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NIGERIAN SECURITY IN AN ERA OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM

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Abstract

There is no gain saying that insecurity in Nigeria has never been so rife since her political Independence. Every day, reports of various security breaches fill the air: kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, ritual killings, rape, armed robbery, phone theft, money-ritual, arson, trading in human body parts, herders-farmers clashes and unknown-gun-men phenomenon. Furthermore, with the inception of new media, cases of spam, account hacking, ponzi schemes, fake alerts, passing off, piracy, plagiarism, privacy invasion in term of release of sex-tapes, nude pictures and pornography among others are constant reminders of how poor and porous, warped and weakened our society and its security architecture have become. Insecurity being a negative global phenomenon and a hydra-headed monster, many reasons have been adduced as the causative factors of which citizen journalism is one. This study therefore attempts to not only unveil the various maladies confronting the Nigerian state in a new media environment but also explores past studies relating to insecurity and citizen journalism. It further recommends steps towards curbing the problem of insecurity and ways to appropriate the activities of citizen journalists for sustainable development in a highly volatile and democratized media sphere.

Keywords: Nigerian Security, Era, Citizen Journalism, insecurity, Me-too Journalism.

Introduction

Insecurity is a global trend that confronts all nations and nationalities. No race, space, tribe or tongue is spared. It portends a negative happenstance in the human society. Nigeria in recent times continues to grapple with insecurity of different dimensions and descriptions that were hitherto unknown and unreported. Citizen journalists have most times become vehicles for the conveyance of such news through the new media. Some reports have pointed to citizen journalism as a major tool in fueling and feeding the spate of insecurity in Nigeria (Uche et al, 2021a). The Nigerian security outfits have continued to grapple with the security challenges in different parts of the country as often reported with minimal success much to the chagrin of its citizenry. The new media platforms being highly accessible to a country of teeming young population are awash with varied and worrisome actions that are often viewed as constituting security threats by government and its agencies. This has made the sitting

government to scheme various ways and means of curbing the activities of its netizens including regulating the social media.

Statement of the problem

Various issues confront every polity. Many of such issues are daily occurrences while some happen after a long while. Of the most recurring and challenges issues is that of insecurity. A country like Nigeria has been in the news. The crux of which is insecurity posed by insurgents, bandits, militants, tribal agitators, unknown gun men, arsonists, fraudsters, ritualists, kidnappers, child rapists, scammers and robbers. With the inception of the new media, new twist seems to have been brought to fore, and that is, the online activities of citizens. Some of such activities have often been viewed as posing security risk to the already security-tensed state of the country. These online activities are carried out by netizens who are bloggers, net surfers, online community members, cyber citizens and untrained journalists who are otherwise described as citizen journalists.

Objectives of the study

In order to place this study in the right perspective, the following objectives are targeted:
To unveil the activities of citizen journalists in Nigeria
To determine the roles citizen journalists play in the issue of insecurity in Nigeria
To unveil ways of curbing the security challenges confronting the nation in a new media era

Conceptual Review

The concept of security

Security is the state of being secure. It connotes absence of threats to human lives and property. It is a state of being free from danger, fear and injury. Just as the saying goes, security is everybody's business. Nations ensure security through various means including setting up of armed forces, policing of the environment, institution of laws and order, mounting of security satellites, erecting correctional centres, putting up security cameras such as CCTVs in crime prone areas, aerial surveillance and cyber monitoring.

The Concept Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism has different descriptions and appellations; some of which are fitting while some are unsettling. Citizen journalism can be described as a me-too journalism, pedestrian journalism and all-comers journalism since what is required is the ability to operate a smart-phone or a computer device with internet connection. Nip (2010) refers to it as online citizen journalism. Salawu (2011) describes it as journalism of the people. To Bowman and Willis (2003), it is participatory journalism. Moretzsohn (2006) refers to it as publish-and-filter journalism; while Dare (2011) calls it we journalism. Uche et al. (2021b) describes citizen journalism as an all-comers participatory journalistic practice. There are no needed training and qualifications except the ability to use a mobile device such as smart-phone. Citizen journalism is therefore the unregulated journalism practice by untrained individuals in the society whose centre of operation is the new media. Prensky (2001) refers to this set of individuals as digital natives. It should however, be noted that even digital immigrants have joined the bandwagon.

Citizen journalism is a journalism practice that welcomes everybody no matter your tongue or tribe, taste or treasure, training or talent. It welcomes all in the news gathering and

transmission processes. It could be engaged by full-time and part-time workers in full-time or part-time basis. Activities of citizen journalists transcend time and clime; faith and fame; friends and foes.

Empirical Review

In a descriptive survey by Uche et al (2021a) on the rise of citizen journalism and security challenge in Nigeria, out of a sample of 200 respondents, 51% agreed that terrorists use citizen journalists as tools to push their agenda. 43% agreed that citizen journalists post fake news that brings fear to people's hearts. Of all the respondents, 35% agreed that Nigeria's insecurity will reduce if there are no citizen journalists with 58% submitting that government should regulate citizen journalism in Nigeria. The study therefore recommended that pupils and students should be exposed to social media education in order to become responsible social media users who would not engage in activities that could constitute security threat to the country.

Uche et al (2021b) in their study on digital media, hate speech and nation building, dissecting the nationhood imbroglio posit that activities of citizen journalists remain a major factor in the upsurge of insecurity in Nigeria. They found that a lot of people, young and old transformed themselves into active users and producers of contents in digital space. This brought about the abuse and misuse of the online space; due largely to the non-observance of media laws and ethics as citizen journalists often post whatever appeal to them while describing their actions as complying with their freedom of expression. They recommend among others the need for new media users to do gatekeeping of their activities while also ensuring self-monitoring and self-accounting.

