

Media Ownership Interference and the Covert Practice of Citizen Journalism among Mainstream Journalists in Nigeria

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Abstract

For journalists to function effectively, an atmosphere devoid of coercion and interference is needed, so as to afford them the opportunity and freedom to generate and distribute contents that are not biased, or value-laden. However, in recent times, journalists have had to contend with undue pressure from their employers ("pay masters"); this impede on fair and accurate reportage. The paper investigated the extent to which such interference in the operations of journalists, among others, could be a catalyst for alternative means of content dissemination, like citizen journalism among professional journalists in mainstream media. The Authoritarian and Democratic Participant Media theories were the theoretical foundations upon which this investigation was based. Using qualitative research method, 12 journalists (6 from Delta Broadcasting Service, Warri and 3 from Rize FM, and Crown FM, Warri respectively) were randomly selected. Interview was used as the instrument of data collection. Findings revealed that journalists were sometimes cowed to report issues that advance their owners' interest, and were also restricted from publishing content that may hinder their owners' interest. It also revealed that journalists sometimes engage in citizen journalism practice by circumventing such interference, and publishing through other social media platforms. The study recommended, among others, that journalists should be allowed to practice without pressure from their employers, and that they should stick to the ethics of their profession.

Keywords

Citizen Journalism,
Interference, Interest,
Media ownership,
Social media,
Paternalism



I. Introduction

Over the years, the struggle for press freedom has been a subject of debate among media practitioners and scholars. There are so many ways journalists can be impeded in the course of discharging their duties. Journalism is expected to function freely, and without corporate and state institutions' interference and pressure, including fear of intimidation and persecution (Igwe, 2020). Furthermore, journalism is expected to create a robust public sphere which offers citizens a platform for interaction and engagement in the civic space as well as the socio-political space within the media sphere.

Notwithstanding, journalism practice has continued to witness many challenges which continue to clog the wheel of progress, with regard to content generation and distribution, whether in a public or private media outfit. The vulnerable conditions of journalists in

Nigeria and other countries of the global South subject them to the whim and caprices of media owners who place their interest over and above factual reportage. Hence, Guanah, Obi and Nkala (2020) argue that “media ownership has effects on both the management of a media organisation and journalism practice because ownership determines the degree of control exerted by the owner cum funder, since “he who pays the piper dictates the tune”” (p. 275).

In addition, Adomi (2017) contends that ownership and paternalism are among the common denominators that have had unpalatable influence on the practice of media and journalism in Nigeria. They have made journalism practitioners to somewhat abdicate their role as watch-dog of the society and are gradually failing to recognise their position as the Fourth Estate of the realm. Despite this constitutionally assigned role of journalists, “journalism practice has frequently become a struggle to choose between the interests and policies of media proprietors and the demands of professionalism” (Adomi, 2017, p. 75).

However, it is worthy of note that media control and paternalism is not characteristic of the Global South alone. The Global North has had (and is still having) its fair share of the media owners’ influence on journalism practice. Harcup (2009) acknowledges that with the conservation of ownership, big media owners are used to having their own way. This ultimately constitute a barrier to professionalism in the practice of journalism. The control process usually begins with choice of editors by media owners; for example, Sander (2003) and Harcup (2009) describes “Rupert Murdoch’s normal methods of control as rather more subtle, beginning with choosing editors who are generally on the same wave length as him” (p. 27).

Even at the geopolitical level, journalists are pressured by the state to report issues which portray them as powerful among Nation-States. This has made journalists, especially those under the political, economic and social influence of media owners, to find it difficult to strike a balance between professionalism and propaganda as well as other primordial interests in their reportage.

Consequently, Usua and Sado (2018, p.9) note that the failure of mainstream media as a result of negative influence of media owners and paternalism has become a cause for concern to the extent that embracing citizen journalism practice is not an option for the people. It is against this backdrop that this paper argued that the interference by media owners in the process of content generation and distribution among mainstream journalists has the potential to promote citizen journalism practice.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

One major challenge to media and journalism practice is the concentration of ownership, along with it paternalistic tendencies in the media industry. Media owners’ interest in profiteering, political and social security as well as primordial slant towards ethno-centric considerations also limit the diversity of ideas that are available. To argue the least, owners of large media corporations have significant level of control over how media houses organise and operate such as the power to shape media content. This unbearable influence of media owners on journalism practice undermines factual reportage, stifles originality, and distorts news stories, thus become inimical to the practice of journalism. This accounts for why, sometimes, journalists end up only publishing stories that promote their pay masters’ interests.

