# Perception of Television Viewers in South-South Nigeria to Citizen Journalism Reports.

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*Abstract*
*The contribution of citizens who comment on issues of public concern is appreciated all over the world. Especially in countries without freedom of expression, the World Wide Web plays a crucial role in opening opportunities for informing the people. The most important thing is that the digital media are opening up the sphere to those who previously had no means to make themselves heard. This study examines the perspectives of television viewers in South-South Nigeria to citizen journalism reports. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population for this study comprised television viewers in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria consisting of six states, namely: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers and the total population of adults in the six states according to the 2006 census figures is 21,044,081. Out of the six states, three were chosen: Rivers state, Edo state and Akwa Ibom state. These represented the old Rivers state, the old Bendel state and the old Cross River state respectively and the population amounts to 12,334,133. Using the Yaro Yamani formula, the sample size was determined as 401.Out of the 401 television viewers sampled, 384 were returned and found useful yielding a return rate of 96% which is used for analysis. The study reveals that television viewers strongly feel television stations should accept and use reports from citizens. The study recommend among others that citizens should be encouraged by professional journalists to be vigilant so as to capture and send happenings around them to television stations since it is obvious that citizens are everywhere but journalist are not, in this way, citizens will help in fighting corruption and other vices in the country as people will become careful since anybody can capture vices and send same to television stations for broadcasting.*

*Key words: Citizen Journalism, Television Viewer, Television journalist, South-South Nigeria, User-Generated Content, Perspective.*

## Introduction

Livingston and Bennett (2003) observe that communications technologies are opening new gates to the practice of journalism. These new technologies include cell phones with cameras that anyone can use to capture and share newsworthy images with the media (Gordon 2007).

The BBC is considered a pioneer in the field of user-generated content (UGC). The BBC has many people working in its UGC hub, up from just three in 2005, and receives thousands of comments and e-mails every day along with hundreds of photos and videos. BBC staffs see UGC as part of newsgathering operations; basically, a way of obtaining photos and videos, eyewitness accounts or story tips. In fact, UGC has become institutionalised at the BBC as a form of newsgathering, consolidating the existing relationship between journalists and the audience. Some BBC journalists view it as a way to collaborate on stories, or as a shift towards collaborative journalism.

From the 2008 Mumbai attack to the Sichuan Earthquake in China, through the plane

crash in Hudson River in New York, the first breaking news has been provided by citizens with smart phones and internet connections. Nicola (2010) observes that one of the groundbreaking moments of this trend (citizen journalism) was the grass-root coverage of the 2009 Iranian protests where the mainstream media organisations were muzzled, unable to cover demonstrations. It was user generated footage shot on mobile phones and distributed via social networks like YouTube and Facebook which enabled things to be seen that would have hitherto been missed.

The scenario is not different in Nigeria. Commenting before the April general elections, Bongani (2011) opined thus: "when citizens of the country vote in presidential and parliamentary elections between April 2$^{nd}$ and 9$^{th}$, young participants will tweet, update their statuses and post videos of activities at polling stations. They will disseminate real-time and first-hand accounts of their voting experiences. Those who plan to snatch ballot papers may find it difficult to do so as their images will be on Facebook and YouTube, blogs and Twitter." Some television and radio stations in the country supplied phone lines through which citizens could call in to give situation reports in their localities.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) created a User Generated Content (UGC) Hub, and asked viewers to submit original content during crisis events to it. The hub then processes such content. Time and thought have been given to understanding the effects that digital media are having on traditional media and journalism. In the light of the foregoing, this study sets out to identify television viewers' perception of the use of citizen reports on television stations in South-South Nigeria.

## Objectives of the Study
The specific objectives of this study were to:
1. Determine if television viewers encourage the adoption of citizen journalism in television stations in South-South Nigeria.
2. determine if television viewers recognize citizen journalists knowledgeable enough and as potential source of reports on television stations in South-South Nigeria
3. Determine the impact of citizen reports on the credibility of news reported by television stations in South-South Nigeria as perceived by television viewers.
4. ascertain whether television viewers confidence will fall when television stations in South-South Nigeria use citizen reports

## 1.1 Research Questions
The following questions guided this work:
1. To what extent do television viewers encourage the adoption of citizen journalism in television stations in South-South Nigeria?
2. Do television viewers recognize citizen journalist's knowledgeable enough and as potential source of reports on television stations in South-South Nigeria?
3. What do television viewers perceive to be the impact of citizens' reports on the credibility of news reported by television stations in South-South Nigeria?
4. Would television viewers' confidence fall when television stations in South-South Nigeria use citizen reports?

