

## CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND ELECTION MONITORING IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

Citizen journalism is fast becoming an alternative platform for the common man to lend their voices in the process of governance. This is especially relevant in Nigeria, where those in the corridor of power have gagged the media denying the citizens the right to contribute to personal or national discourse. Drawing lessons from Nigeria's Machiavellian leadership recruitment system with attendant prebendal skews in elections characterized by all sorts of irregularities and fraud, the study looks at the role of citizen journalists in monitoring election via social media platform. Survey research method was used for the study, and the questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The respondent for the study comprised of 300 and 400 level students of Mass Communication Department Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai. The study purposively sampled 150 respondents for the study. Findings reveal that citizen journalism has a critical role to play in election monitoring in Nigeria. The study discovered that citizen journalism can enhance transparency and accountability in the conduct of elections. This to some extent can bring credibility to the electoral process as citizens would be allowed to participate fully in the electoral process. However, the study noted some inherent dangers associated with citizen journalism / journalists in general. Some of the drawbacks of citizen journalism include the following; it may lead to mass revolt and protest, invasion of people's privacy, and the dissemination of unverifiable information by members of the public. The study, among other things, recommends that citizen journalists need to be trained in order to be acquainted with the journalistic code of media ethics.

**Keywords:** *Citizen journalism, social media, monitoring, election, Nigeria.*

### **Abstrak**

Wartawan warga sedang pesat menjadi laluan alternative pada rakyat untuk meluahkan suara dalam proses tabdir urus. Hal ini relevan di Nigeria di mana pemerintah negara mencengkam media dan menafikan hak rakyat untuk menyumbang wacana personal mahupun nasional. Mengambil pelajaran dari sistem pemilihan pemerintah Machiavellian di Nigeria dimana penjaga pilihanraya tidak jujur dan di liputi berbagai masalah dan penipuan, kajian ini meneliti peranan wartawan warga memantau pilihanraya melalui saluran sosial media. Kajian ini menggunakan kaji selidik survei dan soalselidik sebagai intsrumen kutipan data. Responden kajian terdiri dari pelajar tahap 300 dan 400 dari Jabatan Media Komunikasi, Universiti Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, Lapai, Nigeria. Sampel kajian dalah 150 orang. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan wartawan warga ada peranan yang penting untuk memantau pilihraya di Nigeria. Wartawan warga boleh memantapkan ketelusan dan tanggungjawab dalam pentadbiran pilihanraya. Ini juga dapat memberi keyakinan kerana rakyat di benarkan untuk mengikut serta sepenuhnya dalam

proses pemilihan. Namun kajian ini menampakkan kewujudan bahaya berkaitan dengan wartawan warga/ wartawan secara umum. Antara kebimbangannya ialah bantahan dan revolusi, pencerobohan peribadi, dan penyebaran maklumat tidak rasmi oleh rakyat. Kajian ini menyarankan wartawan warga perlu di beri latihan untuk mereka mengetahui kod kewartawanan etika media.

**Kata kunci:** *Wartawan warga, media sosial, pemantauan, pilihanraya, Nigeria.*

## INTRODUCTION

The paradigm shift from hypodermic needle to the two way pervasive information and communication era with attendant Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has placed the power of the media in the hands of ordinary citizens. Social media are opening up the Nigeria social space in new ways. It is now the new equaliser that is breaking the information monopoly that was enjoyed by the state and a few media houses. In the process, it is unleashing hidden journalistic talents as we witness a mushrooming of bloggers, social commentators and critics. The latter are a part of a new generation of social activists who have now appropriated this new technology and use it to network, share ideas, criticise and vent their frustrations. Citizen's power is now growing. Those who were formerly voiceless now have a voice. These voices can now be heard once you can sign up to an account on a social media like *Twitter* or *Facebook* (Noel, 2012). The origin of citizens engaged in journalism was therefore long in existence and originated in the United States. It was indeed in realization of the professional ineptitude of traditional journalists of their own weaknesses in covering the electoral event during the U.S. presidential election of 1988 that lead to the emergence of a group of journalists who called themselves "citizen journalists". This group of journalists became part of the public or civic journalism movement, a countermeasure against the eroding trust in news media and widespread public disillusionment with politics and civic affairs (Merritt, 2004 cited in Agboola, 2013 p. 212).

The advent and growth of Information and Communication Technologies and their widespread integration in the society has further provided citizens the platform to actively engage themselves in the political process. Today, with the use of the mobile phones, computers and the Internet, citizens are empowered to collect and disseminate information to any part of the

globe within a relatively short period of time. The exponential growth in technology has challenged the traditional form of journalism in contemporary times. The conventional one-way producer to the consumer mass communication has given way to user-generated media, made possible by the availability of relatively inexpensive, easy-to use technological gadgets, as well as cultural trends that encourage citizens to produce media content (Livingstone, 1999, 2002; Tapsott and Williams, 2006, cited in Oladokun and Morah, 2013, p. 45).

