

## Internet and Changing Audience Role in News Processes

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### Abstract

*The process of news is a unique one as journalists and media houses traditionally source for news, gate keep, edit and send to the audience who were once regarded as passive participants in the news process. The development and growth of the internet all over the world and especially in Nigeria has changed the role of the audience in news processes. The audience is now a vital part of the process as they are news content creators, active commentators, collaborators and conversation participants. Using the convergence culture theory and qualitative content analysis, this study purposively selected thirty Nigerian online news sites and analyzed the role of the audience in these sites' news processes. The research found out that a large number of audience members in Nigeria are limited in their participation as most of these online sites are owned and run by traditional media owners who run the online sites like traditional media. Audience participation at all levels is not fully embraced except for a few individual online news sites. The research recommends that journalists and media houses should not see audience members as a threat to professional journalism but as partners that will make news processes richer.*

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**Key words:** News Process, Internet, Audience, traditional media, Nigeria

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### Introduction

News is anything different from the norm. News process and dissemination commenced before the invention of any form of technology in Nigeria. Information was carried from person to person with the use of gongs, signals, town criers and other traditional means of passing information. The publishing and printing of *Iwe Irohin fun awon Egba ati Yoruba* in 1859 by Reverend Henry Townsend made news and information available in written form and disseminated to a large number of people. Over time, other newspapers sprang up and then came the radio in 1933 and television in 1959 (NOUN, n.d.). The process of news does not start with ordinary imagination or lying on the bed expecting a miracle to happen. News could come from any angle, any part of human life- the city hall, courthouse, political environment, board meetings, natural occurrences, sports, human occurrences and also spiritual matters. Hard news often cries out to be reported as it is news that happens itself while soft news is manufactured and not so exciting. Herbert (2000) noted that for a piece of information to be considered 'news'; it should be immediate, clear, unexpected, related to the audience and big enough to be reported. The process of news and its production is an interesting one that starts with a decision to write. Anyone interested in the process of creating news gets to do interview(s) where necessary to help in the writing, writes a report and then chooses the best quote to captivate the audience. Journalists, reporters or staff of media houses are mostly involved in news processes. The process does not stop with the writing but continues to editing, typing, re-editing, proofreading and other processes before the final stage that leads to production that audience members get to see.

Traditionally, with the process of gatekeeping and series of editing, news stories used to be told the way elites in the society, media owners or those in government wanted the story to be told. News was more often than not, told in favor of a particular person, group or organization (Belam, 2010). The audience members in the news process were seen as passive actors in the whole process. Audience members were expected to receive information the way the media wants and react to the information as expected. The advent of the internet all over the world and especially in Nigeria has changed the roles of audience in news processes over the years. The audience is seen as a vital part of news process as they contribute to news from its gathering to its dissemination to the final audience. This study relates the magic bullet theory, uses and gratifications theory and the agenda-setting theory of the mass media to the role of the audience in news process traditionally and now, the internet in Nigeria. In the course of this study, the online news sites available in Nigeria will be listed; the roles of news audience in traditional news processes will be examined and audience role in news processes with the growth of internet in Nigeria will be ascertained.

### **News Process**

News processing is the main core of journalism practice as journalists have to go through learning process to fully grasp the nitty-gritty of the profession. In a diagram by Turk (2018); the process of news starts with a professional creating or generating information from a news-worthy event or situation to the editors' gatekeeping and ensuring the work is good enough. Pictures, video clips and other attachments to news stories also take time as different stages of editing takes place. Next is publishing, amplifying the published news disseminating the news to the final consumers or audience.

Traditionally, news process originates from certain professional actors with specific organizations who have information to share with the audience. After the process of making news has been adequately followed, news is often disseminated at certain times or hours of the day- for newspapers, it could be morning, afternoon or evening dailies; for television and radio- it could be 'AM' or 'FM' news at different times during the day (Bergstrom, 2019).

