

# **Perception of Professional Journalists on the Impact, Challenges and Gatekeeping of Online Newspapers**

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## **Abstract**

The upsurge in the use of new media tools for information dissemination has created impact and challenges for journalism practice. In line with this, professional journalists are currently having challenges with the gatekeeping process of online newspapers. As such, this study investigated the impact of Internet based media on gatekeeping and journalism practice in Nigeria. Survey and in-depth interview methods were adopted to execute the objectives of the study. The study was carried out in Lagos State, Nigeria, and sixty journalists in Lagos State were purposively selected as sample for the study. Findings of the study show that credibility of information disseminated as a result of Users Generated Content (UGC) served as the main challenge confronting gatekeeping activities and that use of the new media has left an indelible mark on journalism profession as a result of the activities of bloggers and other new media users. As such, it is recommended that journalists, especially editors, should ensure that online newspapers be subjected to proper scrutiny as a means of ensuring that news items disseminated are credible.

**Keywords:** Gatekeeping, Journalism, New Media, Online Newspaper, Reporting, Professionalism

## **Introduction**

Traditionally, professional journalists determine information that will be disseminated to the public and serve as gatekeepers at different levels. However, the practice has changed as a result of the presence of the digital media. In line with this, Friend and Singer (2007) submit that:

In a world of digital media in which anyone can be a publisher, in which there are few if any technological or financial barriers to producing and disseminating information in which concrete and finite media products such as newspaper or television broadcast have been replaced by an amorphous and constantly changing agglomeration of billions of seamlessly interconnected bits (p. xv).

With the new media, certain changes are manifesting in relation to how things are done even by professional Journalists. Conboy (2010) has noted that with the advent of the Internet, “the language as well as the layout has begun to change out of all recognition. They have done this in part to retain readers but also to align themselves more to the apparent democratic imperatives of online interactivity” (p.145). Also, the User Generated Content (UGC) feature of the new media is equally posing as challenge to journalism practice. As such, the perception of professional journalists is gradually accommodating the changes that have come to reorient information dissemination.

Mangal (2006) has noted that “perception is a highly individualised psychological process that helps an organism in organising and interpreting the complex patterns of sensory stimulation for giving them the necessary meaning to initiate his behavioural response”(p.106). The bloggers are online to contend practice with professional journalists as a result of the dynamism in global communication process. As such, multi-skilled journalism activities are required by journalists whose media organisations have online facilities. In line with this, Harcup (2014) submits that Journalists are “required to cover stories for a variety of platforms and/or to utilise variety of different skills such as writing, subbing a story, taking pictures, editing audio, uploading material online, and engaging members of the audience in a conversation”(p.184).

Also, with the use of new media UGC feature, traditional gatekeeping role played by newspaper outfits has received transformation. Therefore, dissemination of news is no longer restricted to professional journalists; anyone with a digital device and a story to tell can go online and tell such story without bothering what the consequences will be, as such could post online whatever information without