Since the emergence of Citizen journalism in the United State of America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, its growth and popularity has gained wide acceptance in both developed and developing countries of the world. For instance, in Nigeria, citizens of the country are already actively involved in citizen journalism. Since 2000 several Nigerians have established so many online media websites, blogs and set up twitter accounts. For example, Dare (2011, p. 22) argued that Odili.net having been established in 2002, leads the pack in online media use and establishment of blogs in Nigeria. The Nigerian Village Square (NVS) followed in 2003. It was wholly a UGC site. Nairaland, was thereafter established in 2004 and named after the Nigerian currency by a young 22 years old unemployed graduate called Seun Osewa, in Lagos. Other online media sites include Africa.net, Sahara Reporters, Naija Community, and Naijapals.com among others.

Studies on the role of citizen journalism in elections have been document by scholars around the world. For instance, the Australian 2007 election attests to the fact that citizen journalists played a significant role in monitoring the election. Citizen journalism websites like JohnQuiggin.Com, Youdecide2007, TimBlair.net, and News.com.au's extended the public sphere for citizen's involvement in political coverage, debate, discussion, and deliberation during the election. Veteran Bloggers like Dan Gillmor's criticized the irregularities recorded in the election even when *The Australian* state owned newspaper were less critical of the outcome of the election (Brun, Wilson & Sanders, 2007).

In addition, the Zimbabwe's 2013 election equally witnessed a massive manifestation of the activities of citizen journalists in covering the election. This was necessitated by the fact that President Robert Mugabe has been in power for a very long time and thus manipulate state media to his selfish interest. Moyo (2006) confirm this when he asserts that Zimbabwe's media landscape is dominated by state control and that political reporting on election is openly biased

in favor of president Mugabe's ruling ZANU PF party, resulting in huge loss of credibility for both the electoral system and state owned media organizations. As a result of this development, citizens are turning to alternative new media as source of information on politics or election. Baba Jukwa and Amai Juwa were two leading citizen journalists in Zimbabwe that decided to engage the citizens through social media to vote the incumbent president out of office. The citizen journalists along other people they trained monitor the election and made public the irregularities that characterized the election. Even though they could not initiate the change needed in Zimbabwe, however they exposed politician's covert operations and gave out public official's emails and contacts numbers to the citizens during the elections (Bugalo, 2013).

Even though citizen journalism is a welcome development in the society, however its practice is often beclouded with the issue of credibility, trust, and lack of objectivity. For example, Mackinnon (2007) cited in Suleiman (2015) in a study entitled "foreign journalists use of blogs within China" found out that even though citizen journalism is embrace in China partly because of the stiff control of the media in the country. However, findings from the study show that respondents did not agree that they can trust the information they receive online except if such information are scrutinize and evaluated to be true. Grubisich (2005), reviewed ten new citizen journalism sites and found many of them lacking in quality and content. Grubisich followed up a year later with, "Potemkin Village Redux". His discovery reveals that the best sites had improved editorially and were even nearing profitability, but only by not expending editorial costs.

In the same vein, Suleiman (2015) conducted an "exploratory study on the use of blogs and citizens journalism materials as news sources by Kaduna Based television stations". The study wanted to find out whether Kaduna based television journalists consider blog and citizen journalism related materials credible enough to be used in news bulletin of television stations. Findings reveal that 64% of the respondents deemed blog and citizen journalism news materials not credible as against 36% others that said they are credible. Corroborating the findings of Suleiman's study Okafor, Ebenezer, Chukwuemeka, & Daniel (2013, p. 94) equally attested to the fact that Nigerian citizen's perception of the workings of citizen journalism is bad. Among the respondents selected for the study 56% of them said the perception of citizen journalism in

Nigeria is bad, 26.8% said good while the remaining 17.1% were indifferent. These studies among several others suggest that citizen journalism as good as the concept is in journalism parlance is bedeviled with credibility issues. This situation is aggravated by the unregulated nature of new media technology which makes gate keeping process difficult.