Navigating through this problem has become a serious issue among journalists who want to present a balanced reportage of news events. This study, therefore, sought to evaluate the implications of media owners' influence on journalism practice, and the possibility of using alternative platforms of content creation and distribution among mainstream journalists in a society deprived of access to media and factual information due to media owners' interest in Nigeria.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1) To what extent do media owners' economic and/or political interest encourage alternative form like citizen journalism?
- 2) How does media owners' interference in media reportage encourage citizen journalism?

Given the influence and pressure media owners' exert on employees, is there any prospect for citizen journalism?

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

a. Authoritarian Theory

This study anchored on both the Authoritarian and Democratic Participant Media theories. The Authoritarian theory of the press is one of the normative theories of the press which was developed by F. S. Siebert, T. B. Peterson and W. Schramm (1956). Although its roots could be traced to the era of the renaissance about the 16th and 17th centuries in England, monarchies and powerful business structure as well as political institutions employed the authoritarian model to exercise their power over citizens. Anaeto et al. (2008, as cited in Nwachukwu, Asak & Asadu, 2013) note that:

Authoritarian theory describes press arrangements in societies, like monarchies, where the press first began. The press here is subordinated to state power and the interest of the ruling elite; while humans are considered as subservient to the state. In such a society, the press is viewed as an instrument for disseminating the state's position on an issue to the people. As such, it is a theory that is generally based on the principle of supremacy of the state. Thus, the role of the mass media is one of subordination to the state and uncritical support of the status quo (p. 36).

Watson (2003) adduces that authoritarian theory "appertains in a state in which press or broadcasting freedoms not only do not exist but are not considered – by those in power, or those who support them in power" (p. 202). Given the above exposition, one can deduce the central tenets of authoritarian theory as follows – that the state is the highest expression and authority, secondly, the media are subject to the powers and authority of the state, thirdly, citizens' right can be taken away by the state and they are to remain subservient to state, fourth, mass media are heavily censored and controlled by the government. The Authoritarian theory of the press is aptly suitable for this study because its tenets, as highlighted, are characteristic of media owners' *modus operandi* in media outlets in which they oversee and have stake in.

The Democratic Participant Media theory is second foundation upon which this study is anchored. According to the Free Press theory (as cited in McQuail, 1983), this theory is an offshoot of the Libertarian theory. As the dissatisfaction among the citizens grew, owing to media ownership pattern and control, access to communication media was barely within the reach of ordinary citizen because the media were firmly in the hands government and private individuals who determined their usage pattern.

The Democratic Participant Media theory was one of the six normative theories of the press propounded by Denis McQuail (1983). According to Alemoh and Ishima (2013), this theory “de- emphasises media concentration, centralization, professionalization, bureaucratization and monopolization, seen as hindrance to public access to “the media” (p. 213). In otherworld’s, the top down pattern or model of communication appeared not to deliver any effective result on the communication process. It therefore, sought for a more horizontal type of communication which allows for audience participation.

The paternalistic form of media operation is no longer effective, as audience now preferred a more interactive form of communication given the advancement in information and communication technologies. Hence, with the availability of journalistic tools, citizen could now get involved in content creation as a result of unrestricted access to the Internet and social media platforms.

Consequently, the Democratic Participant Media theory emphasises the right of access to media by citizens. Hence, Watson and Hill (2003) maintain that “the theory opposes the concentration of ownership and rejects, the role of audience as tame receiver. Media should be answerable, free of government or big business intervention, small-scale, interactive and participative” (p.203). Therefore, if the media are to serve their purpose in the society, they must be free from the emasculating fingers of media proprietors, whether government or private owners.

The Democratic Participant Media theory is relevant to this study because its tenets provide a landing space for citizens who want to break away from the concentration of media power and monopoly in content creation. It meets the conceptual understanding and practices expressed in citizen journalism practice. This includes, but not limited to, citizen participation in societal issues and government administration process, access to communication media, and challenging the dominance and monopoly of media generation and distribution by mainstream media.