## Literature Review
### The concept of Citizen Journalism
Scott (2006) provides a comprehensive analysis of the changing digital journalism landscape by documenting challenges brought about by technology. He suggests that the Internet has been very disruptive to traditional media, noting that "It has demanded new business models, threatened complacency, and responded to innovation" (p. 93). This response

includes adopting practices that now include news gathered from the public, which is commonly referred to as citizen journalism, participatory publishing, or open publishing to mention a few of the terms (Nguyen, 2006).

Although it is clear that the emergence of citizen journalism is conceptually linked to the debates about the normative nature of journalism, it was not until the advent of new media technologies (the internet, world-wide web [WWW], mobile phones, etc.) that it exploded globally. Citizen journalism could be defined as the act of a non-professional citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires. Citizen journalism is a bottom-up, emergent phenomenon in which there is little or no editorial oversight or formal journalistic set up moderating the action of a participant. Instead, it is the result of many simultaneous, distributed conversations that either blossom or quickly atrophy in the Web's social network. While the explosion of weblogs is a recent phenomenon, the idea of tapping into the audience for new perspectives or turning readers into reporters or commentators is not. Many news organisations have a long history of tapping into their communities and experimenting with turning readers into reporters or commentators. In the early 1990s, newspapers experimented with the idea of civic journalism, which sought participation from readers and communities in the form of focus groups, polls and reaction to daily news stories. Most of these early projects centered on election coverage. Later, newspapers sought to involve communities in major deliberations on public problems such as race, development and crime. According to a report from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, at least 20 percent of the 1,500 daily U.S. newspapers practiced some form of civic journalism between 1994 and 2001. Nearly all said it had a positive effect on the community. Kovach and Rosenstiel, (2001) further elaborate on participatory journalism in their book: *The Elements of Journalism.* In their words: "In an era when anyone can be a reporter or commentator on the Web, 'you move to a two-way journalism.' The journalist becomes a 'forum leader,' or a mediator rather than simply a teacher or lecturer. The audience becomes not consumers, but 'pro-sumers,' a hybrid of consumer and producer."

**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. It is news of the people, by the people and for the people. Citizen journalists are independent, freelancing citizen reporters. They are not constrained by conventional journalistic processes or methodologies, and they usually function without editorial oversight. Citizen journalists gather, process, research, analyse, report and publish news and information, most often utilising a variety of technologies made possible by the internet (Ross and Cormier, 2010, p. 66). An important point to make about the traditional media is that they are given to the conventional definitions of news which emphasize very important persons, controversy, conflict, oddity, and the like (Galtung and Ruge 1969). These definitions are restrictive. They are by implication, saying if something happens to ordinary people, as long as there is no very important person to quote, it is not newsworthy.

The structured nature of traditional media thus tends to be exclusive in its selection of stories and their sources. Citizen journalism seeks to open it up to the participation of ordinary people. Citizen journalism is thus aimed at de-institutionalising and de-professionalising the practice of journalism.

### 2.1.2 CNN's iReport:
CNN started soliciting and featuring audience-gathered content in 2006 under the

iReport brand. During the first phase of implementation, approximately ten percent of the news-related photos and videos were featured on air or on CNN.com after being carefully reviewed by in-house journalists. In February 2008, CNN launched an online community website dedicated to gathering un-moderated user-generated content. The Website explained that CNN makes no guarantees about the content or the coverage on iReport.com. The site was developed to build an online community; help the network gauge what people consider to be news and empower the community to drive news conversations. CNN continues to use iReports on-air, and on CNN.com once newsworthy reports are vetted. Trained journalists are charged with verifying the authenticity of news reports and events submitted by the public before any clips are aired (Dube, 2008).

One of the most notable iReports occurred in April 2007 when a Virginia Tech student, Jamal Alburghouti shared video captured on his cell phone camera of the worst shooting massacre on a college campus in U.S. history. Alburghouti was walking across the campus when he happened upon the scene. He captured the only video of police entering a building and audio of the gunshots (CNN, 2007). As significant as this and other acts of citizen journalism appears, some iReporters and journalists have discussed the ethical issues that come into play (Witt, 2008; Callan, 2008).

Some have predicted a troubled future for the use of citizen's reports due to content accuracy, privacy issues, reliability and other related concerns.

**Theoretical Framework**
This work is anchored on one mass communication theory known as Democratic – Participant Media Theory.

