Citizen Media and the Future of Government-Owned Broadcast Organizations: A Study of Radio Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Government owned-media organizations, established to propagate policies and programmes of governments have in many countries, including Nigeria, ended up being used as mere mouth-pieces of any government in power. This expectedly, has serious credibility implication. With the increasing popularity of citizen media, it became necessary to find out what impact it will have on the survival of government-owned media organizations. Using radio Nigeria as focus, opinions of Nigerians were sought through a survey. The result shows that Nigerians do not only have misgivings about Radio Nigeria as a source of information and entertainment, but they also strongly believe that more people are increasingly relying on citizen media for news, information and entertainment than government-owned media. This gives a negative signal about the survival of government owned media.

INTRODUCTION

The mass media's primary functions include information to the people, education, entertainment, surveillance, advocacy as well as the provision of platform for debate and exchange of views, among others. Besides these basic social functions, media organizations are established with the hope that they will serve commercial and political purposes. While privately owned media organizations are pre-occupied with commercial consideration (Murdock, 1983: 140), government-owned media, structured to serve any government in power, exist to justify actions and inactions of every regime, proclaim its achievements, and explain away its failures (Anim 1986:35) Because government-owned media will not investigate and report corrupt

government officials but are mere megaphones, they often times find themselves battling with credibility problem. Some people view privately-owned media as a better option, but that option has its limitations. In the 1940s, Lord Beaverbrook, a newspaper publisher told the Royal Commission on the press in Britain that he ran his *Daily Express* purely for propaganda, having first built up a commercial position. Such propaganda usually is not far from that which aligns with the interest or ambition of the proprietor. That is why, in the view of Bagdikian (2004:207) at certain times, certain important issues can be ignored even by privately-owned media.

When the media agenda, as result of ideological or political interest, aligns with government agenda, at the expense of public agenda, and when (privately owned) media are more concerned about profit than the protection and promotion of the interests of the voiceless masses, audiences are likely to operate on the final stage of Peskin's model which shows how the society is informed (cited in Adelebu 2008:365). At that stage, people are no longer gullible, they no longer require an "informed" intermediary to tell them what is good; but become pretty smart and begin to sort things out for themselves. Given the opportunity, they begin to find their own version of the truth.

In today's global world, the new information and communication technology have given citizens of the world the opportunity to seek their news and entertainment with little in no recourse to hitherto indispensable newspaper editors, reporters and radio/television content creators. Glaser (2006) has observed that today. "The average citizen can now make news and distribute it globally, an act that was once the province of established journalists and media companies".

If government-owned media – such as Radio Nigeria, perceived to be the mouth piece of government, can be ignored by increasingly discerning citizens, is there any hope of future patronage, and by implication, survival of such media, in view of the options that citizen media provide the population or audience. This is the primary concern of this study.

The Problem

Government media, such as Radio Nigeria, are established to serve as means through which government policies are explained to the people and, in the case of Radio Nigeria, to help in integrating the many ethnic groups in the country, give voice to all the segments of the society and remain a credible source of information. But the medium failed woefully in carrying out these responsibilities (Usua 2006, Uche 1989). Military leaders exploited it to announce military coups while managements of Radio Nigeria engaged in blatant falsehood and misinformation of the people just to satisfy government officials. All these built up to a serious credibility problem. In 1992 when the broadcast media industry was liberalized by Ibrahim Babangida led military government, many Nigerians found respite in privately-owned radio and television stations. This implied a drop in patronage of Radio Nigeria which also had a problem updating its depreciated equipments. But the greatest

threat at present to Radio Nigeria's patronage and indeed survival is citizen media practice which began to flourish in Nigeria as a result of increase in internet use among Nigerians.

This trend, if it continues, will force Radio Nigeria out of the market. Thus defeating the purpose for which it was established and denying Nigerians the privilege of an alternative source, especially at a time when the open-sky nature of Internet information is yet to be regulated and effectively monitored to minimize its Internet problems.