2.2 Conceptual Review

a. Media Ownership Patterns

The pattern of ownership of the various means of communication, especially the mass media like print, electronic, and most recently, the new media, has various origins historically. Communication media, such as the electronic and print media in Nigeria, seem to have almost the same pattern of ownership (Aondover et al., 2025). For instance, there are two distinct patterns, which are government ownership, and private ownership of both the print and electronic media.

Ownership of media outfits are largely driven by interests which may hover around economic, political, social or cultural in many cases. For instance, Guanah, Obi and Nkala (2020) assert that, for “the media that are set up to make profit, all the decisions to be taken will be based on economic interests, that is why news stories that are detrimental to such media organisations from making profit will never be allowed (p. 276-277). Although the National Broadcasting Commission Act prohibits religious organisations and political parties from owning media outfits, however, there are reported cases of political stalwarts and religious sects who clandestinely own media houses through proxies (Vitalis et al., 2025).

b. Media Ownership: Control and Paternalism

Journalism practice in Nigeria has experienced numerous forms of control, especially from government and influential personalities (Aondover et al., 2025). For example, the press witnessed one of its most brutal use of force and oppression under the military era in Nigeria as an attempt to curb the media. Omu (2000, as cited in Okafor, 2014) holds that:

The problem of media control is associated with owners' interests and punitive laws that make it difficult for the media to perform its statutory functions without let or hindrance. These laws most often include laws of libel, sedition, defamation, official secrets, and national security. The era of military dictatorships in Nigeria witnessed the worst forms of media emasculation in the history of the media in Nigeria (p. 38).

The days of military rule witnessed what is now known as the dark days of journalism. This is because many journalists were arbitrarily thrown into jail, some were relieved of their jobs, while some paid the supreme price for adhering to professionalism within the conduct of journalistic operations. There were also obnoxious laws and decrees that were made in an attempt to gag the media (Aondover et al., 2024).

Media ownership and paternalism is largely driven by particular or collective interest. The realisation of the interest strictly depends on the power being exercised within the media organisation - that is, the organisational structure of the media house. Hence, some lay the “negative influence” on journalists on media owners. Street (2001) holds that “common to these perspective is the view that managers (editors, advertising executive and so on) rather than owners are the decisive actors and that managers are motivated by the benefits which the organisation provides, not by the need to realize profits on capital investment” (p. 132) . If this is the case, one may ask, whose interest predominates in corporate decision making? Additionally, a saying goes thus, “he who pays the piper dictates the tune.” And to that extent media owners’ interest cannot be overlooked by the managers of media houses.

The World Development Report (2000, as cited in Odionye, Yare & Omelagha, 2007) explains that ownership “is a central factor of independence because it is the owners who control information flow and thus influence economic, political and social outcomes” (p.6). It is sad enough to say that ownership has continued to play influential role in the practice of journalism in Nigeria especially as its effects are felt in skewed reportage. This interference by media proprietors, no doubt affects the ethics of journalism and media practice, thus casting doubt on the content published by journalists. This, to a large extent, contributes to the trust deficit on the part of audience, who believe that the media ought to mirror the Nigerian society.

Odionye et. al., (2018) further note that the influence of media ownership is more pronounced in government owned media organisations, especially in Africa. Stretching the argument further, Asadu (2007) is of the view that whether government owned, or privately owned, the media are affected by the interest (political, economic, cultural, social and so on), decisions and influence of the owners, more so that the power of the media, when it comes to politics, has always been on display at various times (Guanah, 2024a; Aondover et al., 2024). Therefore, the structural organisation of the media outlets, under the operational managers (editors, advertising executive and so on) is nothing but a reflection of the image of media owners.

c. Paternalism and Media Ownership

Paternalism is described as the attitude of a person or a government that subordinates should be controlled in a fatherly way for their own good. Williams (1966, as cited in Watson & Hill, 2003) sees paternalism as “authoritarianism with a conscience; that is, authority with values and purposes beyond those concerning the maintenance of its own power” (p.142). As nice as the intent may appear, the action and practice in government and privately owned media organisations is a far cry from the spirit of this definition, Oppressive regimes in the history of Nigeria have had to mask their intent in regulating the media (under the guise of public interest, national security, peaceful coexistence and unity of the country).

