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disseminating information in which concrete and finite media products such as newspaper or television broadcast have been replaced by an amorphous and constantly changing agglomeration of billions of seamlessly interconnected bits (p. xv).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

subjecting such to credibility test through the gatekeeping process. Gatekeeping, therefore, relates to all the activities carried out by news producers to ensure that 'chaff'' is removed from what is presented by the media to the public for consumption, that is the reason, Kosicki (1993) states that "the media gatekeepers do not only select which messages to pick, but actively construct such to emphasise certain aspects" (p.113).

Statement of the Problem

The advent of online newspapers through the new media has changed journalistic practice in the global community. Traditionally, processing and enabling dissemination of news were subjected to the professional gatekeeper. Furthermore, Onabajo (2002) from code of ethics of journalism in Nigeria on editorial independence has stated that "decisions concerning the content of news should be the responsibility of a professional journalist" (p.36). On the contrary, whoever has an information can post such news item through the new media platforms without getting queried on how, when, who, why, where and what the news item is telling the public. The practice has increasingly limited journalists practice and requires reorientation in relation to professional gatekeeping.

Therefore, the fundamental problem which this study seeks to address springs from both gatekeeping mechanism and the deterioration thereof as a result of the advent of the new media. As such, the concern of this study is to investigate the impact of participatory media on how journalists perceive the challenges of gatekeeping online newspapers.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the perception of professional journalists on the impact and challenges of gatekeeping online newspapers. The study objectives were set to:

1.   identify the perception of professional journalists on the use of new media for news dissemination;
2.   examine the impact of new media on professional journalism practice in Nigeria; and
3.   To find out the challenges journalists experience in gatekeeping online newspapers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1.   What is the perception of professional journalists on the use of the new media for news dissemination?
2.   What is the impact of new media on professional journalism practice in Nigeria?
3.   What are the challenges journalists experience in gatekeeping online newspapers?

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Gatekeeping Theory and Democratic-Participant Media Theory. The Gatekeeping theory was propounded by Kurt Lewin in 1947. Harcup (2014) argues that gatekeeping theory is "a theory that presents the journalist as a gatekeeper who allows some events to pass through to become news while shutting the gate on other events" (p.114). The assumption of the theory premised on professional role of vetting information and releasing only credible ones to the public. As a result, gatekeepers either allow information to flow or prevent information dissemination. The theory experienced misgiving in some quarters based on bias that could be entertained by the gatekeeper. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) assert that gatekeeping determines which information is to be selected and also what the content and nature of the messages would be.

The arrival of the new media seems to have thrown gatekeeping out of news dissemination. The new media have given opportunity to anyone with information to access the new media platform and publish story online without subjecting such story to the gatekeepers. Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) explain thus:

> It would seem the notion of gatekeeping goes right out of the window with the Internet. The Internet and its user-friendly World Wide Web graphical overlay is the best example yet of a postmodern medium; it provides the opportunity for creation of a highly personal interface, in which all importance, all meaning, is relative to an individual perspective (p.93).

However, the critics of gatekeeping believe that certain news items were prevented from getting to the public as a result of factors that could jeopardise business opportunities of organisation represented by the gatekeeper. Also, the danger of citizen journalism lies in the bias that could be entertained by the amateur as a result of not having anyone to critically scrutinise the information/news items that will circulate to the public. Gatekeeping is a call of conscience which stands on the

moral principles of truth, objectivity, fairness, and responsibility etc. It is an avenue of getting Journalist code of ethics fulfilled.

Democratic-Participant Media Theory

The second theory adopted for this study is Democratic-Participant Media Theory. The theory was propounded by Professor Dennis McQuail in 1987. The democratic feature of the theory supports new media UGC and publishing media content based on self-regulation. McQuail (2013) argues that "the guiding principles are of participation, interactivity, smallness of scale, local identity, cultural autonomy, and variety, emancipation and self-help" (p.47).

McQuail's Democratic-Participant Media Theory promotes interactivity and participation of different people, group and communities. The theory is a suitable theory for news dissemination on the new media. It gives opportunity to anyone with credible information to come online and share with others. It also fosters the feedback feature of the new media. As a result of the democratic participatory theory, interactivity can take place in respect of the online newspaper promoting participation of media users. With the democratic-participant theory, gatekeeping online news is not limited to the professional journalists as it is obtainable in traditional gatekeeping.

