leads to more frequent checks on news credibility. This finding supports uses and gratifications theory, which posits that individuals actively engage with platforms that provide personalized content and allow for verification. As Newman et al. highlighted, younger generations are particularly cautious about the reliability of online news, which is consistent with the study's findings [8]. The role of ambient journalism further reinforces this, as social media platforms like Twitter facilitate real-time discussions and fact-checking, contributing to an ongoing dialogue about credibility.

Hypothesis two: Citizen journalism and mainstream media credibility

Spearman's correlation coefficient ($r_s=0.136$, $p=0.012$) indicates a weak but statistically significant relationship between the rise of citizen journalism and a slight decline in trust in mainstream media outlets. This supports Koliska and Chadha's view that citizen journalism complicates the authority of mainstream media, offering alternative perspectives that challenge traditional journalistic norms. Carlson also supports this view, noting that media credibility is increasingly contested in a fragmented media landscape. The decline in trust reflects a broader crisis of institutional trust, which Bauman's theory of liquid modernity helps to explain, as trust in institutions becomes more fluid in the digital age [9].

CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence of social media on citizen journalism and its impact on the credibility of mainstream news in Nigeria, focusing on the youth demographic. The findings reveal that social media has become a dominant source of news for Nigerian youth, with platforms like Twitter and Instagram playing a pivotal role in shaping their news consumption habits. The study confirms that social media significantly influences news verification behavior, with higher engagement on these platforms leading to more frequent checks for credibility. Additionally, the rise of citizen journalism has introduced new challenges for mainstream news outlets, slightly diminishing trust in traditional media among the youth.

All four research objectives have been successfully addressed:

News consumption habits: The study found that Nigerian youth are heavy users of social media for news, with the majority accessing news multiple times daily and relying on platforms like Twitter for real-time information.

Impact of citizen journalism on mainstream news credibility: The findings indicate that while citizen journalism has not completely eroded the credibility of mainstream outlets, it has

introduced a slight decrease in trust, reflecting the broader disruption caused by user-generated content.

Social media engagement and perceived news credibility: There is a clear relationship between social media engagement and news credibility, with highly engaged users more likely to verify the credibility of news stories, suggesting that social media fosters a more discerning news audience.

Trusted and distrusted platforms: Twitter emerged as the most trusted platform, while Facebook was the most distrusted, largely due to its association with misinformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for enhancing the credibility of news in Nigeria's evolving media landscape:

Media literacy initiatives: Efforts should be made to strengthen media literacy among Nigerian youth. Educational programs that teach critical thinking and fact-checking skills can empower users to better navigate the vast amounts of information available on social media. Partnerships between educational institutions and media organizations could be key in implementing these programs.

Collaboration between mainstream media and citizen journalists: Mainstream media outlets in Nigeria should consider collaborating with credible citizen journalists to enhance their reach and maintain credibility. By incorporating user-generated content in a structured and verified manner, traditional news outlets can stay relevant while ensuring the accuracy of shared information.

Fact-checking mechanisms on social media platforms: Social media platforms, particularly those with high engagement in Nigeria, like Twitter and Facebook, should enhance their fact-checking mechanisms. Platforms can implement more robust algorithms that detect and flag potential misinformation while partnering with local fact-checking organizations to ensure culturally relevant accuracy.

Diversification of news sources: To mitigate the risk of echo chambers and filter bubbles, Nigerian youth should be encouraged to diversify their news sources. Campaigns that promote the importance of accessing news from both social media and traditional outlets could foster a more balanced perspective on current events.

Improving transparency in traditional media: Mainstream news outlets should enhance transparency in their reporting processes to rebuild trust among younger audiences. This could include clearly presenting the sources of their information, providing more open channels for audience feedback, and addressing misinformation quickly when it occurs.

By implementing these recommendations, the Nigerian media landscape can evolve to better address the challenges posed by social media and citizen journalism, while maintaining the credibility of mainstream news outlets.

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