In some cases, the paternalistic tendencies are demonstrated by media proprietors, especially those of government, through appointments of some of the best journalists into government offices, like media advisers, spokespersons, Communication/Information minister of commissioner and so on. Some journalists are even given national award, and in some cases, projects are cited in the village of the media practitioner as a form of patronage. This soft-power approach by media owners does have some consequences on genuine and factual reportage. Hollows (2016) notes that “owners of the media could use the media texts they own to express their own political interests and shape the ideas, knowledge and information that is available to audience” (p.43).

The media become paternalistic in their reportage when they tend to give the impression of serving the public, whereas the underlying interest is to serve the media owners. With such patronage on journalists, subsequent reportage could be skewed against audience. In other to forestall this, Adomi (2017, p. 78) maintains that “no special treatment should be given by journalist/media to owners of power” and vice versa. However, in a situation where media owners are the ones who “butter the bread” of the journalist, what then is expected? This is why striking a balance between professionalism and dancing to the tune of their ‘pay masters’ has always been an onerous task for journalists. Hence, McQuail (2005) notes, that “the contents of the media always affects the interests of those who finance them” (p. 226).

Furthermore, Jika (1984, as cited in Ezeah, 2005) claims that the freedom of the press starts where the fundamental interest of the owners ends. Ezeah further opines that “ownership influence transcends beyond the proprietor’s interest to invest. The publisher’s interest is reflected in the appointment of staff; careful selection of a team that will dance to the dictates of the publisher’s interest and dreams are not wished away” (p. 141). Again, the assertion by Jika (1984) that press freedom begins from where the fundamental interest of the owners ends raises more doubt as to whether media control and paternalism can ever be eliminated from journalism practice. Regrettably, what was, hitherto, thought to be characteristic of military dictatorship, is found even in modern democracies like that of Nigeria. What hope is there for journalism and media practice in Nigeria?

d. Social Media and Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism is a specific form of citizen media which embraces citizen participation in the media through content generation and distribution using the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Wechat, Whatsapp and other digital and non-digital platforms. Igwe (2020) and Aondover et al., (2022) assert that the growth of this genre of journalism is aided by the unprecedented development in digital media technology especially the new media and their interactive features. He further notes that “in this age of technology-aided journalism practice, one can share videos, pictures, messages and connect as well as interact with millions of people as fast as possible” (p. 29).

Elucidating further, Banda (2010) distinguishes two types of citizen journalism practice—the non-institutional and institutional citizen journalism. “The non-institutional form of citizen journalism is the type of citizen journalism that readily lends itself to different forms of social networking, where private citizens use a combination of platforms to generate and disseminate it as widely as possible” (p. 28). The ability to generate content is facilitated through the use of cell phones and computers that are Internet compliant. It is pertinent to note that in this form of citizen journalism practice, users (Journalists) are not answerable to any organization, neither are they subject to the control and paternalistic tendencies of media owners (Aondover et al., 2023). The second form of citizen of journalism, according to Banda (2010), is the institutional form of citizen journalism. Here,

journalists are employees of a media outfit, and content generated are subject to editorial gate-keeping and media ownership control.

Aondover et al., (2022) observed that citizen journalism practice, however, is a situation where ordinary people get involved in the production of news item for general or particular consumption. Hence, Bowman and Willis (2003, p.9) see citizen journalism as “the act of a citizen or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information.” They further highlighted that, the “intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires” (p.9).

Citizen journalism practice is a people-centered form of journalism which has its activities largely done online. Citizen journalism practice would have been difficult in a democratic age if not for the creation of the Internet, and more specifically the social media. Hence, the use of these social media platforms by ordinary citizens in Nigeria accentuates citizen generated-content, thus creating different sources of information and opportunity for expression among the citizenry. Adelabu (2008) posits that as more and more people get involved in the use of the Internet and other multimedia technology and digital communication technologies, they will no longer rely on traditional mass media to supply them with information rather, they remain at liberty to source and create our media to meet their needs (Idris & Msughter, 2022).

The unprecedented advancement in communication technology, particularly the creation of the Internet, has been one of the remarkable achievements in information and digital communication technologies (IDCTs) (Msughter et al., 2023). For instance, “the Internet has been further transformed from a system primarily oriented on information provision into a medium for communication and community-building through the creation of social media” (Fuchs et. al., 2011). Furthermore, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (p. 61).