Conceptual /Literature Review
Traditional Information Dissemination

The print media have gone through refinement process as a result of technical advancement that enabled the launching of newspapers and magazines for public consumption. Dash (2008) has noted that "traditionally, the newspaper has been looked upon as a platform of public opinion and as an instrument to fight oppression and tyranny of leaders" (p.55). Aside from its serving as a platform of public opinion, it also serves as a platform of disseminating happenings around to the people. According to Nwodu (2011), the idea about documenting daily occurrences as news began in Rome when Caesar was the king. Baran (1999) notes that "the circulation was one, and there was no reliable measure of its total readership" (p.95). During Caesar's era, the people that posted the news items on the wall were referred to as gatekeepers because they determined what will get to the wall as news.

Modern media have seen many transitions at every stage, what was new became old. About a century ago, part of what we regard now as traditional or old media - radio and television – were once the new media. Governments and powers used them to their advantage, and of course; they also posed as threats. Now, with more advancement in technology, we are witnessing a fast shift to what is generally

regarded as the new media, and they are being used for online journalism. The new media, in this regard, include, among many others, blogosphere, Twitter and Social Networking Sites (SNSs) etc. and they have gone a long way to aid online journalism.

In Africa, indigenous information disseminators were used for disseminating vital information in the communities before the arrival of mass media. Guanah and Ojo (2018) note that man from the outset employed one type of primitive technology (drum beating, usage of signs or symbols) to communicate before the invention of modern communication technologies. Whatever information gets to the public was subjected to the discretion of authority that gives a clearance on the message to take to the public. As such, the town criers, drummers and whoever takes message to the public serves as the aid of the gatekeepers.

News, Journalists, and Gatekeeping

Globalisation has changed the trend of disseminating information. Quan-Haase (2013) argues that globalisation is "the move towards the interconnectedness of human affairs - economic, cultural, social, and political - transcending national boundaries, government and laws" (p.236). Information disseminated could contribute or forestall human and societal progress. Before the advent of the new media, the professional journalist through gatekeeping ensured that only credible items that could enable democratic society and make the people better citizens are released as news. Before the news gets to the public sphere, it would have been subjected to the professional view of the gatekeepers starting with the reporter who gathered the news. Therefore, Singer (2007) states that "one widely used definition of a journalist revolves around the role of gatekeeper - a person whose judgment determines what information is and is not worthy to pass through a metaphorical gate for dissemination to the public"(p.29).

Irrespective of the fact that the new media serve as media enabling free flow of information, the moral stand of the one disseminating the information as a result of individual perception on issues play major role in determining the credibility of such news item. When information is given in relation to an occurrence, such information is not counted newsworthy until it has been made to pass through the necessary gates that will qualify it as news. However, Rudin (2011) states that citizens have "always contributed to the processes of even the most professional of journalist operations. Amateur photographers have often been present at what transpired to be dramatic and newsworthy events and eyewitness accounts, although usually framed and circumscribed by the gatekeepers" (p.182).

As a result, Chen (2010) takes a look at applying multi-gated news model to a

social web. In his study, he adjusted Bennet's model and further developed four types of gated-news by identifying the concepts of public, journalistic roles, gatekeeping norms, and online users' decision basis for news selection. He stated that scholars commonly use technology, market, and democratic theories to explain the process of gatekeeping for new media. Bennett used a multi-gated model to demonstrate how the economy, journalism, technology, politics, and public shape news content. Bennet's model offers four dimensions - reporter-driven, organisation-driven, market-driven, and technology-driven to define who uses news, what news is, and what roles new media play. In support of this, Ott and Mack (2010) note that "due to the pressure on journalists to meet deadlines, some issues, events, and actors are far more likely to be reported on than others" (p.66).

Payne (2009) explains that mass media content homogenisation is a product of a complex, three-tiered set of interactive gatekeeping roles and two-tiered agenda setting relationships involving internal and external content control, and a socialisation process that produces a consensual definition of news. Tertiary-level gatekeeping are carried out by reporters, sub-editors and line editors. Their contribution to homogenisation is a consequence of top-down pressure. As a matter of survival, they are compliant with dictates of superiors.