In another opinion by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN); news process and its production commences when a reporter goes information-hunting on the field. The reporter is assigned to a beat and then goes to get news. The major beats in Nigeria include: police, judiciary/court, government house. Legislative, armed forces, science, power/mines, recreation/leisure, banking/finance, sports, agriculture, education, foreign affairs, health and hospital beats among others. The reporter on the beat then decides which story to cover and from which angle based on proximity, prominence, timeliness of the news, magnitude and /or human interest. The news process continues with the news gathering. The reporter then writes salient points on events covered in the 'reporter's diary'. While gathering the news; information that can enhance the story is gotten by conducting interviews, observations and/or monitoring other media sources. The reporter then writes the news.

Back in the media house, editors get to work by editing the copy, editing signs and symbols, inserting captions where necessary and then editing the photographs and/or videos taken during coverage. With the help of the editor(s), a process called 'gatekeeping' helps the reporter to decide which of the events covered will be published or aired; the angle the lead will take and if the story will be modified, rewritten or discarded (Rogers, 2019).

News process used to be very expensive with the equipment used to generate and disseminate news and the time spent in making news ready for audience members. The processes explained above take time, money and energy before it gets to the audience. The advent of the internet in Nigeria in 1966 changed the whole process of news as news can be disseminated within seconds on the internet either by professional or unprofessional journalists.

### **The Advent of Internet in Nigeria**

Different individuals had worked on creating a digital software that can be used by thousands of people all over the world. In the 1960s, a prototype of the internet came into existence with the creation of the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) originally funded by the United States Department of Defense. Over time and after series of research, the internet came into being (Andrews, 2019). The internet's first emergence in Nigeria was when the Regional Informatics Networks for Africa (RINAF) project sponsored by UNESCO in 1995 attempted to introduce it. The Nigeria Internet Group (NIG) was established during that period at a workshop held to propagate the idea of the internet in Nigeria. Seven years after it was introduced in the United States; the internet gained grounds in Nigeria in 1996 when the Nigerian Telecommunications Commission (NCC) licensed 38 internet service providers to sell internet services in and to Nigerians. *Linkserve Limited* was the first internet service provider in Nigeria when it began its operations on January 1, 1997 (IXPN; Vanguard, 2010). Other internet service providers like Skannet, PINET, Steineng, Cyberspace, Infoweb and Hyperia sprang up over the years (Nenge, 2019).

### **Audience role in Traditional News Processes**

Traditionally, the media used to speak to the people and inform them of happenings in the society. Lim (2013) in Ritonga and Syahputra, (2019) noted the media's role is to amplify and echo issues existing in the society. However, societies where the media is used as a tool in the hands of a few media conglomerates or used as a tool by the ruling authority experience audience rebellion. This then brings a complete turnaround in their reception to news and information.

In past years, journalism and media houses regarded the audience as passive persons or a group of passive individuals who consume news and process it after publication with little or no feedback. (Hermida et al 2011 in Picone, Courtois & Paulussen (2014). News and information dissemination was originally one-way, like the magic bullet/hypodermic needle theory assumes. In this theory, the audiences were mainly participants who took news and information hook, line and sinker without the opportunity to air their own views. Thus, audience members were isolated from one another and they were easily influenced by mass media messages (Anaeto, et al, 2008). Gans (1979) in Lee & Tandoc (2017) notes that journalists did not pay much attention to audience feedback as feedback was mostly limited to audience interaction with family members, friends and sometimes colleagues. The audience for a very long time now has been part of the news process in the long run albeit on different levels of participation. As audience members reacted differently to the magic bullet theory; other theories which attributed much less power to the mass media sprang up.

