

NECESSITY OF MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY FOR EFFECTIVE CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

New media and information technology have a profound impact on all ramifications of our lives, including the way and manner in which we gather facts and opinions, process them, write about them, edit them, package them, and disseminate them. This led to the advent of a new phenomenon in journalism known as citizen journalism, where non-professionals or untrained individuals engage in the act of reporting news on issues and events, leveraging the accessibility and affordability of the tools of digital technologies. Unfortunately, these concerned citizens know little or do not have the minutest skill to critically assess and distinguish between false and genuine information to be shared with a large, heterogeneous audience. The frequency with which those untrained journalists spread misinformation, hoaxes, and hate speech draws our attention to carrying out this study, relying on the available literature as the source of data for the study. In view of this singular fact, this paper therefore discusses the need of media and information literacy for effective citizen journalism. Anchored on democratic participant media theory as its theoretical undertone, the paper recommends, among other things, the integration of media and information literacy (MIL) skills into Nigerian educational curricula at both post-primary and higher institutions of learning so that the youth will be guided in the use of new communication media. **Keywords:** Citizen journalism, information literacy, journalism, media participation, new media

Introduction

Journalism is simply an act of collecting, processing, writing, and disseminating news and views about the issues and events happening in society via the various channels of mass communication. The term is traceable to Roman Acta Diurna, which is so important that it is upon which the current terminology is derived. Journalism, as a profession over two centuries old, owes its threshold to print as the earliest form of mass media channel. It has been an ever-evolving

phenomenon that is continuously being shaped by the invention of new media and information technologies. According to Hasan (2013) the historical evolution of journalism, or the collection and dissemination of news, can be traced back to the advancement of technology and innovation, which resulted in the creation of specialized ways for obtaining and spreading information on a regular basis. As a result, the variety of news accessible and the speed with which such information is disseminated has steadily increased.

Hasan (2013) observation is seen as a true reflection of the evolution of journalism in the world, which started primitively through the words of mouth before the development of writing and much later with the invention of the movable typed printing press in the 1450s by Gutenberg, which marked a great turning point to the modern form of journalism we have today. In the later part of the 20th century, journalism practice saw an unprecedented change following the invention of the interconnected networking and other information and communication technologies. According to Khanna and Kaur (2019) the field of communication has witnessed a dramatic change and advancement as a result of the increasing growth and use of communication technologies, particularly the Internet, which has the ability to facilitate information sharing and allows whoever has access to it to produce and broadcast his or her own information for all to see. This, however, brought the world to a situation where an individual, who hitherto had no opportunity to share opinion, views, or aspirations has the space now to do so freely without a single gate to be checked by gatekeepers before it gets broadcast or published, unlike in the case of organizational news media. This is what is referred to as citizen journalism.

However, Ritonga and Syahputra (2019) see the multiple breakthroughs in new media and information technologies as an advancement in journalism that opens a window for citizen journalism that makes us all journalists, broadcasters, columnists, commentators, and critics. With this development, all the dynamism of journalism practice has continued since the invention of new communication and information technologies. Steinhauer (2021) argues that, prior to the emergence of the interconnected networking and the World Wide Web, the source of conventional mass media was often

restricted to a limited number of people who performed predetermined roles in a media organization. However, the advent of information and communication technology allows an individual to communicate and disseminate information to a relatively large number of people.

Due to the affordability and accessibility of new media and information technology, the journalism realm is equally witnessing a tremendous change that has brought about the concepts of user-generated content (UGC), and more importantly, citizen journalism (Allan & Hintz, 2019). As a result, information and other media content saturated the space to the extent that people could not easily ascertain which pieces of information or news to consume and which not to. And this situation of information explosion, courtesy of the invention of new technology, is one that people cannot dodge but must learn to live with. Therefore, knowledge of media and information literacy becomes imperative to enable novice practitioners, particularly citizen journalists, to critically assess information and to also appreciate the workings of the media; otherwise, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and hate speeches will continue to be embellished in our society.

Objective of the study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To draw attention to the imperative of media literacy in the digital information era
2. To discuss how media literacy competencies enhance effective citizen journalism in Nigeria
3. To identify some problems associated with citizen journalism in Nigeria

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on democratic participant media theory, which advocates for the democratization of media ownership and control as well as its protection from the tight grip of professional exclusivity. As Bajracharya (2018) points out that, the democratic participant media theory recommends pluralism in the form of many small-scale media structures aimed at breaking the professional hegemony of the mass media, which sustains and maintains a few voices in the political class. It recognizes the importance of public engagement in the development of fledgling democracies, such as those seen in many African nations. McQuail (1987) adds that, the theory as one of the later normative theories to compensate for the shortcomings of the western liberal model.