Perception of Professional Journalists on Gatekeeping Online Newspapers

Tine, Chile and Aer (2015) note that "online newspaper, also called a web newspaper is actually a daily newspaper that is published and read over the World Wide Web (p.118).Today, online journalism is so elaborate that The Guardian Unlimited, a subsidiary of *Guardian* Newspaper in the United Kingdom (UK), has become the biggest website in UK attracting millions of readers daily all over the world. As a news site it is only second to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). It has about 140 million page impression a month and about 13 million users a month (Awoyinfa, 2006).

Just like with print newspaper, Gillman (2011) explain that "news values are applied to determine what information is selected, what is rejected and what importance it will be given in the overall output. As a result, journalists and media professionals have been described as gatekeepers" (p. 253). However, Singer (2007) observes that in the networked world, many people are involved to "gather, organise, and publish timely information every hour of everyday, there is no such gate. The idea that anyone can or even should guard one seems absurd when virtually any bit of information, misinformation, or disinformation" (p.29) is available online.

The appearance of citizen journalism has introduced practices that sharply interfere with the outlook of the traditional professional journalism. The perception of the professional journalists on amateur style of practice and dissemination of information hinged on the belief that they are stylishly misinforming the society as a result of not subjecting information in the public sphere to checks of the editor that would have ascertained the credibility or otherwise of such information. Therefore, the interactive feature of the new media has added value to journalistic practice. Singer (2007) also notes that "the interactive nature of the medium offers a prime opportunity to break away from restrictive conventions of sourcing in which only people holding particular badges of authority are allowed through the journalistic gate" (p.47). The new media are fostering various ways of disseminating news.

With ambient journalism, news items are produced, distributed and received through new media platforms, and also, different types of practices that were not given credence in professional journalism practice are thriving and could not be hindered by any gate. Amateurs post news items because they were not linked to any media organisation that would have shut news dissemination gate against them. However, this has promoted reporting witnessed issues (eyewitness) or events involved in (native report). Harcup (2014) argues that native reporting is journalism "produced by people who are themselves involved in a story. Most commonly found within alternative media, native reporting allows communities, groups or individuals to speak directly on their behalf rather than having their stories mediated by a third party" (p.193). Aside from eyewitness and native report, there are many more ways engaged by non-professional in disseminating information online without gatekeeping hindrance. Drudge report, Gonzo journalism etc. are all able to disseminate information freely as a result of the liberty found through the new media platforms.

In support of the professional role, Chandler and Munday (2011) note that being an editor is "a role involving the overall control of content, format, and publication" (p.117). As a result of the overall control, the content would have been checked for credibility before finding its route to the public sphere. In as much as a reporter is a story teller that needs to embrace fairness and objectivity in reporting news, there are different types of reporting in professional journalism (investigative reporting, objective, interpretative and crime reporting). Each type tries as much as possible to key into newsworthiness and credibility.

Impact of the New Media on Journalistic Practice

New media are interactive communication tools powered by the Internet. New media technologies are fast tracking information and aiding speedy dissemination of

happening around the world. People now have easy access to the latest information through the various new media platforms. Aside from the fact that new media platforms are used for sharing information, the contributory element of the media include getting instant feedback, this is advantageous in comparison to traditional media. Today, the Internet is deployed to virtually all aspect of human endeavour.

As technology evolves, mass communication practitioners (journalists) align themselves with the trending technology to effectively perform their roles in the society. Guanah and Ojo (2018) observe that technological advancement as applied to information gathering and distribution has changed, and still changing the nature of journalism practice positively and negatively. According to Audu, Adeyeye, Onoja and Ogwo (2012), journalists may only be able to confirm the authenticity of what the public must have already read or watched through social media, "because as soon as a newsworthy event occurs, most people on the scene of the event will immediately post it on social media often scoop breaking news away from mainstream journalists" (p.73). This involves public participation, bloggers break news on independent websites, and citizens capture newsworthy events with cell phone cameras to enable posting 'User-Generated Content' through avenues like YouTube, Instagram etc.

As a result of the use of the new media, policies get reviewed because the people now serve as the watchdog of their own environment, a function that was formerly reserved for professional journalists. Citizens now use the social media to draw attention of government agencies without hindrance from gatekeepers. However, with all the advantages associated with the new media, there are disadvantages. Amaefule (2017) explains that they can be a nuisance to the government and society at large through the promotion of "mudslinging, hate speech, cyber bullying, rants and unbridled ventilation of anger that are common features on these platforms" (p.1).