The traditional gatekeeping theory propounded by Kurt Lewin, a German psychologist in 1947 assumes that journalists, reporters and/or editors decide what news stories or articles goes in and out of their bulletins. The 'gatekeepers' control information and they decide 'who sees what, where, and from which angle'. These individuals gate keep news and stories based on their media houses' ethics, policies, biases and their own personal preference, professional experience and/or social influences (MCT, n.d.).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory whose groundwork was built by Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail in 1969 assumes that audience members use the media to satisfy their various needs of entertainment, socialization, relaxation, emotional and psychological needs (David, 2016). If news stories do not particularly favor audience members, they may switch and no longer patronize those media outlets. To avoid a loss of audience, journalists in their news processes

consider audience opinion, what they use their own media for and then tailor their news stories to fit audience members and give them satisfaction.

The agenda setting theory propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972/1973 assumes that the media does not tell people what to think but gives them what to think about thus setting agenda for them. With this theory, journalists process news and expect people to think about the news stories and accept their positions on such stories.

Despite the monotony enjoyed by the media in news creation and news processes, the media still had to research on audience wants and present news stories to them in the way they would enjoy so the media houses do not run out of business or become obsolete. Over time, they designated editors and persons who would mainly address audience' feedback, comments and opinions and then give room for their suggestions in subsequent production. The feedbacks come in forms of 'letters to the editors', text messages, phone-in opportunities where available and emails among others. These designated individuals or persons are called "audience-editors". They inform the newsroom about audience engagement with the news, what audience preferences are and they help in decision making that will encourage greater audience participation (Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc, 2018). Connell (2003) in Allan (2006) notes that before the internet boom, the only way to be involved in news process (es) was to become a journalist.

### **Convergence Culture and Audience Role in news Processes**

Convergence culture; a very powerful concept developed by Henry Jenkins was intended to redefine the face of American popular culture (Jenkins, 2006). This concept has however been introduced to other cultures, countries and different aspects of life and has changed practices across the world. Convergence culture has helped to "change existing relationships between different groups of individuals- institutions and their patrons; governments and their citizens and storytellers and their audiences" (Tussey, 2017). As technology evolves, many things are changing. Old things are being confronted with the new and many new are trying to displace and/or the old. However, many old are also trying to fit into the new so they do not go into extinction. An example of the 'old meeting the new' by Tom, David and Lewis is the old idea of personal music players being incorporated into new media technologies-handsets and people can have their personal media players with them wherever and whenever they want.

Convergence culture concept that has developed into a theory has been existence for some time and has its roots in the concept of audience participation in media matters. Jenkins (2001) said "We are entering an era where media will be everywhere, and we will use all kinds of media in relation to one another". Audience members who were passive spectators in news processes have become active over the years. Convergence culture explains a shift as audience members are encouraged to participate in media matters. The theory explains how the 'old media format' meets the new and has to co-exist with the new so it does not go into extinction. In the world of convergence, nothing goes untold as every important story gets to be told and very brand gets to be sold. "Convergence does not occur through media appliances but occurs within the brains of individual audience members and through their social interactions with others". These individual audience members do not form opinions on their own without input from others nor make informed decisions about issues without consulting as the media pushes a lot of information into audience faces on a daily basis. To be able to actively participate in media matters and news processes; these audience members do not do all the thinking and conclusions as individuals but rely on social interactions. Convergence culture, a shift in 'cultural logic' encourages audience members through social interactions to join media conversations, take charge and use online platforms to be a huge part of news processes. The participatory culture in the theory encourages not just top-down process in news preparation but a down-top

consumer driven process (Tussey, 2017). Convergence allows audience members to decide what they want to read and see, where they want the information and the format they want the information to follow.

### **Changing Audience role in News Processes**

With burgeoning studies in media, communication and digital advancement, there are various studies that relate to the audience. Many studies and scholars have focused on journalism, news processes and the evolutions in news processes. Little attention has been paid to the audience role in news processes but research on how the audience is involved in news process has become important since the advancement in participation at all levels of news process and production.

Couldry (2011) in Picone, Courtois & Paulussen (2014) says that “the fate of the media is closely tied to the fate of the audience as journalism’s first loyalty is to citizens”. Fiske (1989) in Picone, Courtois & Paulussen (2014) notes that ‘the first move towards a more public-oriented approach to journalism was at the beginning of the 1990s under the influence of the cultural turn in the social sciences’.