Citizen journalism is fast becoming a potent force to be reckoned with in relations to building open and democratic societies. The emergence of new media technology and their integration in the field of politics is yielding some benefits in contemporary times. The Arab spring and other revolutions in most countries of the world are cases in point. It has been argued that the revolution was largely mediated by new media technologies like Twitter, Facebook, Blogs and Mobile phones. In recent times, these technological devices are massively used by citizen journalists to monitor and cover election proceedings in most countries of the world. Even though the deployment of new media technology in election monitoring in Nigeria is still relatively new, however, the practice seems to have some remarkable prospects in view of the experience recorded in the 2011 election. Therefore, this study focuses on citizen journalism and election monitoring in Nigeria during the 2011 elections. The time frame for the study covers the presidential and governorship election in Nigeria. This is germane in view of the fact that the 2015 election is at the corner and this study will go a long way to ascertain the role of citizen journalists in promoting transparency and accountability in the forthcoming election.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The role of the mass media during electioneering campaign cannot be overemphasized. As the watchdog of the society, the media monitor election proceedings and furnish the citizens with relevant news concerning developments as they unfold during elections. However, it has been observed that the conventional media of communication have inherent limitations in regards to election monitoring. First, is the hegemonic nature of the media structure in Nigeria. The political elite have hijacked the media to promote their vested interest. Hence the ordinary people are denied access to the media. Secondly, due to the vast nature of the country, it is impossible for traditional journalists to cover every locality during elections. In fact, majority of

the journalists limit their coverage to major towns and cities at the detriment of the rural areas where the majority of the electorate resides.

Furthermore, elections in Nigeria are characterized by all kinds of irregularities like rigging, snatching of ballot boxes, bribery and corruption, violence and falsification of election figures. In view of these irregularities, it is imperative that citizen journalism be employed in the monitoring of election proceedings in Nigeria. This is because citizen journalism would ensure the participation of the ordinary citizens in the electoral process. And this will in turn ensure transparency, accountability as well as exposes all kinds of corruption during elections. Also, objectivity and accuracy are usually lacking in the reportage of state owned media establishment during elections. This is due to their ownership structure. As a result of this, they tend to be biased and take sides to favor their principal officers when reporting election proceedings. Hence citizen journalism will provide an alternative news source for citizens to monitor election process.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the role of citizen journalists in monitoring elections in Nigeria.
2. To determine the extent to which citizen journalism is used to monitor elections in Nigeria
3. To find out which social media networks is mostly used by citizen journalists to monitor election in Nigeria.
4. To find out whether citizen journalism can engender transparency and accountability in the conduct of elections in Nigeria.
5. To find out the challenges of citizen journalism in Nigeria

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the role of citizen journalists in election monitoring in Nigeria
2. To what extent is citizen journalism employed to monitor election in Nigeria
3. Which social media networks is mostly used among citizen journalists to cover elections in Nigeria
4. Can citizen journalism engender transparency and accountability in election in Nigeria?
5. What are the challenges of citizen journalism in Nigeria

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

It is imperative to conceptualize key concepts that are associated with this study in order to put the study in perspective. This concept includes citizen journalism and election.

### **The Concept of Citizen Journalism**

According to Educause Learning Initiative (2007) the term citizen journalism is a broad term and still shifting in meaning. Banda (2010, p. 26) notes that citizen journalism is a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community. He further observes that it is news of the people, by the people and for the people. Citizen journalism is therefore a people centered type of journalism where the interests of the ordinary people are taken into consideration.

Citizen journalism is also known as “public”, “participatory”, “democratic”, “guerilla “or “street journalism” is the concept of members of the public playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information (Glaser, 2007, cited in Nelson, Tunji and Sulemen, 2012, p. 163). Quoting Salawu (2007) they further opined that citizen journalism emerged as a result of democratization of the multi-media technologies by the people and for the people. New media technologies have made possible for members of the

public to take on the responsibility of representing common interest and actively participate in the creation and dissemination of information (Oladokun and Morah, 2013, p. 45).

Expounding on the concept of citizen journalism, Radschi (2011) submit that citizen journalism is an alternative and activist form of news gathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions, often as a response to the shortcoming in the professional journalistic field that uses similar journalistic practices but is driven by different objectives and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than the traditional media or mainstream journalism. This is apt in explaining the nature of media operations in Nigeria today where the majority of media outfits are controlled by the state and are often manipulated to serve the interest of those in power. And coupled with the limitations of access and time, and in some cases ulterior motives in presenting one side of a story by conventional media reporting risks at least the perception of being skewed. As a result of these encumbrances, citizen journalism by granting access to anyone to cover and disseminate news will provide citizens the latitude to present their own side of the story (Agboola, 2013 p. 215). Through blogs, Twitter, and YouTube citizen journalists have broken stories about political corruption, police brutality, and other issues of concern to local, national and international communities. The rationale behind citizen journalism is that people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the internet to create, augment, or fact-check media own or collaboration with others (Lassica, 2003, p. 1).

It is based on the above that Rodriguez (2000) cited in Atton (2009, p. 268) noted that “independent media enable ordinary citizens to become politically empowered”. According to her, when people create their own media, they are able to represent themselves and their communities. Citizen media are aimed not at state- promoted citizenship, but at media practices that construct citizenship and political identity within everyday life practices. Therefore, rather than relying on the mass media to set boundaries of political involvement, citizens can use their own self -managed media to become politically involved on their own terms and thus making them an active participant in the political process (DeCerteau, 1984; Levebveu, 1947/1941; Dahlgren, 2000 all cited in Atton, 2009, p. 267).