Democratic participation theory advocates resistance to commercialization and monopoly while opposing the bureaucracy of public media agencies. The approach stresses the receiver's participation in the process of communication and incorporates the user's rights to relevant media message, to be heard, and to be seen (Kperogi, 2019). The messages and substance of the media should not be influenced by bureaucratic and political control. One of the major arguments for this theory is that the existence of the media should be shown in terms of the recipient's interests and requirements rather than the media entity's interests and wants. This approach promotes small-scale, numerous, local, non-institutional community media because they connect senders and receivers and also favour horizontal interaction patterns. On this note, Johnson and Johnson (2013), citing Baran and Davis (2012) sum up the major arguments of the theory as follows:

- a. Democratic participant theory encourages media support for cultural diversity at the grassroots.
- b. It calls for the advancement of less-sophisticated medium that can be directly controlled by group members.

Participation in society's decision-making and communication activities should be open to all citizens, not just wealthy individuals. The motivation factor for the application of this theory in this paper is its campaign for the liberalization of information production, distribution, and consumption—an opportunity that gives ordinary citizens, who are considered consumers of media content, the opportunity to actively participate in the process of content production and distribution, which is known as citizen journalism. Contributing to the discourse on the democratic participant media theory, Helberger (2021) observes that the new media, of which citizen journalism is an emerging type, have brought about communication liberation in the hands of the people out of the monopolistic control of professionals and political elites. McQuail (1987) argues that participatory media theory is based on the philosophies of participation, collaboration, smallness of scale, localness, cultural independence and variety, emancipation, and support services. The flexibility and participatory nature suggested by this theory make information flow in different directions, and media audiences can now play the roles of reporters and news producers, a situation that makes news production and dissemination participatory for all, irrespective of whether they have journalistic training or not. What is required for the citizen to participate in the information ecosystem is acquiring a smartphone, a blog page, or a social media account, as well as internet connectivity. Untrained citizens who hitherto consumed

news could now produce and package their information and share it with others. This theory is appropriate to this paper because it accurately describes and narrates the flexibility of media operations in the digital era, where everybody, as opined by **Bajracharya (2018)**, is a broadcaster, publisher, reporter, columnist, editor, and critic. It is unfortunate indeed.

Method of the study

This paper is qualitative in nature, depending on the previous literature in which relevant data and information from published online and offline resources were obtained to guide the researchers in gleaning an intimate understanding of the variables under study (Muhammad, 2014). Mohajan (2018) views this type of research method as one that collects data by learning and apprehending data that has a close connection with the problem from theories, documents, journals, articles, and books. The study therefore consulted diverse works on information and media literacy and citizen journalism separately and then brought them together, showing how media and information literacy skills assist in enhancing the activities of citizen journalists in Nigeria for the promotion of democratic, egalitarian, hateful-free, and diverse societies.

Conceptual Clarifications

Meaning of journalism

There are various meanings to the term journalism, as there are multiple scholars of journalism and media platforms upon which journalism is practiced. Fundamentally, journalism's mainstay entirely entails collecting, processing, verifying, and disseminating facts and opinions of public relevance. It is the act of reporting issues or events via a wide spectrum of mass media channels, which include newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the internet.

According to McQuail (1985) Journalism is the paid writing for public media on current and ongoing events of public interest. This is clearly illuminating the fact that not every issue or event that can be reported can be reported, but only the few ones that are adjudged to be of significance and importance to society. By this definition, journalism can be seen as a process of communicating selected information about selected events or issues using carefully chosen words, sounds, or visuals.

To Hasan (2013) journalism means is an academic field deals with collecting, evaluating, validating, and presenting news regarding current happenings, trends, issues, and people, which is characterized by a direct presentation of facts or a description of events without an attempt at interpretation. Furthermore, Eric Hodgins of Time Magazine offered his definition of journalism as the process of conveying information from here to there with accuracy, insight, and dispatch and in such a manner that the truth is served and the rightness of things is made slowly, even if not immediately, more evident. It is obvious, as captured in the above, that truth and accuracy of facts are paramount in journalism, which could make or mar the credibility of the media. This is confirmed by the saying that 'facts are sacred, but opinions are free.' This is emphasizing the fact that journalism deals with facts and figures that are verifiable and, to a greater extent, with opinions that will be clearly identifiable by the audience. Journalism involves all forms of mass media channels through which information is passed to the audience (Saragih & Harahap, 2020).