**Democratic – Participant Media Theory**
Democratic – Participant Media Theory was actually developed by Dennis McQuail during the 1980's. The crux of this theory, according to Folarin (1998, pp.29-30), "lies in its insistence that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down, so as to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers".

In an elucidatory manner, Ojobor (2002, p.15) avers that "there is in this theory a desire for horizontal rather than vertical (top down) communication". The stimulus for democratic – participant theory has been the reaction against commercialisation and monopolisation of privately owned media or monopoly journalism, centralism and bureaucratisation of public broadcasting institutions, (Okunna, 1999 as cited in Ojobor, 2002, p.15).

In line with the above statements, McQuail (1987, p.123) opined that one of the basic principles of the theory is that "individual citizens and minority groups have rights of access to media (rights to communicate) and rights to be served by media according to their own determination of need.

This theory advocates the liberalisation of the media for the common good of the people it is meant to serve. It believes that the people should have free access to the means of communication in order to better their lot. In a way, the theory vehemently opposes the monopolistic and rigid structure of traditional mass media.

This theory is relevant to the work under investigation because it anchors itself on individual citizen's right of access to the media. This work focuses on the citizens' participation in information gathering and dissemination. Therefore, this theory provides a forum where citizens can have access to information gathering and dissemination.

## Methodology
### Research Design
The study adopted the survey method with the questionnaire as research instruments. The population for this study comprised television viewers in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria consisting of six states, namely: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers and the total population of adults in the six states according to the 2006 census figures is 21,044,081.

Out of the six states, three were chosen: Rivers state, Edo state and Akwa Ibom state. These represented the old Rivers state, the old Bendel state and the old Cross River state respectively and the population amounts to 12,334,133. Using the Yaro Yamani formula, the sample size was determined as 401. The proportional stratified sampling was used to arrive at the number of respondents to be selected from each of the three stratum of the population. This was done in proportion to the population of each stratum.

The questionnaire was administered to television viewers who are adults and informed from three states under study. Data collected from survey (questionnaire) was analysed using simple percentages.

### Data Presentation and Analysis
A total of 401 television viewers were sampled out of the population of 12,334,133. In all, 384 were returned and found useful yielding a return rate of 96% which is very adequate for analysis.

**Table 1. Television Viewer' predisposition to the adoption of citizens' reports by television stations.**

| Nature of Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 357 | 93 |
| No | 24 | 6 |
| Not sure | 3 | 1 |
| **Total** | **384** | **100** |

Table 1 reveals that the majority of the respondents (357) agree that they would encourage the adoption of citizen journalism; 24 respondents (6%) would not encourage the adoption of citizen journalism while 3 (1%) of the respondents are not sure where they stand in the matter.

**Table 2: Respondents' Views on Whether Citizens are Knowledgeable Enough to Contribute to Reports on Television Stations.**

| Nature of Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 282 | 73 |
| No | 88 | 23 |
| Don't know | 14 | 4 |
| **Total** | **384** | **100** |

It can be gleaned from table 2 that of the 384 respondents, 282 respondents (73%) consider citizens knowledgeable enough to contribute to reports in their stations, 88 respondents (23%) do not consider citizens knowledgeable enough to contribute to reports, while 14 respondents (4%) have no opinion. It is evident from the table above that the majority of the respondents consider citizens knowledgeable enough to contribute to reports in their stations.

**Table 3. Respondents' View of Citizens as Potential Sources of Reports in Television Stations.**

| Nature of Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 308 | 80 |
| No | 68 | 18 |
| Don't know | 8 | 2 |
| **Total** | **384** | **100** |

Table 3 indicates that of the 384 respondents sampled, 308 respondents (80%) recognize citizens as a potential source of reports; 68 respondents (18%) do not recognize citizens as potential sources of reports while, 8 respondents, (2%) are undecided as to whether citizens are a potential source of reports on their television stations.

**Table 4: Subjects' views on the impact of citizens reports on news credibility.**

| Nature of Response | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Strongly Agree | 160 | 42 |
| Agree | 148 | 38 |
| Undecided | 38 | 10 |
| Disagree | 16 | 4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 22 | 6 |
| **Total** | **384** | **100** |

Table 4 indicates that 160 respondents, (42%) strongly agree that adoption of citizen journalism by television stations will not put news credibility in doubt; 148 respondents (38%) agree that the adoption of citizen journalism will not put news credibility in doubt. 38 respondents (10%) were not sure whether the adoption of citizen journalism will put the news credibility in doubt or not. 16 respondents (4%) disagree that adoption of citizen journalism will not put the news credibility in doubt, while 22 respondents strongly disagree that adoption of citizen journalism will not put the news credibility in doubt.