Social media enable users to create and disseminate content, form online communities, and be in close interactions among people who are not within a geographical proximity. This technology facilitates online communication such that citizens can now express themselves through shared videos, pictures, messages, voice-call, and so on (Maikaba & Msughter, 2019). Also, messages generated by users can be shared with the speed of light, thus overcoming the barrier associated with mainstream media due to media ownership control. In the same vein, Socha and Eber-Schmid (2012, as cited in Chibita & Ugangu, 2017) believe that:

Social media hold out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content.

Another important promise of new media is their democratization of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content (p. 238).

Looking at the social media as an enabler of online communication, the operability of citizen journalism may not have been easy, if not for the new media technology being experienced today (Msughter et al., 2023). This phenomenon that is occurring in the media space has taken traditional media producers by storm, and thus, challenges the hegemony and monopoly which were hitherto the exclusive preserve of media owners. This “unnegotiated” democratization of the media space has opened up an aura of opportunities for ordinary citizens, thus enabling them (citizens) who were once the audience (Rosen, 2006) to become

participators in content generation due to the pluralism of access to media injected by the Internet in communication technology.

e. Social Media and the Implications for Citizen Journalism

There is no doubt that the liberalization of the media space in Nigeria, which began in 1992 with the broadcast sector deregulation, brought a relief to the media industry, as the 'chain' that held the media appeared to have been broken. However, the established private media houses, did not offer the much needed desire for citizens to be involved as content generation and dissemination to the public, as media owners continue to hold sway in content generation and distribution to the public (Mojaye & Aondover, 2022). The wall that separated producers of media and audience who consume them was brought down with the advent of the Internet and the creation of Web 2.0 (social media). The power to produce media messages was decentralized, as citizens can now own their media. However, there are some implications of this decentralization for citizen journalism, as highlighted by Banda (2010, p. 9)

- There is a plurality of media platforms, theoretically providing more opportunities for citizens to experiment with citizen-journalistic communication.
- There is so much competition for source of information that the base of possible source is likely to be diversified, suggesting that conventional journalism will rely on citizen journalist for some of its production. Thus involving people, hitherto marginalized from mainstream media
- There is greater opportunity for citizens to own their own media and counter the effects of years of reportorial neglect occasioned by an unhealthy concentration of media ownership.
- With new media outlet set up in far flung area, the likelihood of achieving universal access to media by citizens is such that it could fuel interest in localized forms of journalism including citizen journalism. Basically, since citizen journalism is about citizen.

Basically, since citizen journalism is about citizens participation in journalism, its practice create a form of public sphere where debates on vital public issues are discussed online and off line (Msughter et al., 2023). It is an attempt, according to Barlow (2007), to move news media functions into the public sphere to connect journalism directly to the debates among the people but as helpers toward resolution, not as leaders.

Nevertheless, the society has to be circumspect when it comes to citizen journalism because of some challenges associated with it. One of challenges is that it exacerbates the spread of fake news (Kurfi et al., 2021; Oreoluwa et al., 2024). According to Guanah (2024b), this is so "because most of its "practitioners" are not groomed in the ethics of journalism. This unprofessional activities of these non-initiates into journalism professional has been enhancing the propagation of fake news and yellow journalism" (p.12). Nonetheless, the spread of fake news is not likely to be common with the institutional form of citizen journalism.

III. Research Methods

The study adopted the qualitative resaech method with oral-in-depth interview as the means for data collection. The researchers randomly selected three media outlets in Warri metropolis of Delta State. They are two privately-owned radio stations and one government owned television station. The stations are Delta Broadcasting Service (TV), Warri, Rize FM, Warri, and Crown FM, Warri. A total of twelve (12) journalists were purposively selected and interviewed - six (6) from the television station, and three (3) each from, the two private

radio stations. Through a structured interview, data were collected from respondents. With relation to interview, Kothari (2004, p. 97) notes that a structured interview involves the use of a set of predetermined questions and of highly standardized technique of recording.

IV. Result and Discussion

The study focused on the implications of media owners' interest, and their paternalistic dispositions toward media practitioners in media organisations, and how such interference hinders journalistic professionalism and promote other forms of journalism practice like citizen journalism, through the Internet and social need platforms. This study became necessary in view of the numerous accusations on the media abdicating their role of informing, educating, and entertaining through factual reportage. Again, performing the watch-dog role and exposing the unconstitutional practices of those who are in power as well, is expected of the media. This discourse was therefore guided by three research questions viz.