From the foregoing, it has been established that citizen journalism is an alternative type of journalism practice that utilizes modern communication technology to facilitate the engagement and participation of the ordinary citizens in the process of gathering and dissemination of information. This therefore means that with modern communication devices, there is a paradigm shift in the communication continuum where the traditional media of communication held sway in determining and setting the agenda for public discussion. With the aid of a mobile phone for example, members of the public can set the agenda and direct the course of discussion in the public domain and subsequently draw the attention of the people with critical issues that concern them. Thus, breaking the monopoly of the traditional media of communication in directing and choosing which issues they feel to report to the audience.

### **Conceptualizing Election**

Historically, elections were used in history in ancient Greece and ancient Rome and throughout the medieval period to select rulers such as the Holy Roman experience and the Pope. Ancient Arabs also used election to choose their Caliph Uthman and Ali in the early medieval Rashidun Caliphate. The modern “election” which consists of public elections of government officials didn’t emerge until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe (Abdullahi, 2011).

The concept of election is associated with so many meanings such that it is hardly difficult to say its exact meaning. According to Omonijo et al. (2007) cited in Ayo (2012), election is the act of choosing public officers to fill vacant posts by vote, it is an act of choosing those that govern a state; it may be conducted periodically. Elections are central in the institution of democratic representative governments. The reason is that, in democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. The principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free and fair elections. Corroborating Omonijo’s submission, Adeyemo (1996, p.63) sees election as the method of making political choices by voting or choosing candidates for political offices usually by eligible voters or the electorate. It is on this premise that Egwemi (2013), avers that elections are an

important component of democracy and without periodic and regular elections, democracy gradually loses its value and appeal.

To Ujo (2004), “election is one procedure of aggregating preferences of a particular kind and a process of choosing between alternatives.” Elections can be done in practice only through forms of procedure accepted as binding within the political society. Chukwu (2007) cited in Mato (2009, p.16) asserts that election is regarded as the central institution of democratic government. This assertion is significant considering the fact that in a democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent given by the governed to the leaders. The primary mechanism for obtaining and translating that consent into governmental authority is holding genuinely democratic elections (Mato, 2009, p. 16).

Since Nigerian return to democratic rule in May 1999, after decades of military dictatorship, the nation has been facing the challenge of conducting free and fair election. Such that even international observers attest to the fact that previous elections in the country were adjudged to be fraudulent with all kinds of electoral malpractices. For example, the 1999, 2003, 2007, and 2011 elections recorded massive rigging by the government in power. Such that European Observer Mission (EUEON) and other key international observers widely claimed that these elections were flawed with irregularities of varying degrees. As the country prepares for another round of election come 2015, it is hoped that the previous experience we had as a nation will not repeat itself. It is in this light that citizen journalism will help promote transparency and accountability in the election processes.

### **Citizen Journalism and Election Monitoring in Nigeria**

On a global scale, citizen journalism has been used to mobilize electorate to participate in political activities as well as monitor election proceedings in both developed and developing countries of Africa. The emergence of social networking sites which is heralded by the advent of the internet is opening up the public sphere to a more transparent and participatory form of democracy. Several organizations are beginning to see the potentials inherent in these communication devices to enhance political participation, social mobilization and even civil

protest. Today several Nigerians have Email accounts, and huge number of people have signed up for social networking sites and numerous audiences – driven online citizen journalism sites and discussion forums. As a result, dissemination of news is not an exclusive preserve of the conventional media of communication alone. Citizens are now actively involved in producing and generating media content in the country. Nigerians are no longer passive consumers of media content again.

Nigeria had its own share of testing the pervasive power of new media technology in the 2011 general elections. Prior to this time, the traditional media of communication were exclusively responsible for the monitoring of election activities. However, the 2011 general election saw the massive deployment of new media technology by both conventional journalists and citizen journalists alike. Odoemeleam and Adibe (2011) reported that during the elections in Nigeria, many Nigerians were armed with their blackberries and Twitter account feeds. They further observe that one of such Nigerian was Gbenga, a 33 years old IT consultant and activist, his team had designed a smart-phone application called *Revoda* which allowed voters to instantly upload photos, pictures and reports delayed arrival of materials and presence of intimidating gangs at their local polling stations.