**Table 5: Subjects' views on the impact of citizens reports on confidence rating of news.**

| Nature of Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 21 | 5 |
| No | 336 | 88 |
| Not sure | 27 | 7 |
| **Total** | **384** | **100** |

On whether viewers' confidence will fall if television stations use citizen reports, Table 5 indicates that the majority of the respondents (336) are of the opinion that their confidence will not fall when television stations use citizens' reports. 21 respondents (5%) agree that if television stations use citizens' report, viewers' confidence will fall. However, 27 respondents (7%) were not sure if their confidence will fall if television stations use citizens' reports.

## Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the four research questions raised in the study.

**Research Question one: To what extent do television viewers encourage the adoption of citizen journalism in television stations in South-South Nigeria?**

The answer to this research question was obtained from television viewers (citizens). Table 1 indicates that of the 384 respondents who make up the respondents for television viewers, 357 respondents (93%) would encourage the adoption of citizen journalism by television stations. The above analysis shows that television viewers encourage the adoption of citizen journalism. The respondents (television viewers) do not think that the adoption of citizen journalism by television stations would put news credibility in doubt and that their confidence in television stations would not fall if stations use reports from citizens. After all, people upload their audio and videos clips, reports, pictures on different blogs and forums captured or created through their PCs, mobiles, iPods, and Cam coders and many consume these contents. Practically, people are enjoying the blessings of blogs, forums, independent news sites like YouTube, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, AOL, Google, MSN & Yahoo Messengers etc. This active participation in news process changed the definition of news consumers into the 'participatory or citizen journalism'

**Research Question Two: Do television viewers recognize citizen journalists' as potential source of reports on television stations in South-South Nigeria?**

The responses of those sampled indicate they strongly believe citizens are potential source of news reports. Table 3 indicates 80% of the respondents are in the affirmative. Kolodzy (2006) agrees with this result, he believes "participatory journalism takes the act of convergence a step further and requires sharing between producers and consumers; it requires audiences to be part of the team, part of the conversation. And audiences are sometimes deciding to share among themselves, leaving traditional journalism out of the loop" (p.218). Franklin (2009) stated that it is as "giving a voice to the voiceless" Many segments of the society were unrepresented by the mainstream media. However, all the technological advancement is providing an expansion to possibilities of citizen participation in journalism. Through blogs, citizen journalists have wrecked the stories about political corruption, police violence and about other concerning issues to local, national and international communities. Being the part of news process, people feel a sense of representation and pride; they share sometime valuable and distinct contents. In the crises like 9/11, it was hard for professional media especially TV reporters to get the access in targeted areas and mostly media men are not allowed getting in with their gadgets and team. In such circumstances, citizens perform journalist's role with their devices like mobiles and camera. They do not angle the incident under the government or organizational policy; they just capture and portray what they see on the site. Citizens' involvement in the news process breaks down the sense of media hegemony. Versatility and freedom of voices is beauty of journalism comprising the basic features of democracy.

**Research Question Three: What do television viewers perceive to be the impact of citizens' reports on the credibility of news reported by television stations in South-South Nigeria?**

On whether the adoption of citizen journalism puts the news credibility in doubt, Table 4 indicates that 160 (42%) respondents strongly agree and 148 (38%) respondents agree that adoption of citizen journalism by television stations will not put news credibility in doubt while 22 respondent (6%) strongly disagree and 16 respondents (4%) disagree that adoption of citizen

journalism by television stations will not put news credibility in doubt. The remaining 38 respondents (10%) however, were undecided whether the adoption of citizen journalism would harm credibility or not. Schweiger (1998) points out that credibility could become an important heuristic for content selection at a time of information overload. However, this is certainly not a problem for television stations in Nigeria at least for now since many of those interviewed in a study by Ashong and Nnamdi (2018), acknowledged that citizens hardly bring in reports. Schweiger (1998) opines that credibility may also influence the journalistic and commercial success of a medium. Other scholars (Lasica, 2001, Araut and Anderson, 2000) in their studies of online news and user generated contents have similar concerns over credibility, believability, ethical lapses, news gathering techniques and news presentation of citizens. In his study of source credibility, Infante (1980) used three dimensions to measure source credibility. These were trust worthiness, expertise and dynamism. Johnson and Kaye (1998) employed believability, fairness, accuracy and depth of information in their study of internet source and traditional news credibility. Sunder (1999, p.382) developed a credibility scale applicable to both the newspaper and online newspaper in his study of online news. He found striking similarity between the factor structures underlying receiver perceptions of print and online news. He claimed this similarity made it possible to use the same scales for different media, which he described as a boon to researchers.