The concept

Citizen media, a term coined by Clemencia Rodrigue, refers to the process in which citizens of any society, who were once mere consumers of media products – news and entertainment- become participants in media practice, by using the different resources that technology has offered. "There are many forms of citizens-produced media including blogs, vlogs,podcasts, digital storytelling, participatory video and more, and may be distributed via television, radio, internet, email, movie theatre, DVD and many other forms" (Wikipedia).

Citizen media is also referred to as participatory, civil or citizen journalism and for us, it is used to refer to the gathering of news, information and entertainment, processing and sharing of same with other members of virtual communities.

According to Mark Glaser (2006), the idea behind citizen journalism is that people who have not had professional journalism training can use tools of modern technology and global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact- check the traditional media on their won, or in collaboration with others. He goes further to note that one who is not a journalist in the traditional sense of it, can write about a city council meeting on his blog or in an on-line forum. Or one can fact-check a newspaper article from the main stream media and point out factual errors or bias.

Citizen media practice is believed to have existed in some crude way long ago, but blossomed in the age of computers. Dan Gillmor cited in Glaser (2006) traces its roots to the founding of the United States in the 18th century when pamphleteers like Thomas Paine and the anonymous authors of the Federation Papers printed their own publications. He however notes that in the modern era, video footage of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in the 1960s and footage of public beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles in the 1980s, as captured by citizens on the scene were both some kind of citizen journalism. However, there is no doubt that modern technology has not only rekindled the practice, it has indeed re-defined the entire practice of journalism. In fact, "citizen media bloomed at the birth of the Internet and into the 1990s as a response to traditional mass media's neglect of public interest and partisan portrayal of news and world events" (www. Wikiipedia.org). the implication of this is that:

The Internet has delivered unparallel gains in contracting the horizon and evolving the once imaginary "global village', now wired together by information. It is also said to have brought a latitude of opportunities that continue to expand, offering the voiceless around the world, new hopes" (Ibezimako and Bo, 2008)

With the Internet and the rise of World Wide Web, around the 1990s, anyone can create a personal home page, post information to express their views and share their thoughts with people in all corners of the earth. Glaser (2006) has argued that "after 9/11, many ordinary citizens became on-the-spot witnesses to the attacks, their stories and images became a major part of the story"

Citizen media practice also involves the use of mobile phone by citizens to send information – stories and pictures – to either other citizens directly or to media stations to be shared with the public such as practiced on CNN's *iReport*

One of the benefits of citizen journalism is that members of the public, by the privilege of fact-checking stories from conventional media organizations, are better informed. It also empowers citizens, especially in societies where officials of government are known to conceal information for selfish reasons, because as Sunday and Anim (2008:111) have noted, there are sources that are capable of posting information on the Internet which citizens can access from their homes. A similar view is shared by Ibezimako and Bo (2008:16) who think that with Internet and the access it creates for citizens of the world, people in non-democratic and emerging democracies like Nigeria and other African countries, are now having access to uncensored news, analyses and discussions. There is also increased interactivity between content creators and users which is minimal or absent in conventional media. Besides interacting with producers, you can also link up with other Internet visitors for the purpose of sharing views and comparing notes. This is because media products produced by private citizens can be trusted to be neutral and without political, social or corporate affiliation.

But citizen media practice has its own demerits. As Adelabu (2008:364) has noted, "every change in technology holds a promise and threat in the practice of journalism". The Internet, which is the main vehicle of citizen journalism, exposes people, especially young ones, to all sorts of information and images which are detrimental to their physical, social and psychological health. It is, in the view of Ibezimako and Bo (2008: 20), "an unwary messenger; it delivers the good and the bad". In the name of initiating, processing and sharing information on the Internet, and the web (citizen journalism), child pornography, espionage, violence, fraud, hacking and other crimes have been committed. According to Glaser (2006) there is some controversy over citizen journalism because many professional journalists believe that only trained journalists can understand the rigors and ethics involved in reporting news. Others have called for stringent laws to check crimes and economic, cultural as well as ideological dominance by the developed world.

Theoretical Base

The study is predicated on two theories: mediamorphosis and source credibility theory.