4.1 RQ1: To what extent do media owners' economic and/or political interest encourage alternative form like citizen journalism?

The analysis of the study data obtained during the oral in-depth interviews conducted indicate that 83.3% of the respondents were of the view that owners of communication media would not want any news information which is antithetical to their economic or political interest and that of their close associates to be published. The media in Nigeria, especially the private media owners, see their media organisations as business venture before any other considerations. Hence, profit maximisation is central for the survival of their investment, and as such the unbridled economic interest of the owner of a medium of communication could hinder true journalistic practice.

This in perhaps why advertisers wield enormous influence in media content generation and publication because the money being generated by the media establishment mainly comes from advertisers. A respondent from DRTV noted that they have to comply with directives from management before broadcasting any information that touches on government, for fear they might lose their jobs. The consequences of such interest is that journalists with factual and authentic information, which are likely to discredit their employers (media owners) and advertisers, and who serve audience interest, may abandon such news stories in order to protect their masters' interest. This has far reaching implication for journalism practice as professionalism is sacrificed on the altar of media owners' interest.

The same is true of media owners with political interest. For instance, one of the respondents acknowledged that during electioneering period, falsified results from polling units and Wards were sometimes brought to them in the newsroom as part of the bulletin to be broadcast, with the directive - "order from above." In fact, some politicians in Nigeria have media establishments from where propaganda stories are trumped out to the public. In some cases, information put out for public consumption is all about projecting the image of the media owner and his cronies in the public space.

They believe that such news publication will enhance the chance of their politician-media owner to clinch political position in the country. In such situation, respondents are of the view that they find it difficult to publish information with negative implication about the political interest of their media owners, or the political party of which their media masters have leaning.

It is worthy of note that such activities that hinder journalism practice are peculiar to both government and privately-owned media establishments. Asemah (2011) holds that, these media owners, in most case, exert pressure on the operations of their media outfits just to

advance their interests. In some case, they compel the media management to publish certain stories that may discredit their political and/or economic rivals.

The inability of journalists to act freely in content publishing, due to media owners' interest, has made many of them (journalists) to perform below average. Contents that are not news worthy are published, and news stories that are effectively sourced but 'considered inimical' to the interest of media owners are filtered through gate-keeping. Most respondents are of the view that when people are dissatisfied with the kind of content constantly disseminated to the public, there is likelihood it will give room for alterative media platform like citizen media. This is one of the reasons why citizens are compelled to generate their own content on social media through citizen journalism practice.

Therefore to answer research question RQ1, media owners' economic or political interest greatly affect good journalistic practice, hence the desire for audience to seek alternative platform to get information and generate contents that appeal to them, and equally meet their needs. Journalists are constantly in a fix as to how to strike a balance between their employers' interest, and how to function professionally in their practice of journalism

4.2 RQ.2: How does media owners' interference in media reportage encourage citizen journalism?

On whether media owners' interference in media reportage does encourage independent media like citizen journalism, the data obtained from the respondents indicate that 75% are of the view that such interference encourages citizen journalism in the sense that when media owners interfere in content creation and dissemination, journalists become discouraged in their practice.

Media owners' interferences can frustrate professionalism among journalists, which may lead journalists to freelance in journalism practice. Regrettably, they (journalists) operate from a weaker stand point, which makes them more susceptible to pressure from their owners. In addition, the Internet provides a space for publishing of media contents, and this avenue is sometimes explored by mainstream journalists who are factual in content creation and dissemination. In some cases the political party in power could deny the opposition parties certain rights and privileges of the use of government owned media simply because they wanted to silence the voices of those who are in the opposition.

Furthermore, Hollows (2016) acknowledges that most owners of the media do put pressure on their workers to create texts that will be profitable. Even one of the biggest media owners in the world, by name Rupert Murdoch, is reportedly cited as an owner who has directly intervened in the content of his newspaper to promote his own political views (Hollows, 2016, p. 44). The same is true of media owners in Nigeria, whether in the print or electronic media, who constantly influence their media texts to promote their interest. In the final analysis, ultimately, it is the owners "who, through their wealth determine the style of journalism we get" (Foley, 2000, p.51).