In a related development, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) handed out blackberry pin via Twitter for voters to send reports from their polling booths. During the elections, several Nigerians were able to send reports on Facebook and Twitter on the proceedings of events in their respective polling stations. A case in point that got people's attention is the case of a woman that was captured on YouTube video by a citizen journalist thumb-printing multiple times on numerous ballot papers. On Twitter, she was fondly tagged "The last VoteBendor" and the attention of INEC was drawn to the case. A report on the role played by social media in the elections revealed that INEC posted over 4000 tweets, many in response to voters queries (Arthur, 2011).

Civil society organizations and groups were able to mobilize youths to monitor election proceedings in their respective voting centers. For instance, the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation established a social media tracking center during the elections where youths were involved in monitoring election proceedings in the entire country. Civil society organizations

also established reporting platforms via SMS, Twitter, Websites, Blogs and phone lines. An Abuja based civil society group established a civil society Election Situation Room, which received reports from the field during the election process and relayed information to INEC, the Police Service Commission and the Nigerian police respectively (Asuni, Farris, and Nwankpa, 2011, p.2).

Furthermore, organizations such as “Enough is Enough Nigeria”, ReclaimedNija”, “Wongo”, “IamLagos” and a host of many others established social media platforms enabling citizens to report election –related incidences with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemail. The ReclaimNiaja which was launched in March 2011 demonstrated a change in mood as hundreds of community activities, ranging from motorbikes and taxi drivers to market women, hairdressers and battery chargers, stood and held their mobile phones aloft, “the power is in our hands”

Similarly, in other African countries the use of social media has been fully integrated in election processes. For instance, in Zambia’s 2011 election, various civil society and interest groups employed the social media to monitor the elections in their country. Chatora (2001) as cited in Nwafor, Odomemela, Ori-egwu, Nwanko, and Nweze (2013 p. 74) observes that Bantu watch was a civil society driven websites that utilized Facebook and Twitter to encourage registered voters and interested parties to report incidence of election –related violence, hate speeches, corruption and other matters via the websites and via text messages. According to him, Tweets with the hashtag Zambia elections were automatically compiled and link to the Bantu Watch Website. This initiative by the group provided the opportunity for ordinary citizens to participate and monitor election activities at their respective polling stations.

Writing on the impact of new media technology in the 2011 general elections, Agboola (2013, p. 227) argues that the elections was monitored through mobile phones by Nigerians. He further says that new media technology has played a greater role in the elections. With 87 million handsets in the hands of Nigerians, most of whom were young people, who were social media inclined (citizen journalists in the making), for the first time in the history of the country, Nigeria 2011 general elections were monitored by ordinary Nigerians. And this major milestone to some extent helped to ensure transparency in the conduct of the elections. Several electoral

frauds and malpractices were exposed with the aid of new media technologies in the hands of Nigerians. For example, one remarkable event that took place during the 2011 elections in Imo State. An ordinary citizen, Mss. Chika twitted in the early hours of April 9 alleging that one of the senatorial candidates, Kema Chikwe, was engineering completion of results sheets in a private home. Two civil society organization groups were alerted and sent trained observers to verify the tweet. Over the day, citizens followed proceedings with a flurry of tweet, not just around the country but around the world. At the end of the day, Kema was defeated by Chris Anyanwu and the news quickly spread. The use of social media to a great extent help to minimize the cases of manipulating election results during the elections. In a nutshell, the 2011 elections will perhaps be remembered as a historic election that saw the introduction of new media technology into the political arena of Nigerian politics.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

This study is situated within the context of Public Sphere theory, Uses and Gratification Theory, and Democratic Participant Media Theory. The Public Sphere theory is credited to a German sociologist, Jurgen Habermas. According to Abubakar (2011, p.103), the theory holds that the media (old & new) are components of the various avenues where citizens freely participate, communicate and share political ideas and information in a democratic forum. He further adds that other platforms where citizens can participate are clubs, coffee and saloon joints, assemblies and so forth. The emergence of new media technology brought a paradigm shift in the character and nature of the public sphere. With the advent of new media technology, political participation and deliberation is now mediated online. Grossman (1996) argues that this development will give rise to “Electronic Republic” where new media technologies are used widely to increase people’s power and influence on the decisions of the state. ICT therefore facilitate citizen participation, create more informed citizens enhance democratic governance.

Wang (2009) is of the view that “public sphere is the key to engender a strong and active citizen’s participation in government affairs, not merely at an election one day in a year, but

every day". This explains why social media platforms like blogs, facebook and other social media tools are now arenas where citizens can monitor government activities as well as discuss state issues online freely without government control. Hence, citizen journalists through their online reports provide the platform for citizens to contribute in political discussion on a variety of issues and thus enhance interaction with those in power.