Mediamorphosis:
The late 20th century and early 21st century saw a lot of technological remonstrations especially in the domain of media practice, resulting in remarkable transformation of the media technology. It is, in view of Osazee-Odia (2008: 349), this fundamental shift from the technology of old media to new ones, made manifest through the development of computer, Internet and satellite, that made Roger Fidler to come up with mediamorphosis hypothesis in 1997. In defining the theory, Fidler, cited in Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008:191) says it is the transformation of the media brought about by complex interplay of needs, competitive and political pressures as well as social and technological innovations. This means that although technological innovation is key in media practice, other external variables need not be ignored. To that extent, and since the media in their older or traditional states were also influenced by people's needs, competition, as well as political and social pressures, audience's use of modern-media – Internet facilities, videophones and several others - need be looked at within the context of such variables. Whether people will continue to rely on, and thus, patronize Radio Nigeria in the immediate future and beyond, will not only be a result of emergence and availability of new media technologies but also a function of their needs and satisfaction therefrom, accessibility to competing media, such as the new technologies offer, and other pressures which bear on and define the products or services of Radio Nigeria.

Source Credibility Theory:
Source Credibility theory of Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss (1951) is based on the hypothesis that source variable plays an important role in determining the outcome of communication effort. Thus Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008:76) state that "there appears to be a widespread belief that having the right source can increase the effectiveness of a message'. Patronage of course, and effectiveness are only two sides of the same coin. This is because for it to be effective, the message must impact on people who patronize the medium.

Prominent among the dimensions of source credibility is trust-worthiness (Hovland and Weiss, 1951) A subsequent study by Whitehead, cited in Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008:76) also revealed that trustworthiness and objectivity are important factors in determining the credibility of any medium. Unfortunately, a study earlier conducted on Radio Nigeria showed that trustworthiness and objectivity were scarcely, characteristics of Radio Nigeria (see Usua 2006). Incidentally, the audience is in position to determine hour credible a source is hence Rosnow and Robinson, cited by Pearson, Nelson Titsworth and Harter (2003:375) insist that just like beauty, credibility "is in the eye of the beholder".

Research Questions

In order to properly focus on the problem, the following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1.   Is citizen media a popular practice in Nigeria?
2.   Is it capable of satisfying the information and entertainment needs of the people?
3.   Does it have the capacity to take the attention/patronage of Nigerian citizens away from Radio Nigeria as a source of information and entertainment?

Methodology

The study was initiated to find out the fate of government owned media based on presumed popularity of citizen media or citizen journalism. Radio Nigeria was chosen for the study. The survey method was adopted because of the promise of reliability it holds since, in the words of Wilmmer and Dominick (1983:102), it gives room for problems to be investigated in realistic settings. The instrument of questionnaire was used to draw from the benefit that is only gotten from highly structured interview, that is, the benefit of effective representation of opinion. The questionnaire contained twenty-three items in its three sections. While section A contained bio-data questions, sections B concerned itself with questions which sought to gauge the attitude of respondents towards Radio Nigeria. Section C explored respondents' attitude towards citizen media and its impact on Radio Nigeria as a medium of information and entertainment.

        A purposive sampling technique was employed to reach one hundred and twenty (120) respondents with at least functional education across the six Area councils of the FCT. They were reached in local Government offices, shopping centres, cyber halls and residential areas.

        Of the 120 copies of questionnaire, administered by hand eight (8) did not contain the required information, 2 could not be accounted for and so the remaining one hundred and ten (110) copies formed the basis for analysis. Responses to attitude gauging and opinion testing questions were tabulated and ranked in simple percentages, and where necessary, cross checked with independent variables.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Concern about the impact of the media on the society has continued to grow and scholars have continued to make statements about the relationship between the two. This study, looking at the relationship between the people and the new media and how that relationship will affect government-owned media, ended up with one hundred and ten (110) respondents, comprising 61 males and 49 females. There were 30 respondents (27.2%) within the age bracket of 15-25 years, 32 respondents (29%) within 26-35 year bracket, 29 respondents (26.3%) were between 36 and 45 years of age, while those who were in the age bracket of 46-55 years and 56-65 years were 14 respondents

(12.7%) and 5 respondents (45%) respectively. On educational level, there were 14 primary school leavers (12.7%), 38 respondents (34.5%) fell within secondary/ordinary Diploma level of education, 41 respondents (37.2%) held Higher Diploma/degree, while those in higher degrees were 17 (Or 15.5%). Of the 110 respondents, 49 of them (44.5%) were civil servants, 31 (or 28.2%) were self employed, 14 respondents (12.7%) were students while those who were neither students nor employed were 16 (14.6%).

