

New Media and the Rise of Citizen Journalism

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Abstract

The emergence of new media has significantly transformed the landscape of journalism and public communication across the world. With the rise of digital technologies, social networking sites, blogs, online forums, and mobile communication devices, ordinary citizens now play active roles in gathering, producing, and disseminating news. This development has given birth to citizen journalism, a form of journalistic practice in which non-professionals participate directly in the reporting of events and issues affecting society. Unlike traditional journalism, which is often controlled by professional gatekeepers and institutional routines, citizen journalism thrives on immediacy, accessibility, interactivity, and user-generated content. The paper adopted quantitative method using survey and questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. This paper examines how new media has facilitated the growth of citizen journalism, its contributions to democratic participation, information sharing, and social accountability, as well as the challenges associated with misinformation, lack of professionalism, ethical concerns, and weak regulatory mechanisms. The study argues that while citizen journalism has expanded the frontiers of freedom of expression and diversified news production, it also raises critical questions about credibility, verification, and responsibility in the digital age. The paper concludes that citizen journalism has grown considerably in Nigeria due to the widespread availability of digital technologies and social media platforms. These tools have enabled ordinary citizens to participate actively in news reporting, public debate, and civic engagement.

Keywords

New media, Citizen journalism, Digital communication, User-generated content, Journalism practice.



I. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed the way information is produced, shared, and consumed across the world. Unlike traditional media systems that are largely controlled by trained journalists and established media institutions, digital media platforms now allow ordinary individuals to participate actively in the dissemination of news and information. Through access to the internet, smartphones, and social media platforms, individuals can report events and communicate with large audiences almost instantly. One major outcome of this transformation is the emergence and growth of citizen journalism. Citizen journalism refers to the practice where non-professional individuals engage in news reporting by documenting and sharing information through digital platforms. This form of journalism has increased public participation in media production and has reduced the exclusive gatekeeping role traditionally played by mainstream news organizations (Allan, 2017).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube have become important tools for citizen journalists. These platforms enable users to share news updates in real time, offer alternative viewpoints, and engage directly with audiences. As a result, information now flows more freely, allowing citizens to

contribute to public debates and civic discussions, especially in societies where trust in traditional media may be declining (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2019; Newman et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, the growth of internet access and smartphone usage has further encouraged the practice of citizen journalism. Many young Nigerians now rely on social media platforms as primary sources of news and information. Events such as the #EndSARS protests of 2020 and the 2023 general elections demonstrated how citizen journalists provided immediate reports from various locations, particularly where professional journalists faced restrictions or limited access (Ojebode, 2018; Aondover et al., 2024).

Despite its contributions, citizen journalism in Nigeria is faced with several challenges. These include the spread of unverified information, ethical concerns, and personal safety risks. Many citizen journalists operate without formal training, which increases the likelihood of misinformation and raises questions about credibility. In addition, individuals reporting on sensitive political or social issues often experience online harassment, intimidation, or threats, making citizen journalism a risky practice in Nigeria's digital media environment (Salawu et al., 2023).

The increasing use of digital media platforms has changed the nature of news production and distribution in Nigeria (Aondover et al., 2025). Through social media and other online platforms, citizens now participate actively in reporting events, sharing updates, and engaging in public discussions without relying solely on traditional media institutions (Ojebode, 2018). While this development has expanded access to information, it has also introduced significant challenges.

One major problem associated with citizen journalism in Nigeria is the issue of credibility. Since many citizen journalists lack formal training and editorial supervision, there is a high risk of spreading unverified or misleading information (Msughter et al., 2022). This problem becomes more pronounced during major national events such as elections, protests, or security crises, where inaccurate reports can influence public perception and social stability.

Additionally, citizen journalists often face ethical and legal challenges, including violations of privacy, defamation, and lack of accountability. Safety concerns also remain a serious issue, as individuals reporting sensitive topics may be exposed to harassment, threats, or intimidation both online and offline (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2019). Although existing studies have examined citizen journalism and new media, there is still limited research that comprehensively explores these challenges within the Nigerian context using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This gap creates the need for a focused study that examines the obstacles facing citizen journalism in Nigeria, with the aim of improving credibility, ethical standards, and the overall quality of citizen-generated news.

1.1 Concept of New Media

New media refers to digital communication technologies that allow users to create, share, and interact with information in real time. Unlike traditional media, which depends largely on professional journalists and centralized media organizations, new media enables ordinary individuals to participate actively in information production and dissemination (Dussel & Benasayag, 2028; Saint et al., 2024). Examples of new media include social networking sites, blogs, online news platforms, podcasts, and video-sharing applications. A defining feature of new media is interactivity. Users are not only passive consumers of information but can also comment on content, share opinions, and generate their own media messages. New media is also characterized by accessibility and immediacy, as information can be accessed and distributed instantly using mobile devices and internet-enabled

technologies. This immediacy is particularly important during emergencies, protests, elections, and other time-sensitive events.