Jefkins, Ford & Green (2013) in Picone, Courtois & Paulussen (2014) notes that the participatory form of journalism no longer sees the audience as mere consumers of pre-planned and pre-constructed messages but individuals and groups of persons involved in the shaping, thinking, creating, forming, reframing and remixing of media content. Bowman and Willis (2003) in Noor (n.d.) mention that “journalism as a profession which is mainly gathering and disseminating news is not threatened by competitors nor advancement in technology but it is gravely threatened by the audience it serves”. Different scholars have opined that the audience taking on roles of journalists pose a very great threat to professional journalism and thus, see them as a very big competition. However, other scholars in contrasting arguments mention that audience members involved in the process of news help to complement the efforts of professional journalists and not compete with them (Bentley, 2008; Simon, 2005; Dugan, 2008; Noor, n.d.).

With advancement in technology, the role of the audience has drastically moved from just spectators and people willing to be fed by news content to different participants in the news process. Tandoc and Vos (2016) in Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc (2018) notes that “the audience is involved in the newsroom and news production process by contributing to journalistic content; distributing and sharing news or interacting with news websites. This then leaves the audiences’ digital footprints that are considered in editorial processes”. With the internet, anyone with an idea or opinion can become a publisher overnight by having means to the internet, have the right software, observe events and make news (Connell, 2003 in Allan 2006). Moller (2012) opines that social media and the internet at large has changed the way news is generated as the internet now has a very important role to play in news processes. The internet has become a tool for journalists to create content, to distribute and impart information and a tool to seek, receive and access information. This platform has also afforded the audience the opportunity to leave comments which can be visible to other users; ‘like’ articles or share on their own online personal pages. The feedbacks given online are faster, more accurate and easy to analyze; they are automatic, more inclusive and can contain both textual and numeric forms (Lee & Tandoc, 2017).

Audience participation in news processes has given birth to new job positions in media houses like social media editors who interact with audience members as they send in their feedback and also scan and edit content created by these audiences (Lee & Tandoc, 2017).

In traditional news process, journalists shield the process of topic selection from external influence as a means of gatekeeping. With the internet, the audience now serves as a guide to



journalists so topics will be selected based on trending issues and editors can then decide which events and topics the audience will be more interested in out of many alternatives. People relate better with visuals and images than mere words. Journalists and editors therefore ensure the articles they upload include visual complements (Tandoc, 2014 in Lee & Tandoc, 2017). Furthermore, traditionally, interview questions to be asked during events are usually drawn by journalists before events and one or two extra questions can come up during the events. With the internet, journalists can stream events live online and request viewers and audience members to comment on ongoing discussions. Audience ideas can form interview questions for journalists and spice up the events. Involvement in news processes on the internet includes internet blog, news portals, websites, social media platforms and the Short Messaging System. With the internet, journalists rely on the audience before they gate keep unlike the traditional gatekeeping theory. What is in vogue, what is trending or the audience angle to stories will determine the gatekeeping angle the journalist will tell their stories from.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory traditionally assumed that audience members used the media to satisfy their various needs. The internet has made the theory more effective as audience members have a wide range of options online to select from to participate in news processes and at the same time, satisfy their media needs of entertainment, socialization and relaxation among others. As Jenkins (2006) notes in his theory on convergence; each audience member uses the bits and pieces from various media sources to construct a personal perception and then make sense of everyday life.

With the internet now and immediate feedback, the position of a media house on an issue or the angle the media presents it can be altered or otherwise influenced by audience members. One or two persons who have read these stories can give different opinions or views and thus, change the perspective and perception of other audience members. A few others might give negative feedbacks that will completely discard media opinion (Lee & Tandoc, 2017). The audience will then start thinking differently from what the media wants them to think about. In advancing theories, theory scholars can shift their focus on agenda setting from what the media wants the audience to think about to what the people tell the media they want to think about (Chafee & Metzger, 2001 in Lee & Tandoc, 2017).