One of the issues that the new media have thrown up in international communication scene recently is that of peddling "fake news". Guanah (2018) has defined fake news as "any falsehood that is intentionally and deliberately being presented as correct and truthful news report" (p.23). Pope Francis, according to punchng.com (2018), notes that the first fake news dated from the biblical beginning of time when Eve was tempted. The Pope denounced fake news as "evil", and compared it to the snake in the Garden of Eden. He urged journalists to search for the truth. Fake news could have negative effects on the society, example is the health sector where vaccine meant to prevent millions of cases of disease every year, and deadly outbreaks are under threat from growing public mistrust in immunisation as a result of "fake news" which is drowning out expert voices.

There is a high rate of fake news on the new media today because there is no

effective gatekeeping system to vet what is posted online as news. Lack of credibility has become an issue in journalistic practice because people with access to digital device that are connected to internet network now claim to be practicing citizen journalism, participatory journalism, open-source journalism, personal media or grassroots reporting. Awoyinfa (2006) argues that online journalism has become serious, and has become a big business that "you simply cannot just toy with or leave in the hands of non-professionals to manage" (p. 35).

In line with this, Conboy (2010) argues that "the impact of the Internet on the form and content of newspapers is as radical a change as this news medium has ever had to deal with and brings with it fundamental challenges to our social understanding of their function"(p.145). In line with this, Singer (2007) states that "journalists can and should draw on a broad range of online information providers as sources for news and opinions. That is not to say such sources should not be vetted as journalists have always done" (p.47) to ascertain their credibility.

However, Shrivastava (2013) notes that the Internet works "without a break, periodic updating and continuous updating of running stories is possible, hence the time of the update is important. Similarly, the selection and editing can continue all the time, subject to the limit of resources and manpower" (p. 233). Reiterating the benefits of online newspaper, Amadi (2015) argues that "no doubt, the Information and Communication Technology has made the print media a fun, it has practically enhanced and improved the newspaper and other allied matters from the period of production to distribution" (p.153).

Challenges of Gatekeeping Online newspapers

Online newspaper has become an essential part of 21st century journalistic practice. However, there are challenges. Amadi (2015) asserted that newspaper have "been known to freely cull and publish articles and news stories from the websites of other newspapers, without actually paying any royalties" (p.153). Also, Gillman (2011) observes that "professional journalists are increasingly required to be multi-skilled-to-know how to capture images, write text, edit stories, to file for their own organisation as well as overseas outlets and still try to find an exclusive angle" (p.254) without losing professional focus and practice relevance.

Conboy (2010) argues that there are "paradoxes at work in the democratic promise of online interactivity; on the one hand, the Internet appears to flatten the hierarchy of traditional newspaper…elite commentators on the newspapers become highlighted and amplified as opinion brokers and gatekeepers" (p.148) in such case, commodification of news could occur. Gillman (2011) states that "news can be treated like any other good for sale and can be given an economic weight that reflects

how much money it generates and how much it costs to produce" (p.254) but ethically, news ought not to be treated as goods on sale to prevent bias. As a result, Friend and Singer (2007) argue that "bloggers have taken on a self-appointed role as 'watchdogs' of the watchdogs carefully and continuously monitoring what journalists report and how they report it and calling attention to perceived problems such as hypocrisy, bias, inaccuracy, and inattention to potentially big stories" (p.116).

Also, Harkaway (2013) asserts that Google has received the accusation of "fostering and profiting from unlawful use of copyright material, and wreckage of the newspaper industry by taking over the ad revenue stream on which that industry somewhat depended" (p.36). However, to enable continual relevance of the print media, strategies that will promote online newspapers should come to the fore of news production.

The study on "The use of social media for news by students of tertiary institutions in Lagos State by Soji Alabi was reviewed empirically. The study was based on the use of social media for dissemination of news that has made news easily accessible and participatory. The study examined the access and use of social media for news by students in tertiary institution in Lagos. The study adopted survey method and randomly selected a sample of 300 students in tertiary institutions. Findings of the study showed that social media are readily available for news but could pose as challenge to the traditional media. As such, it was recommended in the study that traditional media should strategize to creatively package online news to meet the demands of new media users.