In Nigeria, the expansion of internet access and smartphone usage has accelerated the adoption of new media. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube are widely used for news consumption, social interaction, and civic engagement (Ojebode, 2018; Obasi & Msughter, 2023). As a result, new media has reduced the dominance of traditional media institutions and created space for alternative forms of journalism, including citizen journalism (Aondover et al., 2022).

1.2 Concept of Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism involves the participation of ordinary individuals in the collection, reporting, and dissemination of news without formal affiliation to professional media organizations. These individuals use digital tools such as smartphones, social media platforms, and blogs to document events and share information with the public (Allan, 2017). One of the major strengths of citizen journalism is its inclusiveness. Since anyone with internet access can report events, it allows diverse voices and perspectives to be represented in public discourse. Citizen journalism has been particularly useful in situations where mainstream journalists face restrictions, limited access, or safety concerns. Globally, it has played a key role in reporting political protests, humanitarian crises, and human rights abuses.

In Nigeria, citizen journalism has gained prominence in reporting social and political issues. Events such as the #EndSARS protests in 2020 and the 2023 general elections demonstrated the influence of citizen journalists in providing real-time updates, visual evidence, and alternative narratives that complemented mainstream media coverage (Ojebode, 2018). Despite these contributions, concerns remain regarding accuracy, ethics, and credibility (Mohammed & Aondover, 2025).

1.3 Evolution of Citizen Journalism in Nigeria

The development of citizen journalism in Nigeria can be traced to the early use of personal blogs and independent online platforms in the early 2000s. During this period, individuals used blogs to express opinions and report events outside the control of traditional media institutions. However, the widespread adoption of smartphones and mobile internet in the 2010s significantly expanded the reach and impact of citizen journalism (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2019).

Social media platforms have played a crucial role in this evolution. The #EndSARS protests of 2020 highlighted how citizen journalists used platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram to document police brutality and mobilize public support both locally and internationally (Salawu et al., 2023; Aondover et al., 2025). Similarly, during the 2023 general elections, citizens provided real-time reports on voting processes, election irregularities, and security issues, contributing to transparency and public awareness.

Citizen journalism has also been important in reporting security challenges in Nigeria, including insurgency, kidnappings, and communal conflicts, particularly in areas where professional journalists face access limitations (Oreoluwa et al., 2024). Over time, citizen journalism has become more organized, with online networks and communities supporting collaborative reporting and advocacy.

1.4 New Media Platforms and Citizen Journalism in Nigeria

New media platforms serve as the primary channels through which citizen journalism operates in Nigeria. Facebook supports detailed reporting, live streaming, and community-based discussions. X (Twitter) enables rapid dissemination of updates and facilitates national and global conversations. WhatsApp is commonly used for sharing news within private groups, especially in areas with limited internet connectivity. Instagram and YouTube allow

visual storytelling through images and videos, which enhances the credibility and emotional impact of reports (Chiluwa & Samoilenko, 2019; Aondover & Ademosu, 2025).

During major national events such as the #EndSARS protests and the 2023 elections, these platforms enabled citizen journalists to share evidence, mobilize public opinion, and hold authorities accountable. However, the speed at which information spreads on these platforms also increases the risk of misinformation, making verification a major challenge.

1.5 Challenges Facing Citizen Journalism in Nigeria

Despite its benefits, citizen journalism in Nigeria faces several challenges:

Credibility and Misinformation: The absence of editorial oversight increases the spread of unverified information, which can reduce public trust in citizen-generated news.

Ethical and Legal Issues: Citizen journalists may violate ethical standards related to privacy, defamation, and accuracy due to lack of formal training.

Safety and Security Risks: Reporting sensitive political or social issues often exposes citizen journalists to harassment, intimidation, and online threats.

Technological and Economic Constraints: Limited access to reliable internet, high data costs, and lack of professional tools hinder effective reporting.

These challenges affect the credibility and sustainability of citizen journalism in Nigeria and highlight the need for capacity building and policy support.

1.6 Empirical Studies

Previous studies have explored the role of citizen journalism in civic engagement and democratic participation in Nigeria. Ojebode (2018) emphasized the influence of social media on youth political awareness, while Okoro and Asemah (2021) examined citizen reporting during elections and identified credibility concerns. Salawu et al. (2023) focused on ethical and safety challenges faced by citizen journalists. However, several gaps remain in the literature. Many studies rely on single research methods, with limited use of mixed-method approaches. In addition, much of the existing research focuses on major national events, leaving everyday citizen journalism practices underexplored. There is also a shortage of recent studies covering developments from 2021 to 2025. This study addresses these gaps by adopting a mixed-method approach to examine contemporary challenges facing citizen journalism in Nigeria (Vitalis et al., 2023).

The reviewed literature on new media and citizen journalism, emphasizing their roles in transforming news production and public discourse. While citizen journalism has increased participation and transparency in Nigeria, it faces challenges related to credibility, ethics, safety, and technology (Ademosu et al., 2025). The review also identified gaps in existing studies, particularly in methodology and recent data, which justify the need for the present research.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) explains why individuals actively choose specific media to satisfy needs such as information, social interaction, and civic participation. In Nigeria, citizen journalists use digital platforms to report events, express opinions, and mobilize public attention. This theory helps explain the motivation behind citizen participation in digital reporting.