The Uses and Gratification theory holds that individuals actively select and use media in order to gratify certain needs. In other words, the motives are understood as common predispositions that determine the people's willingness to engage with media content (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000). The origin of the theory is traceable to the works of Elihu Katz, Jay Blummer and Micheal Gurevitch in 1974. The theory according to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008, p. 71) is concerned with what people do with the media instead of what the media do to people. The major thrust of the theory subscribes to the assumption that consumers of mass media content influence the effect of the mass media on them. Hence media consumers are not passive but active in determining what they use the media for. Folarin (2005) observes that mass media audience has some certain needs that are dear to them that is why they are exposed to, attend to, and retain media messages because of the perceived gratification derivable from such messages. The theory is relevant to this study because citizen journalists now use social media to disseminate information and engage with other members of the society.

The third theoretical construct for the paper is an offshoot of the normative theory postulated by Denis McQuail. The major tenets of the theory according to him stem from the outrage that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercialization and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down, so as to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers (McQuail, 2005, p.). Shedding more light on the theory, McQuail says the theory was developed in reaction against commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media and against the centralism and bureaucratization of public broadcasting institutions. The theory therefore advocates a horizontal communication system where citizens can participate in the communication process rather than the top-down communication structure. It is in this light that the democratization of media technologies has engendered the participatory nature of communication that allows for user-generated content and the creation

and distribution of mass media content among ordinary citizens. Thus, breaking the monopoly that was once in the grasp of traditional media of communication. Applying the Democratic Participant Theory to this discourse, the theory provides the latitude for citizens to gather, share, generate, and distribute information without interference. Hence people will have access to the media so as to participate in political communication and debate on national issues.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

Survey design was adopted for the study and the questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection. The population of the study was made up of 300 and 400 level Mass Communication students of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai Niger state. They were selected because they are considered to be in a better position to respond to the questions posed in the research questions. It is also worthy to note that most of the respondents are already practicing citizen journalists even while on campus. Purposive sampling was used to select the population for the study while the simple random sampling technique was used to select (150) respondents. Thus, one hundred and fifty copies of the questionnaire were administered to 300 and 400 level students of Mass Communication Department of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire and collected the data for the study as well as gathered materials from existing literatures to find out what other researchers had said about the subject.

## **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

All the one hundred and fifty copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the respondents were all retrieved. Therefore, the findings of the data are presented and analyzed below.

**Research Question 1:** What is the role of Citizen Journalists in Election monitoring in Nigeria

Table 1: Response on the role of citizen journalists in election monitoring

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Citizen journalists provide on the spot information on polling stations during the elections	30	20.0
Citizen journalists monitor election proceedings by taking pictures, photos and other activities on election ground.	48	32.0
Citizen journalists investigate and unearth electoral fraud and report to the general public.	15	10.0
Citizen journalists update electorates with vital information regarding the conduct of election proceedings	30	20.0
Citizen journalism enables members of the public to participate fully in the election by monitoring trends before, during and after the election.	27	18.0
<b>Total</b>	150	100%

Table 1, shows the various responses of the respondents on the role of citizen journalists in election monitoring in Nigeria. Out of 150 respondents 30 (20.0%) said citizen journalists provide on the spot information at polling stations, 48 (32.0%) are of the view that citizen journalists monitor election proceedings at polling centers, 27 representing (18.0%) subscribe to the fact that citizen journalists enable members of the public to participate in monitoring events during and after the election. 15 (10.0%) said citizen journalists investigate and unearth electoral fraud, while 0 (20.0%) respondents said they investigate and report fraudulent practices during electioneering campaigns. It could be understood from this table that citizen journalists perform critical roles in the process of election. This is attributed to the fact that traditional journalists cannot be everywhere during the election. Citizen journalists therefore compliment the effort of conventional journalists in covering areas they may not be able to cover.



**Research Question 2:** To what extent is citizen Journalism employed to monitor Election in Nigeria

Table 2: Response on the extent to which citizen journalism is used to monitor the election

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very Great Extent	20	13.3
Great Extent	48	32.0
Low Extent	50	33.3
Very Low Extent	17	11.4
Not at all	15	10.0
<b>Total</b>	150	100%

Table 2 above sought to find out the extent to which citizen journalism is employed to cover elections in Nigeria. From the responses obtained from the data the analysis shows that 33.3% of the respondents were of the opinion that it was to a low extent while 32.0% said great extent. This result is not a surprise because with the exponential growth in the use of social media among Nigerians, several citizens now use these technological devices to engage in the dissemination of political information.

**Research Question 3:** Which social media networks are mostly used among citizen journalists to cover elections in Nigeria?