Methodology

The study adopted survey as research design. Questionnaire and interview served as research instruments. Non probability sampling technique and purposive sample were adopted. Some editors were selected for interview. The population of the study are fifty newspaper organisations in Nigeria with Online presence (Onlinenewspaper.com, 2017). The researchers purposively selected six newspaper organisations (*ThisDay, Punch, Vanguard, The Guardian, Daily Independent* and *The Sun* newspapers). The researchers also selected sixty journalists purposively. Demographic data of the Journalists showed that 25 (41.6%) journalists have worked with the media organisations for more than 10 years, 14 (23.33%) have worked for less than 10 years while 21 (35%) used Blog and Twitter for two years and have worked as journalists for more than seven years.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Perception of journalists on gatekeeping online newspaper

Extent of perception of journalist on gatekeeping online newspapers	Freq	%
Very high	37	61.67%
High	17	28.33%
Undecided	1	1.67%
Low	4	6.67%
Very low	1	1.67%
Total	**60**	**100%**

From Table 1 above, the adoption of Internet-based media for news dissemination, to a very high extent, has affected gatekeeping online journalism newspaper.

Table 2: Impact of new media platforms for news dissemination by professional journalists

Impact of new media use on professional journalism practice	Freq	%
There is professionalism reduction for news dissemination online	2	3.33%
There is believability problem with some online news stories	4	6.67%
There is invasion of charlatans online as reporters.	1	1.67%
News value is not given adequate credence in online news report	3	5%
All of the above	50	83.3%
Total	60	100%

Based on data presented on Table 2 above, the emergence of the new media has impacted professional journalism practice negatively. As a result of new media use, there is Internet freedom. Therefore, there is no effective gatekeeping for online news items.

Table 3: Types of challenges journalists face in performing gatekeeping

Online gatekeeping challenges identified by professional journalists	Freq	%
Speed of online media	2	3.33%
Anonymity of users	4	6.67%
Credibility issues	1	1.67%
Electricity	3	5%
All of the above	50	83.3%
Total	**60**	**100%**

Table 3 presented data on online gatekeeping challenges experienced by professional journalists.

Presentation of Data from Interview

Commenting on how the emergence of the new media has impacted conventional journalism practices during an interview, Ademola Oni, Assistant Editor, Online and New Media, Punch Nigeria Limited (*punchonline*), stressed that in online media, practitioners are mindful of speed because it is quite different from the traditional media. He says the latter give them the opportunity of spending up to five hours to work on certain stories, which could not happen for the online media. According to him, it is the speed at which stories are published that keep people coming to the news site.

On the extent to which *punchomline* depends on user-generated content (UGC), Oni said that what happens is that "the social media help you to get a clue to certain happenings. Example, if somebody posts a story on twitter that there is a fight at a political rally that gives a clue to help us get further information. While we do not depend wholly on social media and user generated content, we still get some benefits". He further said that, "Somebody can post on ill-treatment on a particular airline, you the journalist were not there, but because of what you have seen, you can contact the person to know more and also contact the airline to get their reaction".

On the need to double check the sources of online news, and verify facts contained through offline and online means to avoid unnecessary litigation to their establishments, Oni said these steps are necessary because a lot of online news disseminators are anonymous, and lack understanding of media ethics. According to Ademola Oni, because the addresses of bloggers are not known, they believe they can publish anything, "but what goes round comes round. When people know that you use your websites to slander people, at a time they will stop going there. When they go there they do not believe what you are saying. What to do is to consider whether a particular content is against or destroying the reputation of anybody. Where you find that a story is one-sided you have to balance it or reject it outright."

In his own submission, *The Guardian* newspaper`s online editor, Akinlolu Olamuyiwa, observes that conventional media cannot do without legal issues as a result of UGC overused but there should always be a means of minimising them. To him,

> The way you can minimise it is by double checking the stories. When I get a story, I do not just trust who sent it, I still have to verify from two or three other sources. Even when the story is true, the other party would still want to raise issues on it, therefore there will always be legal issues but you use your professional expertise to minimise them.

He said since the media house is the interface with the public, if there is any legal issue, it is the media house that should be sued; that is why media houses should be careful of what they are publishing. He explains that "If you give me a story, before I publish it I have to be sure that it is authentic. But if you give me a story that somebody stole money and I publish it and it turns out that it is not true, the media house is in trouble. The source of the story could even come out to blame you for not cross checking but the person suing will sue the media house".