Section B of the questionnaire contained questions about Radio Nigeria, its use or patronage and respondents' confidence in it as a source of news, information and entertainment. All the respondents said they listened to Radio Nigeria in varying frequencies ranging between "very often" and "not often". They agreed that Radio Nigeria informs and entertains, except that out of 110 respondents, only 2 respondents (1.8%) said that the station, did it excellently. 18 respondents (16.4%) said Radio Nigeria was good at it, 25 of them (or 22.7%) said Radio Nigeria was fair while 65 respondents (59.0%) said the media institution was poor at it. That rating is shown in the table below:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Rating of Radio Nigeria's Information/ Entertainment Services.

Rate Radio Nigeria's information/entertainment	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	2	1.8%
Good	18	16.4%
Fair	25	22.7%
Poor	65	59.1%
Total	110	100%

Respondents were also asked whether they perceived Radio Nigeria as government mouth piece. This question was a follow up to the previous item and the result showed that 76 respondents (69.1%) saw Radio Nigeria as government mouth piece while 34 of them (0r 30.9%) thought it was not. Similarly 99 respondents ((90%) said Radio Nigeria was overtly or covertly restricted by government, while 11 of them (10%) said it was not. Curiously, 105 respondents (95.5%) said they would prefer other sources of news and information to Radio Nigeria while only 5 respondents (4.5%) voted otherwise.

Naturally, results obtained above raised a couple of issues and questions. One of them was the fact that a good number of respondents continued to patronize Radio Nigeria, while it was also clear that most respondents 105 (or 95.5%) preferred to have another source than Radio Nigeria. This situation made one even more curious about respondents' opinion/attitude towards citizen journalism.

Asked about possession of Internet and related facilities through which respondents could get information and entertainment, only 21 respondents (19.1%) said they personally possessed such facilities but 78 of

the respondents (70.9%) agreed that they knew how to access Websites and internet information through computer. 32 respondents (29.1%) were deficient in this regard.

But 108 respondents (98.2%) said they had mobile telephones out of which 107 (97.3%) agreed that they received important information and news from friends, relations, service providers and other sources. 3 respondents (2.7%) did not receive such messages and out of that, 2 respondents did not possess mobile phone.

Of the 78 respondents who knew how to access Internet or web sites for information, 52 used the facilities very frequently, 18 used them frequently while 8 used occasionally.

All the 78 respondents who had knowledge of how to use Internet agreed that this source was useful in providing news and entertainment. The result is also shown in the table below.

Table 2: Internet Sources Provide news/entertainment.

Internet/web provide information	Frequency	Percentage
Very well	67	61%
Well	9	8.2%
Fairly well	2	1.8%
Not at al	0	0%
Total	**78**	**71%**

Respondents were asked whether in their opinion, citizen media (through mobile phone, the Internet and the web particularly) provided as much news and information as Radio Nigeria. On this, 81 respondents (73.6%) said 'yes' while 29 of them (26.4%) said 'No'. Asked whether, in their view, it was possible for citizen media to provide more news and entertainment than Radio Nigeria, the result obtained is presented below in table 3.

Table 3: Citizen Media are Better for news and Entertainment than Radio Nigeria.

Citizen media are better than Radio Nigeria	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	82	74.5%
No	28	25.5%
Total	110	100%

It was for the avoidance of doubt that the question which elicited the above information (in table 3) was recast as shown below.

Table 4: People in Future will rely more on Internet/web sources for news and entertainment than Radio Nigeria.