### **The Internet and Audience participation in News Processes**

There is no defined origin of audience participation in news processes but the internet has increased the need for active participation. The idea of audience members being a part of the news processes have received attention from different scholars over the years and thus, received various nomenclatures. According to Rosen in Moller (2012); it is called ‘citizen journalism’. These journalists are those “audience members who employ press tools at their disposal and in their possession to inform one another”. Other scholars refer to audience participation as ‘participatory journalism’, ‘democratic or civic journalism’, ‘stand-alone journalism’ or ‘community/grassroots journalism’ among others (Noor, n.d.). Bruns (2008) in Kammer (2013) introduced a concept of ‘*produser*’ which is a combination of the ‘*producer*’ and ‘*user*’ in which the audience now plays both roles. Alvin Toffler in his works between 1970 and 1980 calls the idea in which the audience plays the role of producer and consumer ‘*prosumer*’ (Bruns, 2009 & Ritzer, 2009 in Noguera, Villi, Nyiro, De Blasio & Bourdaa, 2013). Bowman and Willis (2003) in Kammer (2013) refer to this paradigm shift as ‘participatory journalism’. Other scholars have called the shift ‘collaborative journalism’ or ‘network journalism’ (Kramp and Loosen, 2018). This is then “the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information in which the citizens or a group of citizens play an active role in the whole process”.

A few examples of citizen journalism websites in the world are *Caleb News Network iReport feature*; *Al-Jazeera's Sharek Portal*; Germany's *myHeimat.de*, *OhMyNews in South Korea* and so many others in India (Noor, n.d.). The citizen journalism website in South Korea sprang up as a result of the dissatisfaction felt by a journalist towards traditional mass media reporting. This journalist, Oh Yeon-Ho started his website with the motto "Every Citizen is a Reporter" and the activities on his website began with 727 reporters and 4 editors. The number increased over the years and gained grounds (Kolodzy, 2007 in Ritonga and Syahputra, 2019). Today in Nigeria, there are over 70 online new sites- 50 prominent ones and 20 upcoming (Chinyem, 2015; Udeze, n.d.; Ikenwa, 2020).

Kammer (2013) identifies different major levels of audience participation. The first is information where the audiences are the source of news for journalists. In this type of audience participation, the role of the journalist is not threatened as he or she maintains the position of a gatekeeper who can select, edit or choose not to use a story provided by the audience. Kammer mentions that two major categories in the 'information' participation function of the audience are news content creators and commentators. Audience content creators are those individuals in the audience that find 'facts' and present them as news stories. The commentators are those that have their opinions and voice out what they think in every news story published online (Kammer, 2013). There is now a dynamic interaction between news rooms, journalists and audiences online. The audiences now produce resources and serve as joint creators with journalists in news production processes. The media has over the years with the advent of the internet lost the monopoly of news creation as almost everyone everywhere can create news and put online for others to see (Newman, 2011).

Newman (2011) mentions that audience members especially social media users are great news creators. In his analysis, with the internet, there is no thing as 'media blackout'. An American example he gave is the US Defense Department's careful secret to surprise Osama Bin Laden in 2011 with the greatest shock of his life. According to Newman, a part-time café owner from Abbottabad live-blogged the attack even though he did not know what the plan was about. The man who described himself on Twitter as an IT consultant named Sohaib Athar was taking a break in his home about 1am. He tweeted about a helicopter hovering around his area and was expressing his displeasure at the discomfort the helicopter was causing. He kept tweeting about the helicopter and then the explosion. Unknown to him, he was 'the man who blogged the attack live'. Overnight, the man became a content creator as he kept tweeting the different media houses placing cameras in his area and then, he became a source of news in the Abbottabad area. By the time traditional media reported the details of the attack, the surprise had died down.