Citizen journalism

The concept of citizen journalism is an emerging trend in journalism that is imminently prompted by the invention of the

internet, the World Wide Web, and other tools of modern technology that enable whoever possesses them to easily express himself without any hindrance. Citizen journalism is the act of untrained individuals actively participating in the process of gathering, reporting, and distributing news and information. This trend has gained momentum, especially in the digital age, with social media platforms giving ordinary citizens the power to share information with the world. Citizen journalism also refers to an act of citizen participation in the process of media content generation, production, and distribution to the public. These people are not professionally trained or do not have to be graduates of a professional course in journalism; all that is required of them are writing skills, a smart phone, a social media account, and internet connectivity.

According to Nwanguma (2015) citizen journalism is the participation of an individual or group of individuals in the process of gathering, reporting, evaluating, and distributing news and other information. To Miller (2019) citizen journalists are individuals with no association with a news organization who develop news and information content (text, video, audio, interactive, etc.) for public distribution. The salient thing to note above about citizen journalism, apart from unprofessional content creation and distribution, is the lack of news media affiliation that citizen journalists do not have. Miller (2019) defines citizen journalism by a variety of distinguishing characteristics, including unpaid work, the lack of professional training, and the frequently unedited publishing of information. It may include clear language, different story selection and news judgment, particularly on hyper-local topics, free accessibility, and interaction. Miller (2019) further stresses that, citizen journalism fosters unprofessional

involvement in content generation through hyperlocal media operations, which are geographically and community based, original news reporting organizations inherent to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue and promote civic engagement. It is also quite imperative to make some clarifications on the nomenclature of citizen journalism, considering that it has gained currency among the public and professionals alike. Some of the other names of citizen journalism include participatory journalism, nonmedia journalism, grassroots journalism, bottom-up journalism, open source journalism, personal journalism, distributed journalism, hyperlocal journalism, guerilla journalism, citizen media, network journalism, stand-alone journalism, street journalism, public journalism (Anthony & Benjamin, 2018).

Classification of citizen journalists

Basically, there are two broad categories of citizen journalists, which include stand-alone and news media-incorporated citizen journalists. Stand-alone citizen journalists are those untrained people who are working on their own, creating the content, and publishing it on their social media platform or website. They are not adding to any existing publications. They are using their social media accounts, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and, Instagram among others, to publish their opinions, comment on issues, and photograph in a way that draws public attention to what is happening in the world. These kinds of citizen journalists, according to Umar, Haruna, Hussaina and Ali (2022) not only draw public attention but also conventional news media, which find them handy in getting the scoop on events or issues. The second category of citizen journalists is said to be the new media-incorporated citizen journalists who assist the

news organization in publishing news with proper sources by employing techniques like crowdsourcing as a means of getting information from the crowd to complete an article. This category of citizen journalists provides another way of cutting the cost of hiring professionals in all nooks and crannies.

According to Dominick (2013) citizen journalism is a trend that is actively encouraged by the traditional news media. He further gives examples of reputable international news media that promote citizen journalism via their created platforms, like CNN, which has iReport; Fox News has uReport; CBS has Eyemobile, etc. In spite of the role played by this type of citizen journalist, the conventional news media must be sensitive while including user-generated materials into their original reporting because citizen-produced journalism carries some risk as the competency, credibility, and objectivity of average reporters may be suspected, which is obvious as it is challenging to discern if citizen journalists are well-informed or if they are chasing personal agendas (Dominick, 2013).

Challenges Faced by Citizen Journalists

Citizen journalists in developing countries, including Nigeria, have become the mouthpiece of the masses, providing firsthand information on happenings in different societies. These untrained journalists have been able to capture events and provide unique perspectives and on-the-ground reporting of events that conventional journalists may not have access (Musa Muhammad Umar, 2023). Despite the broader range of perspectives offered by citizen journalists, they encountered serious challenges, among which were lack of verification, bias and subjectivity, risk of safety, lack of credibility, etc. Citizen journalists, according to Musa Muhammad Umar (2023) may not have access to the same

verification and fact-checking tools as professional journalists have, which makes it difficult for them to produce quality content or report objectively. Citizen journalists are often driven by personal views and experiences that may cloud their objectivity and bias in their reporting. Citizen journalists may sometimes expose themselves to physical danger while covering events and may not have the same level of protection as professional journalists. Occasionally, they face intimidation from authorities. They may be arrested or physically attacked while trying to report an incident. **Musa Muhammad Umar (2023)** states that the public may question the credibility of citizen journalism due to the lack of training or resources often associated with it. To mitigate the presumed risk associated with citizen journalism, we argue that the need for media and information literacy is imperative for citizen journalists.