Ukwueze and Uche (2015) did a study titled "The Rise of Hate and Peace Journalism in the Nigerian Democratization Process: The Place of the New Media." The duo posit that from the inception of the new media, many people across nations of the world including Nigerians have begun to employ new media technologies in their daily activities. Aside from keeping in touch with their loved ones and colleagues, Some Nigerians use the new media especially social media as platforms for publishing their opinions on daily happenings in the society. The researchers who studied 300 Enugu residents via survey design found that Nigerians did not only embrace social media for accessing political information but majority have become citizen journalists themselves thus, creating their own contents.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Technology Determinism and Democratic Participant Media Theories. The Democratic Participant Media Theory is a reactive theory in that it challenges the pride of place which the mainstream media occupied in the media-sphere. The theory not only queries the centralized media but advocates for citizen participation in the ownership and control of media (McQuail, 2010). It challenges the conventional cum mainstream media especially as it relates to over centralization and bureaucratic red-tapism that mark their operation and management processes. Democratic participant theory advocates for widening of the media space and accommodation of whosoever will to have their say unhindered as obtained in a democratic society. In other words, the media ownership and participation should be democratized to accommodate differing and diversified voices in a highly pluralized society.

Major tenets of this theory include:

- Minorities, dissidents and diversified voices should be allowed to have their say; in other words, access to media is a common right.
- Media existence should be predicated on the needs of the people and not necessarily professionals and media experts
- Locals including groups and communities should be allowed to hold a stake through media ownership and content creation.

The above tenets are therefore in line with the principles and operations of citizen journalism, hence, underpinning this study.

The second theory is the Technology Determinism Theory which was propounded and expounded by Marshall McLuhan. Technology determinism posits that media technology shapes how we as individuals in the human society think, feel, act and how the society operates as we move from one technological age to another (McLuhan, 1962). The theory describes how technology influences human evolution: how who we are is determined by tools we invent and use. The theory believes that technology is an autonomous force that changes the society (Ndolo, Udeze & Anikpo, 2015). According to technology determinists, man is seen as a helpless being in the arms of technology. That is to say, human beings are conditioned by technology with no say and no choice but to dance to the dictates of technology just as the pendulum does (Holvast, Duquenoy & Whitehouse, 2005). This position is not absolute as humans and their actions are products of choice and unrelenting decision making. However, this theory is apt for this study since citizen journalists rely majorly on new media technologies in carrying out their activities.

Methodology

This is a conceptual study. It relied majorly on secondary data from documented studies both within Nigeria and in the Diaspora. This methodology entails gathering and analyzing relevant data for the purpose of giving an informed and intelligent description and interpretation of existing situation in order to prosecute a given goal.

Challenges confronting the State

Articulating the myriads of problems confronting the Nigerian state, Uche et al. (2021b) identified ethnicity, nepotism, favoritism, prejudice, religious sentiments, corruption, bad leadership, secessionist tendencies, tribal heroism, discontentment, the ubiquity of social media networks, citizen journalism and politics. Zubairu (2020) identified the causes of insecurity to include the menace of unemployment and poverty, elite exploitation of ethnicity and religious differences, corruption, weak security apparatus, porous border, marginalization and inequality in the country, bad governance and poor leadership. He, however, proffered the following solutions: establishment of community policing, creating of an economy with social, economic, and physical infrastructure for business and industrial growth, sufficient training in modern security methodologies, the provision of state-of-the-art equipment and appropriate remuneration, establishing more centers of entrepreneurship across the nation and creating more job opportunities for the youth.

Implications of unprofessional usage of new media technologies

Uche, Azeez, Aliu and Abdulquadir (2021) opined that the inception of digital technologies otherwise called new media technologies has brought unprecedented development (both

positive and negative) to humanity. Yakubu (2019) while describing the activities of social media users posits that the digital revolution accorded ill-minded individuals the medium to perpetrate evil with just the click of a button or tap on a screen. Thus, blaming, albeit subtly, the citizen journalists. This is in line with Uche et al (2021a) view that the new media due to its accommodating, un-discriminatory, unbiased and unhindered status in the discharge of assigned duties, citizen journalists use the new media platforms in ways that are detrimental to corporate existence thereby heightening insecurity. Citizen journalists sometimes in a bid to generate large followership, traffic and patronage often fuel the already tensed security atmosphere in the country. Bloggers, social media influencers and their fellow cyber citizens seem to be in a frenzy to outdo one another in showcasing, announcing and sometimes fabricating security related news thereby threatening the continued corporate existence of the country. Uche et al (2017) also note that citizen journalism sometimes threatens to destroy the circulation of factual news, through spreading incorrect, misleading information and opinion rather than truth thereby contributing to insecurity in a polity.

Conclusion

It has been noted that insecurity remains a major threat to peaceful coexistence of the peoples of Nigeria. With several challenges including ethnic agitations, political, religious and socio-economic instability, unemployment, drug addiction, rape and corrupt practices including money ritual, activities of citizen journalists have also joined in the fray to heighten insecurity. Therefore, why ensuring that citizens rights are not trampled upon, the government and its agencies owes it a duty to ensure that all the citizens are secure in order to lead a progressive and peaceful life.

Recommendations

- Security is the business of all citizens including the citizen journalists. Therefore, everyone should see it as a collective responsibility.
- Activities of citizen journalists should be in tandem with media ethics and global best practice.
- There should be a collaborative effort between citizen journalists and mainstream professional journalists towards curbing insecurity in the country by enthroning ethical practice, responsible and responsive news dissemination.

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