The next level is collaboration. In this process, the audiences participate beyond information provision. They undertake some journalistic tasks like writing actual stories or giving details about events and/or happenings. A Nigerian example is the 'eye-witness' event feature of Channels television where the audience can take pictures of or take amateur videos of happenings in the society and send to media houses. The collaboration process gives the audience the opportunity to improve the quality of the information circulated in the news.

Another level of audience participation identified by Kammer (2013) is conversation. The audience here is more sociable and it brings about social interaction between the journalists and the audience and also conversation among members of the audience. Journalists while participating with the audience in news processes transforms the audience into guests, co-authors and /or partners (Noguera, Villi, Nyiro, De Blasio & Bourdaa, 2013).

A study in 2010 by the Pew Research Center showed that the internet surpassed newspapers and radio in popularity as six in every ten Americans gets news, comment to news and interact

with news online and offline on a typical day (Moller, 2012). Another part of the research in 2010 by the Pew Research Center noted that audience members also comment on news, post news links, create original news stories, tweet about news and tag content among others.

## **Audience Role in News Processes on Nigerian Online News Sites**

### **Methodology**

In Nigeria, the internet has provided the opportunity for audience to get news at their fingertips the moment something happens. There are over seventy (70) online news sites. The top online news sites are traditional media houses that have online pages for audiences to get information as quickly as possible without waiting to get information from traditional media. Others are online news sites owned and managed by individuals or a group of persons who are not professional journalists or who do not own traditional media houses. For the purpose of this study, the top/leading 23 online sites and 7 other ones that are not as popular were selected and analyzed to know the roles of audience in news processes. The leading sites were selected based on the research by the *News of Nigeria body*; *AllYouCanRead* (the largest database of magazines and newspapers online) and other independent online news research bodies in Nigeria. The 30 online news sites were purposively selected based on accessibility and information provided needed for this study. The sites selected are:

Vanguard Newspaper Online	Punch Newspaper Online
This Day Newspaper Online	Nation Newspaper Online
Tribune Newspaper Online	Guardian Newspaper Online
Sahara Reporters	Leadership Newspaper Online
The Sun Newspaper Online	PM News
Daily Trust Newspaper Online	Premium Times Online
The Next Edition	Daily Independent Newspaper Online
Daily Times Online	Channels tv Online
National Mirror	Nairaland
Businessday Newspaper Online	Complete Sports
Naija world	The Advocate
Pulse Nigeria	YNaija
Linda Ikeji blog	Legit.com
CKN News	Naijanews.com
Nigerian Eye	Daily Post Online

These sites were qualitatively analyzed using the content analysis method. A coding sheet was designed to adequately analyze the content on these news sites. The variables used to understand the role of audience in news processes on Nigerian online news sites are those identified by Kammer (2013) and Miller (2012). They include:

1. Icons on the news sites available to audience to share news stories
2. Audience as news content creators
3. Audience as commentators
4. Audience as conversation participants
5. Audience as collaborators in news processes
6. Icons to contact news site editors

### **Analysis of Nigerian Online News sites**

Based on the afore-mentioned variables and sites, a large number of Nigerian online sites; about 86% provide the option for their audience to share the news stories on their websites. Audience can share the stories on their various personal blogs, social media pages and/or with family and friends.



Members of the audience on Nigerian online news sites do not have the opportunity to create news content without interference from professional journalists as over 60% of the news sites available are those that owned by traditional media houses who their online news sites. Therefore, audience members that have news stories have to send them to the editors of these online news sites by mail and thus, a lot of gatekeeping would affect audience autonomy to be involved in news creation as seen in chart 1 below. Less than 10% of these online news sites permit audience members to share their news content on their websites directly without gatekeeping. The minute number that allow direct news content creation are those owned by individuals or persons that do not own traditional media houses. The over 90% that insist on audience sending their stories to their email addresses do so to retain the credibility of their news sites and to enjoy continued gatekeeping autonomy.