Empirical review on citizen journalism, media and information literacy

Citizen journalism has played a significant role in the process of informing, educating, and mobilizing communities. With the rise of social media platforms and the accessibility of smartphones, ordinary individuals have become empowered to capture and share news events in real-time (Roberts, 2019). This has led to a democratization of information, allowing diverse perspectives and grassroots stories to reach a global audience. Despite the numerous advantages of citizen journalism, it gives untrained journalists the opportunity to spread fake news, misinformation, and rumors. This can have serious consequences, as false information can easily go viral and mislead the public. In response to this, scholars have conducted studies to understand the nature of citizen journalism and how media and information literacy can assist in effective citizen journalism. For instance, Umar,

Haruna, Abdullahi, and Madaki (2022) examine how citizen journalism contributes to the spread of misinformation and fake news, which has negative consequences for society. The researchers used a survey to collect data from 337 participants. According to the findings of their studies, the majority of the participants using social media to disseminate fake news and rumors were not aware that the information being shared and recirculated was untrue. The study recommends incorporating media and information literacy into the general courses in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Similarly, Carr, Cuervo Sanchez, and Daros (2020) conducted a study in Europe and the United States of America to discover citizen participation in the era of social media. Using the case study, the study's findings show that media literacy is necessary as a potential means for effective citizen journalism. Anorue, Obayi, and Chima (2013) study the concept of citizen journalism practice in Nigeria with a view to understanding its challenges, benefits, and prospects in the country. Employing a survey method involving 143 respondents from the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the study finds that the challenges facing citizen journalism in Nigeria include a lack of sufficient computer illiteracy, the cost of the internet, and its access, among others. The study also recommends teaching computer literacy in both secondary and tertiary institutions in the country.

In the same vein, Mcdougall (2019) conducted ethnographic research on media literacy, fake news, and civil engagement. The study's data collected through interviews with prominent members of the stakeholder group, such as teachers, information experts, students, and librarians, reveal that the young citizens contributed greatly to the frequent misinformation and fake news. The study

also recommends the adoption of critical media literacy as a compulsory subject in schools and taught as a dynamic literacy education. The majority of the above-mentioned studies identify the problems associated with citizen journalism and suggest the need for media and information literacy knowledge for effective citizen journalism. As such, this study was carried out to ascertain the necessity for media literacy for effective citizen journalism among untrained journalists.

Media and information literacy: A way forward

Literally speaking, the term 'literacy' refers to the ability to read and write, but recently it has expanded to include the ability to critically appreciate media content and ascertain the genuineness of the plethora of information available, as well as using the verified information to create content for dissemination to other members of the public. It is the capacity to comprehend media messages, as well as the systems in which those messages exist, and analyse their impact on ideas, feelings, and behaviors. According to Aduloju (2019) Media literacy is a set of abilities that enables people to perform information retrieval activities efficiently in a technologically driven world. In another perspective, Aririguzoh (2007) sees media literacy as the capacity to assess, analyze, evaluate, and transmit information to a media audience across a range of platforms, including print and non-print.

In the same vein, Baro and Fyneman (2009) view information literacy as the capacity to recognize what information is required, comprehend how the information is structured, identify the sources of information for a specific need, discover those sources, critically assess those sources, and communicate that information. The above definition is quite similar to the

UNESCO (2023) Information for All (IFA) position on information literacy which could be seen as a basic right of individual in the ICT era. It is also the ability of individuals to detect their information requirements, discover and assess the quality of information, store and save information, utilize information effectively and ethically, and lastly use information to generate and convey knowledge. (Safii & Dewi, 2018). Drawing from the varied definitions and opinions above, media and information literacy are closely tied to each other because they are both concerned with being critical of the information one consumes from the media content and the information one uses to produce the media content.

Furthermore, media literacy as an essential component of citizen journalism could assist in shaping citizen journalism. It helps individuals become both critical consumers and producers of media content. In today's digital age, it is crucial for people to be able to evaluate the accuracy and credibility of news and information coming not only from mobile journalists but also from traditional or conventional media practitioners. Understanding media and information literacy will assist a citizen journalist in developing the skills to recognize high-quality sources of news and information from sensational and fake news. According to Musa Muhammad Umar (2023) media and information literacy could assist a citizen journalist in learning responsible reporting practices, including maintaining reporter neutrality, accuracy, and fairness. Through this media knowledge, untrained people will recognize bias and subjective viewpoints in news and information to better understand the context and motivations behind the subject matter being reported.