The editor reveals that *The Guardian* as a newspaper, even the hard copy version, do not publish every story that people bring to them to use. As a gatekeeper, he emphasises that *The Guardian* has integrity, and people believe what they read hence they are thorough in the editing so that the newspaper`s image would not be dragged down, pointing out that "We start gate keeping right from the reporter who is sending in the story. He should not write from a biased point of view, the sub-editor checks the story to ensure that it is balanced and not just reporting one side. Sometimes, subeditors have to check the grammar usage so that you are not conveying a wrong message. Before it is finally published the editor has to go through too. Therefore, the gate keeping is still very tight, and if will continue like that".

Adding his voice to the discourse in an interview, Johnson Ayantunji, the News Editor of *Daily Independent* newspaper said, journalists "moderate or gate keep before publishing by weeding off unnecessary content. As moderators and gatekeepers of information, we try to make sure that stories are balanced". He said reporters must confirm their stories before publishing to prevent litigations, therefore there is need to dig further before using any UGC. He said when further investigations are made; the stories "could even be bigger than the imagination of the person giving you the information because what you think is very small could turn out to be big by the time you probe further. A big story comes out from unrealistic angle".

Confirming that the Internet and social media have made the job of news gathering easier, Ayantunji said technology itself has made the world a small place for people to live in and to circulate news around the world. However, he mentions that this has come with some challenges like depending on so many other people to get the

work done; people responding to some published stories with insults; some people putting junks as comments, or trying to advertise their products instead of making comments on a particular issue; and even con men posing as if they were making comments but they use the medium to lure unsuspecting people to be conned, hence the need for gatekeeping.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study gave answers to the three research questions raised to guide the paper. Based on the findings of this study, we will attempt to answer the Research Questions we set out at the beginning of the study as well as discuss the implications of the results.

Research Question One: What is the perception of professional Journalists on the use of the new media for news dissemination?
The perception of the journalists anchored on professional practice in the use of new media for news dissemination. Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) submit that "it would seem the notion of gatekeeping goes right out of the window with the Internet. The Internet and its friendly World Wide Web graphical overlay is the best example yet of a postmodern medium" (p.93). Findings of the study show that 61% agreed that the adoption of new media for online newspaper to a great extent affects the gatekeeping process of the media. Only 1.6% of the respondents states that the use of the new media is not affecting professional practice.

Interview with journalists also showed that journalists are not in agreement with what goes on through the new media in respect of news dissemination. Friend and Singer (2007) state that "bloggers have taken on a self-appointed role as 'watchdogs' of the watchdogs carefully and continuously monitoring what journalists report and how they report it and calling attention to perceived problems" (p.116). Put succinctly, during an interview, Ademola Oni, Assistant Editor, Online and New Media, Punch Nigeria Limited (*Puncnonline),* observes that journalistic knowledge limitation on the part of Internet users and technology use are the main factors that increase credibility issue, which could impede accuracy of any information being provided to the public. According to him, "many online practitioners are just bloggers who lack the needed journalistic skills; they are not trained for the job," he points out. As such, journalists as professionals, according to Gillman (2011), are "increasingly required to be multi-skilled-to know how to capture images, write text, edit stories, to file for their own organisation as well as overseas outlets and still try to find an exclusive angle"(p.254).

Expressing his views on whether new media are threat to print journalism as per news dissemination, *The Guardian* newspaper`s online editor, Akinlolu Olamuyiwa, opines that the new media have the tendency of affecting conventional print journalism in the near future. He said "with the change in technology day-by-day

I see the newspaper "dying". It is not going to be an immediate death but a gradual shift. By the time this generation of newspaper readers pass out I see newspaper going into extinction. But it will be gradual." This view supports the conclusion of Ekeanyanwu, Batta and Oyokunyi (2017) that the print media industry may disappear by 2030 unless something drastic is done to stop the adverse effect new media is having on the downward slide in the newspaper fortunes. In essence, the scholars have argued that the Nigerian newspapers are currently facing what they called "economics of decline", which will lead to their eventual death because of declining advertising revenue that has now been sucked up by the New Media (Ekeanyanwu, Batta, and Oyokunyi, 2017).