Trustworthiness, fairness, bias, completeness, respect for privacy, representation of individual interest, accuracy, concern for community wellbeing, separation of facts and opinion, concern for public interest, factual foundation of information broadcast or published were used among the credibility measures by Rimmer and Weaver (1987) in their study of media use and media credibility.

Gaziano and McGrath (1986) identified twelve dimensions of newspaper and television news credibility. They included fairness, bias, completeness, accuracy, respect for privacy, watch for people's interests, concern for community, separation of fact and opinion, trust, concern for public interest and level of training. Furthermore, Gaziano's (1987) analysis of four major credibility studies found twelve operationalizations of credibility. These included believability; accuracy, completeness, and covering up of facts; trustworthiness and reliability; being unbiased, balance of coverage, fairness, objectivity; other characteristics of press performance, such as invasion of privacy, overall evaluation of how well media perform; confidence in media institutions, comparisons of media with other institutions; independence of media from special interests, other organizations, institutions; power/influence of media in community or society; relationship of news media to government; honesty and ethical standards; and professionalism, training of people in the media. Gaziano noted that these measures had also been used in studies by Hovland and Weiss (1951), Meyer (1988), and others. According to Rubin et al (1994,p.234), Gaziano and McGrath observed that media credibility comprises fairness, (un)bias, telling the whole story, accuracy, respect for privacy, watching out for people's interest, concern for community well-being, separation of fact and opinion, trustworthiness, concern for public interest, factuality, and reporter training level (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994, p. 234).

**Research Question Four: Would television viewers' confidence fall when television stations in South-South Nigeria use citizen reports**
Table 5 indicates that the majority of the respondents (88%) are of the opinion that their (viewers) confidence would not fall when television stations use citizens' reports. The analysis shows that if journalists take care of factors like trustworthiness, fairness, bias, completeness, respect for privacy, representation of individual interest, accuracy, and concern for community wellbeing, separation of facts and opinion, concern for public interest, factual foundation of

information broadcast and then edit reports from citizens to meet established journalistic standards, the credibility of their stations would be preserved. Citizen journalism has come to stay. Citizens today, play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. Earlier, the audiences were considered as passive receivers of media messages but technological development changed the situation. The invention of internet and its gadgets enabled the public to express their voices publically. Kolodzy (2006) stated that in 1990s, the Web changed the news audiences from passive consumers to interactive consumers. Then Briggs (2007) endorsed the concept, as readers and viewers are no longer passive receivers of messages. They create, share and comment.

**Conclusion**

The study reveals that television viewers strongly feel television stations should accept and use reports from citizens. They also recognize citizens as potential sources of reports and do not think usage of citizen reports will in any way reduce their (viewers') confidence or jeopardise news credibility.

Based on the above findings, it was concluded that television viewers in Nigeria encourage the adoption of citizens' reports. Television viewers have positive attitude towards citizen journalism. They, recognize citizens as potential sources of reports, consider citizens knowledgeable enough to contribute to reports in television stations and also they encourage the adoption of citizen journalism in television stations. Television viewers do not think that the adoption of citizens' reports would lower the standard of journalism, reduce their confidence nor put news credibility in doubt. When professional news outlets use reports submitted by citizen journalists, they can in fact be viewed as complementing each other and this does not only democratize and revolutionize news making, but also systematically re-conceptualizes the public sphere. The intent of this citizen participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, widespread and appropriate information that is required to strengthen the democracy. Now many established news organizations launched their online portals for citizens to assist, guide and comment on news stories and patterns with their self-created contents.

Based on the findings and conclusions reached, the following recommendations are put forward:

**1.** Citizens should be encouraged by professional journalists to be vigilant so as to capture and send happenings around them to television stations since it is obvious that citizens are everywhere but journalist are not, in this way, citizens will help in fighting corruption and other vices in the country as people will become careful since anybody can capture vices and send same to television stations for broadcasting.

**2.** Television stations should encourage the citizen journalist by using their reports if it meets standards of journalism.

**3.** Professional journalists should complement the efforts of citizen journalist by giving willing citizens training on the basics of news gathering and reporting so as to help make their reports more attractive and more usable to mainstream media.

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