The need of media and information literacy for effective citizen journalism

As noted elsewhere in this paper, the advent of new technology comes with a lot of baggage that either displaces the existing arrangement or improves upon it. Hence, journalism practice has been profoundly affected by the invention of new media and information technology in such a way that even the point of departure between professional journalists and the citizens has been increasingly blurring due to the huge advantage of social media platforms. In respect to this Bossio and Bossio (2017) argue that, the durability of journalism as a career and the lack of clarity around its future are the only two things that have remained constant since it joined social media environments. More than 20 years ago, as the potential of internet journalism started to become clear, conventional journalism was perceived as being in danger (Saragih & Harahap, 2020). Levy and Nielsen (2010) equally point out that, the production and dissemination of news material online has moved journalists and their audiences away from the conventional "one-way" communication paradigm typified by newspaper and television journalism. News reporting is characterized by citizen and other "nonprofessional" content generation, an abundance of information, and new online-enabled technology.

The scenario painted above stirred up an urgent need to look inward on the need to have certain skills or competencies on how to receive information and use it without endangering oneself or society in general, considering the fact that information gathering and distribution is no longer the preserve of professional journalists but everyone with the right tools can dabble in it. Consequently, media and information literacy are imperative in this situation.

Aduloju (2020) opined that media literacy enables people to interpret and make useful decisions as users of digital technology, and at the same time to become media contents creator in their own right. Aduloju (2020) further adds that, It is critical that all persons gain the awareness and aptitude of creatively expressing their thoughts through numerous mediums, including multimedia, in the twenty-first century. This means that media literacy has emerged as a critical component of the effort required to create a media and information society capable of creating a specialized and workable community.

These skills or competencies of media literacy that every citizen journalist is expected to acquire are driven by a framework of useful thinking about media messages, responding to media content, and creating numerous media forms. Genereux (2015) identified key components of media literacy to include access, analysis, creation, reflection, and action. Access to media and information literacy has to do with finding and sharing a suitable and useful information via media technology. Analyze is also concerned with scrutinizing the message's purposes and meanings, while 'create' has to do with focusing on composing or generating that media content. Similarly, 'reflect' has to do with the impact of media messages and technology use on our thinking and action, while 'act' concerns how we work independently and collaboratively to solve problems through sharing useful knowledge.

The discussion above clearly underscore the obvious need of information and media literacy for effective citizen journalism considering the fact that a significant number of people participating in citizen journalism are young people which Kim and Yang (2016) referred to as 'digital native' a category of population that are less experience with insufficient wisdom that

come with advancement in age and with inadequate knowledgeable but full of exuberance with unprecedented enthusiasm to create and share information and views about the happening around and beyond their vicinity without considering the technicalities inherent in media content creation and distribution leveraging on internet accessibility and its by product which allow them to be at the comfort of their bedroom to create and share information without a single gate to check by.

To further justify the necessity for media and information literacy, Huguet, Kavanagh, Baker, and Blumenthal (2019) in their study titled Exploring media literacy education as a tool for mitigating truth decay, opined that media literacy is a form of empowerment that people have so that they can easily make informed decisions or choices regarding the information they consume, create, and share. They moved on to describe media literacy as an empowerment notion of engaging media content that offers a critical thinking, so that one can make conscious choices between what is right and wrong, truth and falsehood, information and opinion, and actively contribute to the flow of information, either through those you compose and share or through the choices you make about what you spread through your social media platforms (Huguet et al., 2019). The critical thinking this literacy is emphasizing is not far apart with some of the principles of professional mainstream journalism that has much to do with skepticism, using informed judgment, asking questions, and assessing information collecting process.