However, deriving from the advantages of the new media channels, it can be concluded that they are a blessing to online newspapers. This agrees with the assertion of Morah (2012) that "the new media developed so fast in past decades that Nigerians now have greater access to information and a greater ability to communicate" (p, 153) more than before.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of new media on professional journalism practice in Nigeria?
Data gathered and analysed established that the impact of new media on traditional news media's reporting efforts is negative. The data showed that new media have led to reduction in professionalism among the practitioners. It has also brought about believability problem, invasion by charlatans, decline in news value, erosion of credibility of conventional media, violation of conventional media ethics by bloggers and other online news creators, among others.

Lamenting the negative impacts of new media adoption as news dissemination platforms on conventional news media's reporting activities in an interview, *The Guardian* Online editor, Akinlolu Olamuyiwa, said most bloggers do not authenticate stories before they publish, for "Bloggers just take stories and post, not minding whether they are true or just a rumour. But for a professional media like ours, despite the fact that we want to reach our audience on time, we still check the authenticity of the story". This singular act of these bloggers who can be referred to as charlatans of the journalism profession contributes to the fall of the profession as well as create believability problem and decline in news value.

Notwithstanding, to some extent, the new media have some positive contributions which include the increase in speed with which conventional media produce and publish newsworthy events. The new media also complement a lot of traditional news reporting activities, especially during gatekeeping processes. The findings are similar to what Livingston and Bennett (2013) found. The scholars found that event-driven news is overtaking institutionally based news, at least in the technology-charged environment of cable television international affairs news.

This finding also shows that the impact of new media on online newspaper

hinged on the belief that non-professionals as disseminator of news online are misinforming the people and also spreading fake news. However, Onabajo (2002) from the code of ethics of journalism in Nigeria on editorial independence suggests that "decisions concerning the content of news should be the responsibility of a professional journalist" (p.36).

Research Question 3: What are the challenges journalists experience in gatekeeping online newspapers?

The data gathered revealed that credibility of the source and anonymity of the users of new media for information dissemination, speed of online media, credibility issue, and electricity supply form parts of the mjor challenges usually experienced by journalists while performing online gatekeeping; hence Olise (2014) calls for the evaluation of the implications of the new media in the practice of journalism in order to bring to light their functional and dysfunctional roles and allow those relying on them to be the judge.

Scholars like Lewis, Kaufhold, and Lasora's (2010), and Guanah and Ojo (2018) do not agree less that the fore goings are parts of the challenges of gatekeeping online. Guanah and Ojo (2018) opine that since all the new media technologies are powered by electricity, journalists run into problems when there is no electricity supply, especially in a place like Nigeria where there is inadequate supply of electricity. In other words, the power outages in Nigeria can hinder the smooth work of the online journalist. Also, speed of access limits the ability of the Internet to be a channel for all forms of media, restricting its use to text based and transactional forms (New Media Book Project, 2016).

On their part, Lewis, Kaufhold, and Lasora (2010) found that some editors of 29 newspapers in Texas either favour or disfavour the use of citizen journalism primarily on philosophical grounds, due to reasons like credibility of the source and anonymity, while others favour or disfavour its use mainly on practical grounds. Moreover, their findings could be viewed in the light of gatekeeping, which offers a new point of entry for the study of participatory media work as it evolves conventional news establishments.

In the same breadth, Conboy (2010) submits that "there are paradoxes at work in the democratic promise of online interactivity; on one hand, the Internet appears to flatten the hierarchy of traditional newspaper" (p.148). However, Friend and Singer (2007) submit that "journalists and bloggers both value truth-but they get to it in different ways" (p.116).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following were proposed as recommendations:

One, New Media ethics and participatory journalism should be included in curriculum of journalists` training institutions to train potential journalists on

effective multi-skilled practices that will promote a better view on journalism practice. This is necessary so that trained journalists can be differentiated from "quacks" who parade themselves as journalists, thereby denting the image of the profession and professional journalists. If journalism students are exposed early enough to the ethics of the profession, they will know how to successfully gate keep news reports in this era of the new media and fake news.

Two, certified professional journalists should engage in in-service training to creatively improve practice and have a better reorientation of new media for effective performance. This is necessary because the new media and their usage are dynamic. Regularly, there are the introduction of new media technologies that can be utilised in journalism practice, therefore journalists need to upgrade their knowledge about these technologies, and how they can be applied to their jobs.

Three, the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and other relevant bodies should use government policies to address recklessness of citizen journalists and bloggers. Publication online should be done under traceable registered website. Erring "online journalists" should be adequately sanctioned so as to serve as deterrent to others who will not want to play by the rules of the journalism profession.

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