More people will rely on citizen media	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	83	75.5%
No	27	24.5%
Total	110	100%

The results obtained above have shown that many Nigerians, having been used to the services of Radio Nigeria, are aware of the short comings of the organization, chief of which is its subjection to government control. This finding has supported the view by Ibrahim (2009:46) that Nigerians do not believe what government media say because they merely serve as government's mouth-piece. It is also clear that citizen media is a viable

Citizen media provide news/entertainment as radio Nigeria	Frequency	Education				
		Primary	Sec/OND	BSc/HND	MA/PhD	%
Yes	81	2	26	37	16	73.6%
No	29	12	12	4	1	26.%
Total	110	14	38	41	17	100%

alternative since all the respondents think that Internet sources provide good information. 67 respondents (or 61%) went further to add that the Internet provides information very well. It was important to match the results obtained in critical areas with

Table 5: Internet sources provide as much news as Radio Nigeria cross tabulated with the level of education of Respondents.

the level of education of respondents for the avoidance of doubt. Thus the question, which inquired about respondents' opinion regarding the possibility of citizen media providing as much information and news as Radio Nigeria, was cross tabulated with level of education, as presented in table 5.

As shown in the above table, the critical segments of the sample population, those with first degree and its equivalent and above have demonstrated more than those with primary education, that citizen media provide as much information and news as Radio Nigeria. 16 out of 17 holders of higher degree, 37 out of 41 degree holders and 26 out of 38 secondary/OND certificate holders hold that opinion too. This independent variable (education) was also matched with the result obtained when respondents were asked whether citizen media could provide more news and entertainment than Radio Nigeria.

Table 6: Internet sources are better for news and entertainment cross-checked with level of education .

Internet/web/phone are better than Radio Nigeria	Frequency	Education				
		Primary	Sec/OND	BSc/HND	Ma/PhD	%
Yes	82	2	27	37	16	74.%
No	28	12	11	4	1	25.5%`
Total	110	14	38	41	17	100%

The above finding is consistent with the findings in table 5. It is clear that people will not only obtain as useful information through citizen media practice as they can get from Radio Nigeria, but they can get more.
This is perhaps so because as Kluver (2002) has noted, "all the resources of the world's newsgathering organizations, governmental agencies and academics are online. Thus from any wired point on the planet, it is possible to obtain an almost inexhaustible amount of information on issues of relevance". (cited by Sunday and Anim, 2008:111). Educational level as a

Table 7: Reliance of people on internet/web source for news and entertainment versus Radio Nigeria, cross-tabulated with educational level of Respondents.

More people will rely on citizen media	Frequency	Education				
		Primary	Sec/OND	BA/BSc/HND	MA/MSc Phd	%
Yes	83	2	27	37	17	75.5%
No	27	12	11	4	0	24.5%
Total	110	14	38	41	17	100%

critical variable was also matched with the result obtained when respondents' opinion was sought on the possibility of citizen media becoming more reliable sources than Radio Nigeria.

More respondents with good education, 37 out of 41 who had first degree and its equivalent as well as 27, out of 38 respondents who had secondary education and diploma agree that as the society advances and people become more empowered educationally, economically, and in terms of exposure to new communication technology, the Internet and related sources of information will become more reliable for news and entertainment than Radio Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The study has supported the view that government-owned media as exemplified by Radio Nigeria, are faced with credibility problem which results in misgivings about them. Since people want to be well informed about what is going on within and outside their country, they need an alternative source (Odion 2008:81). It is therefore not surprising that with the emergence of the Internet and world wide web as well as related technologies which serve as backbone for citizen media practice, Nigerians have already seen the potential of this new wave in the generation and dissemination of news and entertainment as another threat (besides privately-owned outfits) to government owned media (Tables 2, 3 and 4). If the media generally, including those in liberal societies, are yet to develop adequate applications to withstand the challenge that citizen journalism has engendered, it can be concluded that besides government patronage, media organizations owned and controlled by governments are soon to face serious jeopardy because the strength and survival of any media organization is not more in government funding than in the size of the audience it can capture and sustain.

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