It is a fact now that people, especially a substantial part of youths with the right gadget in Nigeria, aside from mainstream media outlets, access their news or information via the internet from online blogs, podcasts, and videos from a wide

variety of providers as well as from other social media and messaging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube, among others, and these led to the saturation of dynamic information sources that created a scenario where it is difficult for people to ascertain which sources to trust with their content. This clearly underscores the necessity of media and information literacy in dealing with complex information environments, as observed by Bruns (2018) that the twenty-first century is defined by a media-saturated culture and the availability and simplicity of access to various sorts of media for all and sundry, where everyone may be a citizen journalist. So, regardless of whether you are a media consumer, media creator or both, the need of media literacy is greater now than ever. Based on the Bruns (2018) submission, media literacy skills are important because they help people acquire many competencies that enable them to make informed decisions and be critical thinkers in a world where technology and new media gadgets are all over the place. It also helps immunize people against undue persuasion and fake information. In Nigeria nowadays, it is becoming regular, especially for political, religious, and other sentiments, that unverifiable platforms create disinformation that is spread and consumed by unsuspected audiences hook, line, and sinker because they lack the skill to assess, analyze, and evaluate the sources to determine their credibility and truthfulness of the information they come across. Examples abound, some of which are drinking salt as a cure for the Ebola pandemic and the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought with it the spread of confusing and false information regarding its prevention and cure (Salamatu & Umar, 2020).

Another advantage of media and information literacy is its potential to provide individuals, particularly children and youth,

with media, information and communication technology and other literacy skills required for the twenty-first century (Horton, 2008). This important knowledge will also assist citizens in understanding how to detect any message that is intended to cause division or hatred or advance an evil agenda. Nigeria, as a complex and diverse country with a multitude of indices of diversities, could be endangered by conflicts if it is not well managed. As observed by Zeng, Jain, Nguyen, and Allan (2019) many factors served as motivation for the practice of citizen journalism, some of which were being victims, eyewitnesses, bystanders, first responders, law enforcement officials, activists, or combatants. Sometimes citizens may feel compelled to bear witness to an event, bring it to the public's attention, or expose some wrongdoing related to it by actively engaging in the production of diverse forms of visual, audio, or written documentation to report what they see, hear, or feel unfolding before them.

However, this practice makes news production and, by extension, citizen engagement participatory, and such participation is crucial to good governance, especially if the event is political or related to public affairs. It is an everyday encounter on the Nigerian online surface to come across a number of multimedia pieces about various incidents, be they road accidents, fire outbreaks, tribal conflicts, assaults, robbery attacks, kidnappings, banditry attacks, political gatherings, or other social gatherings, being posted by Nigerian citizens who are not trained journalists but who have portable modern technologies to make it known and then share it with the public. Since every untrained citizen could engage in a process of both producing and distributing information to a large and heterogeneous audience, it is necessary for them to acquire the media and information literacy skills

necessary for effective citizen journalism so as to reduce the risk of spreading rumors, misinformation, disinformation, hoaxes, and hate speech.

Conclusion

The breakthrough in information and communication technology (ICT) led to rapid development in the field of mass communication. One of such developments is the emergence of people-based journalism, which enabled untrained citizens to engage in the processes of gathering, processing, refining, gatekeeping, and disseminating information to members of society. The ICT equally creates a scenario that leads to having members of the public who are active recipients of information but not passive consumers who equally contribute to media contents production and distribution, leveraging modern digital tools and internet-based platforms such as blogging and social media platforms to widely share their knowledge, information, and opinions regarding any issue or event of public concern. This trend is referred to as citizen journalism and gives untrained citizens the opportunity to take part in the production and distribution of information.

However, this opportunity cannot be utilized without any negative consequences since people without formal training engage in a journalism practice. It is increasingly difficult for people to determine what reliable information is and what is not due to the spread of fake information on the internet. To prevent citizen journalists from becoming agents for misinformation, hoaxes, hate speeches, and the promotion of vested and sinister agenda, citizens need to be thoughtful about the content they put out for public consumption and its implications for others. Based on this fact, we proposed the use of

media and information literacy (MIL) for citizen journalists to be able to understand, manage, and control fake news, misinformation, disinformation, hoaxes, and hate speech that are currently saturating our media landscape.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

1. Media and information literacy (MIL) skills should be integrated into Nigerian educational curricula at both post-primary and higher institutions of learning. By introducing MIL as a general course of study to all students in Nigerian universities and other institutions of learning, the youth will be guided in the use of new communication media.
2. The government, through its National Youth Service Corps orientation program (NYSC), should create an intensive programme for the youth's corps members that will enable them to acquire media and information literacy competency so as to be guided by conventional journalism ethics and principles.
3. There is a need for organizing a sensitization programme to advocate the need for media and information literacy among citizens, especially youths, through conventional and social media platforms.
4. There is a need for a sensitization and intervention program by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) that will enhance the level of media literacy competencies among Nigerian citizens, particularly youths, who constitute a large portion of those practicing citizen journalism.

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