Gatekeeping Theory (Lewin, 1947; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) focuses on how information is selected and filtered before reaching audiences. In citizen journalism,

individuals act as informal gatekeepers by deciding what content to publish. The lack of structured editorial control, however, increases the risk of misinformation and ethical lapses.

Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1962) describes spaces where citizens engage in discussions about public issues. Social media platforms have expanded the public sphere in Nigeria by allowing citizens to debate governance, human rights, and social issues. Citizen journalism plays a key role in sustaining these discussions and encouraging civic engagement.

III. Research Method

This explains the methodology used in this study to investigate the challenges confronting citizen journalism in Nigeria within the context of new media. It details the research approach, population, sample, instruments, data collection and analysis methods, and ethical considerations. The methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive and reliable framework for examining both the quantitative trends and qualitative experiences of citizen journalists operating on digital platforms in Nigeria.

The study adopts a quantitative research method. The quantitative method involves structured surveys administered to citizen journalists and social media content creators. The study population consists of citizen journalists, social media reporters, and media content creators across Nigeria. Respondents are individuals actively engaged in reporting news or social issues on platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. A total of 150 participants was included in the study. This comprises 100 citizen journalists and social media reporters for the survey component and 50 experienced citizen journalists and media professionals for interviews. The study employed purposive sampling to select the respondents with relevant experience in citizen journalism and snowball sampling to identify individuals in less visible or informal networks. This approach ensures that participants possess the knowledge and practical experience needed to provide meaningful insights into the challenges of citizen journalism in Nigeria.

Table 1. Challenges Faced by Citizen Journalists

| Challenge | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Credibility & Verification | 110 | 73.3 |
| Safety & Harassment | 90 | 60 |
| Ethical Dilemmas | 80 | 53.3 |
| Limited Training & Skills | 70 | 46.7 |
| Technological/Internet Issues | 60 | 40 |

Credibility concerns rank highest, with 73.3% of respondents reporting issues such as misinformation and lack of verification. Safety and harassment are also significant, particularly for those covering protests or politically sensitive topics. Interviews reinforced this, with one participant stating: “During the #EndSARS protests, some citizen journalists faced threats online and in person because they exposed police misconduct. Many had to hide their identities for safety.” Survey results show that social media platforms heavily shape citizen journalism in Nigeria: X (Twitter): 78% use it for live updates and trend monitoring. Facebook: 65% use it for community engagement and detailed reports. WhatsApp: 50% for private group sharing and alerts. Instagram & YouTube: 40% use for visual reporting.

Digital platforms facilitate immediate reporting and public engagement, enhancing citizen journalism’s reach. Interviewees emphasized their role in mobilizing social movements and raising awareness, as seen during the #EndSARS protests and coverage of the 2023 elections, where citizen journalists documented voting processes and irregularities. Challenges related to credibility, ethical reporting, and safety undermine the influence and reliability of citizen-generated news, aligning with prior studies (Salawu, 2023).

Table 2. Strategies to Improve Citizen Journalism

| Strategy | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Training and Capacity Building | 115 | 76.7 |
| Ethical Guidelines & Codes of Conduct | 100 | 66.7 |
| Collaboration with Professional Media | 90 | 60 |
| Platform Moderation & Fact-Checking | 85 | 56.7 |

Training, ethics, and collaboration with professional media were highlighted as essential strategies. Interview participants stressed the need for media literacy programs, verification tools, and professional mentoring to strengthen citizen journalism in Nigeria. The analysis demonstrates that citizen journalism in Nigeria is enhanced by digital platforms but constrained by credibility, ethical, and safety challenges. Platforms such as X, Facebook, and WhatsApp are critical for reporting and mobilization. However, lack of training and verification mechanisms limit public trust. The study confirms findings from literature (Ojebode, 2018; Okoro & Asemah, 2021; Salawu, 2023) while providing updated evidence from 2021–2025, reflecting contemporary trends in Nigerian citizen journalism.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the findings, citizen journalism has grown considerably in Nigeria due to the widespread availability of digital technologies and social media platforms. These tools have enabled ordinary citizens to participate actively in news reporting, public debate, and civic engagement. Despite its growing influence, citizen journalism in Nigeria faces persistent challenges. Issues related to credibility, ethical reporting, personal safety, and technological limitations continue to affect the quality and reliability of citizen-generated news. The absence of formal training and editorial oversight increases the risk of misinformation, particularly during sensitive national events such as elections and protests. New media platforms play a dual role in citizen journalism. On one hand, they facilitate rapid information sharing and public participation. On the other hand, they amplify misinformation and expose citizen journalists to harassment and security risks. Addressing these challenges is essential if citizen journalism is to contribute positively to Nigeria’s democratic process and media environment. The study concludes that while citizen journalism has the potential to promote transparency and accountability, its effectiveness depends on improved training, ethical standards, and supportive policy frameworks.

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