Table 3: Responses view on which social media networks is mostly used among citizen journalists.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Twitter	32	21.3
Facebook	60	40.0
Blogs	29	19.3
My Space	07	4.7
YouTube	22	14.7
<b>Total</b>	150	100%

Table 3 has data on respondent's views on which social media networks are mostly used among citizen journalists to monitor election in Nigeria. Out of the 150 respondents, 32 (21.3%) said Twitter, 60 said Facebook accounting to (40%), 29 (19.3%) said Blogs, 07 (4.7%) said MySpace. While 22 (14.7%) said YouTube. It is evident from the table that the majority of the respondents said Facebook is mostly use to monitor election in Nigeria. The findings show that

of all the available social media platforms at the disposal of citizen journalists Facebook is the one that is mostly used among citizen journalists in Nigeria. The reason for this is not farfetched, Facebook seems to be the most popular and the majorities of Nigerians have signed up and open accounts on Facebook.

**Research Question 4:** Can you citizen journalism engender transparency and accountability in election monitoring in Nigeria?

Table 4: Respondents views on whether citizen journalism can promote transparency during elections

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	80	53.3
No	70	46.7
<b>Total</b>	150	100%

Table 4 explains whether citizen journalism can engender transparency and accountability in electoral processes in Nigeria. 80 (53.3%) respondents said yes, while 70 (46.7%) respondents said no. From the table, it can be deduced that there is no significant different from the respondents who believe that citizen journalism can bring about transparency and accountability in the conduct of elections in Nigeria. It could be understood from this table that due to the features of new media which has the ability to spread information very fast more than any other media of communication, news, reports, and photos can be uploaded by anyone and circulate to any part of the globe within few seconds. Thus, social media may expose electoral fraud and other election irregularities during election. For example, Ende (2013, p. 40) reported that on the day of the National Assembly elections during the 2011 elections, *Daily Trust* newspaper promptly uploaded through its multimedia online site, footages of gross electoral fraud that was ongoing in Bayelsa State, so also was Sahara Reporters awash with videos of similar malpractices elsewhere.

**Research Question5:** What are the challenges facing citizen journalism in Nigeria

Table 5: Respondents view on the challenges of citizen journalism in Nigeria

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Citizen journalism poses threat to the invasion of privacy of citizens	20	13.3
Lack of adequate ICT Infrastructural facilities	30	20.0
Most citizen journalists don't adhere to journalistic values of objectivity, truth and accuracy.	50	33.4
Citizen journalism has the potential to fuel mass protest, revolt and civil unrest in the society	20	13.3
Most of the information disseminated by citizen journalists are not subject to any gate keeping process and as such may lack veracity and authenticity.	30	20.0
<b>Total</b>	150	100%

Table 5 reveals the challenges confronting citizen journalism in Nigeria. To this end, 13.3% percentage said citizen journalism is a threat to people's privacy, 20.0% said the majority of citizen journalists don't abide by the principles of journalism, 13.4% said citizen journalism has the potential to fuel social, political and religious unrest in the society, 20.0% said lack of ICT infrastructures while 20.0% said the information posted by citizen journalists usually lacks scrutiny and gate keeping process. It is evidently clear that all the responses of the respondents are true. Despite the huge benefit of citizen journalism, yet it has some inherent limitations associated with it. This problem is further compounded with the fact that social media lacks regulatory mechanism. Anybody can post anything on social networking sites without subjecting the information to editorial scrutiny in order to validate the content of the information. This concern is equally underscored by Odomemela, Ori-egwu, Nwanko, and Nweze (2013 p. 78) who avers that social media technology has been widely used to arrange, support and fuel violent protest in many parts of Africa in the last few years of their existence in the continent. The Arab Spring and the Nigeria fuel subsidy removal crises readily come to mind. These are some of the drawbacks of the social media. Corroborating further, Quoting Grossman (2009) and Shane (2011), and Dagona, Karick, and Abubakar (2013, p.2) opines that "in recent times news report has frequently portrayed social media such as Facebook and Twitter as plying key role in social upheavals and political protests in countries such as Iran and Egypt.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that citizen journalism has a crucial role to play in monitoring election activities in Nigeria. These findings further attest to the important role of the mass media in society. Being the watchdog of the actions and inactions of those in power, they are charged with the responsibility of monitoring governance in the society. This fundamental role of the mass media is being supported by section 22 of the 1999 constitution which confers on the media the onerous task of holding the government accountable to the people. This is evident in Table 1 where the majority of the respondents claimed that citizen journalists perform important roles during electioneering campaigns. This was evident in the 2011 elections in Nigeria where civil society organizations like Local Election Monitoring Group and International Election Observers set up networks and platforms for monitoring elections in Nigeria. They have the webs and other satellite devices to monitor political campaigns, and voting procedure at polling stations (Oyebode, 2014, p. 97).