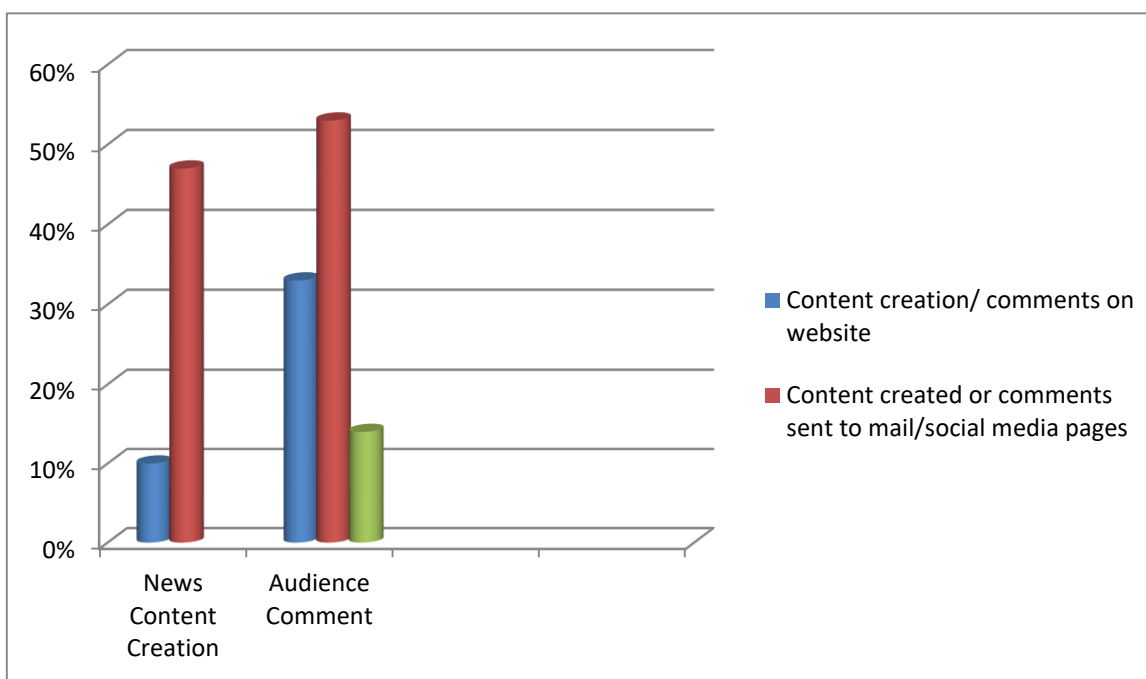


Chart 1

Next, Nigerian online news sites allow audience members to comment on news stories, news articles and give their opinions. However, like chart 1 above reflects; only 33% of these sites allow these comments directly on their news sites while 53% give links for comments to be sent to the site's social media pages and 14% allow both- audience comments can be sent directly on the news sites or can be sent to the social media pages.

In chart 2 below; the audiences on Nigerian news sites are not really seen as collaborators as only 6% of these sites permit audience members to collaborate with their journalists and reporters in the news process. About 17% permit audience to converse with one another and with the editors and/or journalists on their news sites and a very large number, 77% provided links and contacts for comments or letters to the editors like the traditional news media.