Consequently, when journalists are faced with such pressures and influence from media owners, like direct orders that are inimical to professional ethics of journalism, financial inducement, and other forms of incentives, the media messages which are disseminated to the public become nothing but a reflection of the position and interest of their masters. In effect, respondents are of the view that such pressures and influences will promote independent journalism where citizens can freely source for news and information that meet their needs. This finding supports the position by Banda (2010) on the implications of citizen journalism which states that "There is greater opportunity for citizen to own their own media and counter the effects of years of reportorial neglect occasioned by an unhealthy concentration of media ownership" (p. 9).

4.3 RQ 3: Given the influence and pressure media owners' exert on employees, is there any prospect for citizen journalism?

The data obtained from the respondents show that 83.3% are of the view that citizen media have a prospect of growing in terms of usage as more and more citizens embrace the social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, X (formally Twitter), Wechat and so on. These digital platforms offer veritable opportunity for citizens to air their views in matters of national interest thus, contributing to the development at the national and sub-national levels. It is this kind of discourse among citizens through citizen journalism practice on social media that provokes national debate, thus, lending to national cohesion and understanding between the government and the people, and an informed citizenry. On the prospects of citizen journalism, Anorue, Obayi & Onyebuchi (2013) in a study carried out, acknowledge that it (citizen journalism) will help the society to be an information centred environment.

Journalists interviewed in the course of the study acknowledged the micro and macro influence and pressure they face in news framing; for example, guided by the interest to make profits, advertisers' pressure on media owners on content dissemination, forces the latter to further exert pressure on the 'foot soldiers' (media practitioners) of media houses. Respondents acknowledged that this pressure is due to the fear of advertisers who may threaten to withdraw advertisements from their media stations, thus leading to huge revenue loss. In the face of stiff competition, no media owner wants to lose customers to their media rivals. From this perspective, one could understand why media owners exert pressure on journalists irrespective of the acceptability or not of the audience.

Journalists are of the view that such style of administrative practice can lead to citizens embracing other forms of news generation and dissemination like citizen journalism. Respondents acknowledge the possibility of freelancing within journalism practice so as to satisfy their consciences.

Therefore, to answer RQ3, journalists who are conscience-bound to reveal and publish facts are not likely to succumb to such influence and pressure from media owners. Therefore, professionally minded journalists who are sympathetic to their social responsibility demands to the society (Adomi, 2017) are not likely to cave in to pressure from media owners. The consequence, therefore, is to look towards a form of independent journalism practice, in the form of citizen journalism, so as to be free from the gate-keeping process that tends to frame news content from media owners' and advertisers' perspectives.

V. Conclusion

The role of journalism in the society, particularly in democracies across the world, can never be over emphasised. From the watchdog role, to encouraging civic engagement, whether in the socio-political, economic or cultural spheres, journalism practice has become a reflection of what and how a society is. However, journalism practice in Nigeria continues to contend with a plethora of challenges, thus making it difficult to fulfill its role effectively. Journalism practice is expected to function freely, and without cooperate and state institutions' interference and pressure, or fear of intimidation and persecution. Conversely, media owners' interest, along with their paternalistic tendencies, continues to act as clog in the wheel of progress of journalism practice; thus, forcing some to seek an independent form of journalism through citizen journalism practice.

From the findings of this study, it has been observed that media ownership, which is heavily laden with interest, constitute a barrier to a free and functioning press, such that journalists publish news stories that either favour or reflect the interest of media owners and their cronies. The findings of the study further revealed that many of the journalists succumb

to these pressures from media owners in order to protect their jobs due to the worsening economic situation of the country.

Again, there is the credibility issue as to the reliability and authenticity of contents that are sometimes published, especially when the audiences already have the facts of the information in the public domain. Media contents, which are reflective of the extant fact in the public domain, are sometimes perceived by the audience as propaganda of media owners. Finally, it should be noted that citizen journalism is definitely not a replacement for traditional journalism, but they can complement one another through responsible reportage.

Recommendations

1. Although media owners view their media outlets as business ventures, they should, however, try to strike a balance between their interest and the ethics of journalism. The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) should stand up to media owners' unprofessional practices since journalistic reportage is losing credibility before the audience who consider such as reflective of media owners.
2. Citizen journalism practice should be encouraged since media owners do not have the capacity to regulate, or determine what news people disseminate to the public
3. Citizen journalism practice complements the activities of mainstream media, especially institutional citizen journalism, hence it should be emphasised on. However, regulatory authorities should continue to set parameters for operation so as to check fake news content.

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