Furthermore, the study also reveals the extent to which citizen journalism is employed to monitor elections in Nigeria. Findings further proved that citizen journalism is employed to a Low extent and great extent in covering elections in Nigeria. This is evident in Table 2 where a significant number of the respondents attest to the fact that citizen journalism is being used to monitor elections. This finding is not a surprise because the last general elections held in 2011 saw the massive use of social media platforms among the majority of Nigerians. The findings of this study is in tandem with the Public Sphere theory which espoused that with the advent of new media technologies journalists in Nigeria are using the platforms as an avenue to interact with the public on a variety of issues. Nworah (2007) further validate the public sphere theory by affirming in his study that “the internet has provided Nigerian citizen journalists with international exposure such that they can file a story from the remotest part of Nigeria and the story pasted on the internet”. Hence the freedom between the writer (source of the news) and the audience (receiver of news) is greatly enhanced on-line dissemination of information.

In addition, the study discovered that of all the social media tools available to citizen journalists in Nigeria, the most preferred social media among Nigerian citizen journalists is Facebook and online websites. These tools are found to be more popular among Nigerians and that is why the majority of people are signing up to open a Facebook account on a daily basis.

This finding is captured in table three where most of the respondents attested this fact. This further confirms a report that reveals that Facebook is the most prevalent in Nigeria. Nigerians use Facebook more than other social media. In affirmation of the above assertion, Idakwo (2011) cited in Haruna and Danladi (2013, p. 180) opined that Facebook demographic data, as of July 3, 2010, indicates that there are about one million, seven hundred and eighteen thousand (1,718,000) Nigerians on Facebook (less Diaspora) and that it is among the top three most visited sites by Nigerians. Nigerian users on Facebook.com increased from 99,720 in 2008 to 569,180 in 2009, and 1, 718, 000 in 2010. This again show the relevance of the Uses and Gratification theory in influencing citizens to adopt certain media tools like the social media to register their presence online and thus become active in the democratic process.

An interesting discovery of the study reveals that respondents strongly agree that the integration of citizen journalism in the conduct of election has the potential to promote transparency and accountability in the electoral process in Nigeria. Even though percentage of those that affirm to the research question were 53.3% and those that said no were 46.7% the study cannot conclude that this represent the views of all Nigerians since the scope of the study is limited. This finding is provided in Table 4 above. This is in line with the postulation of media scholars who saw the emergence of social media as an alternative platform for citizens to actively participate in the process of governance (Grubisich, 2005, Clarke, 2010, & Wang, 2009). Events at the international level show that social media have been used to strip off despotic and dictatorial regimes in recent times. Thus, with the use of social media in politics, it will foster greater transparency in the election process. This is quite significant given the nature of how election is conducted in Nigeria. Elections in Nigeria had always been adjudged to be flawed with irregularities and electoral malpractices. The use of citizen journalists will ensure that sanity and transparency is brought back to the electoral process in Nigeria.

Lastly, the researcher decided to probe further to find out the challenges of citizen journalism in Nigeria. The finding shows that despite the huge benefits derived from citizen journalism, the concept still have some major issues if not tackled may result to a crisis situation in information and communication need of the society. Due to the pervasive nature of social media, the study discovered that it can lead to the invasion of people's privacy which is their

basic fundamental human rights. Also, social media has the potential to fuel mass revolt and protest. This is evident in the Arab spring revolution and other similar mass action that engulfed some countries in Africa and Europe. Nigeria had its own share of the experience during the fuel subsidy crises. The crisis was largely mediated through social networking sites. It has been observed recently that due to this dysfunctional role of the social media, the governments of several nations are beginning to put stringent measures on the operation of social media in their respective countries. The Egyptian government is already leading in this direction. The findings of this study is therefore consistent with other literature examined in this work which identify lack of objectivity, trust and credibility as the potential problems associated with citizen journalism the world over (Suleiman, 2015 & Okafor, Ebenezer, Chukwumeka, & Daniel 2013).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study examined the role of citizen journalism in election monitoring in Nigeria. The study discovered that citizen journalism has a critical role to play in election observation and surveillance of the environment to ensure transparency and free and fair elections in Nigeria. The study particularly noted that citizen journalism has been employed by both developed and developing countries of Africa to ensure that electoral processes pass the test of being transparent based on international standard. Even though Nigeria just experimented with the use of social media in covering elections in the 2011 general elections, the experience proved that indeed social media holds great potential for Nigeria society. Drawing inspiration from other countries like Zambai, Australia, United State of America, Zimbabwe, among others Nigeria can perform the same feet in the forthcoming elections come 2015.

Based on the findings of this study, we conclude that Nigeria should continue to employ citizen journalism in the conduct of elections in the country. However, a word of caution must be given to all citizens who use social media in a destructive manner to incite, instigate and disseminate malicious information to the general public should desist from doing so. To this effect we recommend that government and civil society groups should organize a forum where experts can give basic training and education to all citizens. To start with, media literacy courses

should be introduced across all educational levels in the country so that the youths who are avid users of social media can be trained on how to use the platform positively.

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