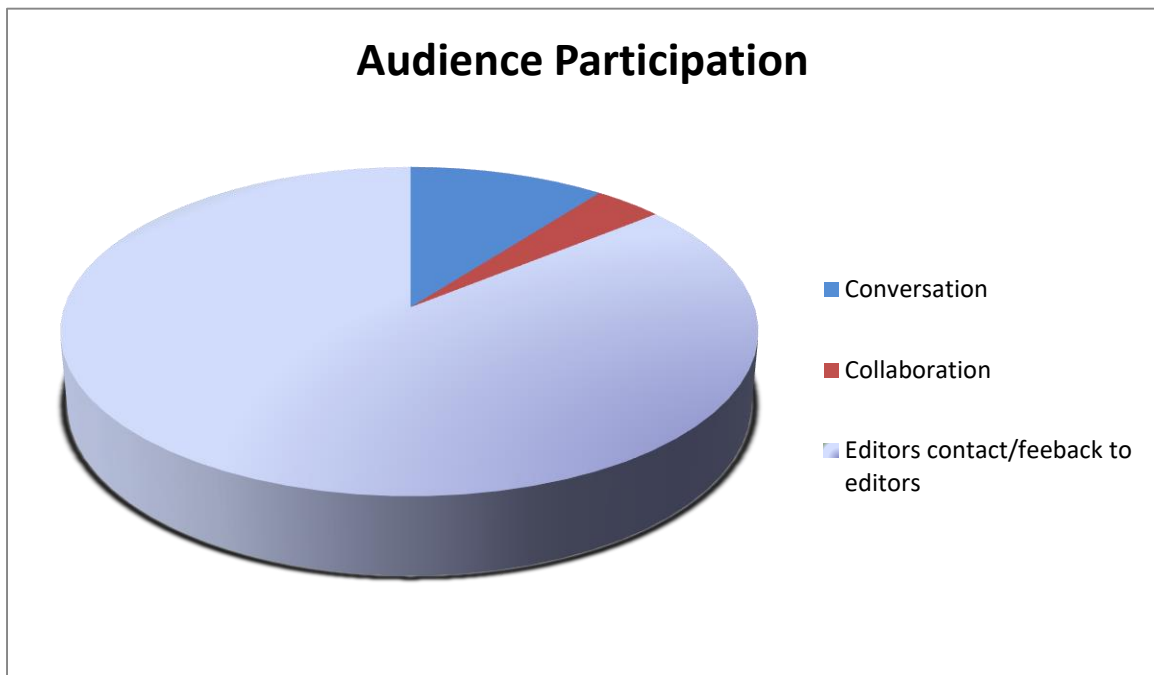


Chart 2

### Discussion of Findings

The National Open University of Nigeria in their news process explanation mentioned that journalists and reporters are assigned to beats where they gather information and after all the necessary processes, the news is made available to the audience. With the participatory role of the audience now in news processes, everywhere is a 'beat' as anyone anywhere can develop content from happenings around without pre-planned consciousness to look for news items. The internet has made the process of news easier as writing the news stories, getting supporting information and editing can be done in minutes and sent out to everyone. Online news sites in Nigeria are over seventy with a majority owned and controlled by traditional media owners who decided to converge, not to be left behind and thus, developed online news sites. Traditional media owners do not want to go into extinction or to lose complete autonomy of being at the center of news events. They therefore developed online news sites to be in control of news online and traditionally. Like the convergence culture opines, 'the old has decided to fit into the new' so it would not go into extinction- traditional media owners have diversified in their operations to the digital sphere. The audience, unlike traditional methods of news process where they are passive; has a lot of roles to play with the growth of the internet in Nigeria. Like scholars have mentioned in various research works; the audience actively participates in creating, editing, contributing to and producing news. Participatory journalism in Nigeria is on the increase as different online news sites owned by traditional media owners and/or individuals are embracing audience contribution to news process. As Moller (2012) opined that the internet has provided an avenue for audience to share news with their loved ones and on their personal pages; findings from the research support the above opinion as a large number of Nigeria online news sites have a link or icons on their sites for audience to 'like' and share news stories. The levels of audience participation in news processes Kammer (2013) itemized are being practiced in different parts of the world. Nigerian online news sites have welcomed audience participation in a few of the levels. In news content creation as a level of participation, most of the sites analysed insist on information being sent to their editors. The members of the audience can think and come up with creative ideas that the media can use but

these ideas are not permitted to go directly on these news online sites. Thus, the audience is not fully accepted as authorities who can create content without supervision. When content gets to the editor, it goes through the traditional gatekeeping process where the content will be properly edited before it will be published and/or let out to the audience. The next level which is 'audience as commentators' is closely linked to the audience as news creators from the findings of this study as a large number also do not provide direct opportunities for audience members to comment on issues on their websites. However, a few online news sites permit audience members to comment on news stories, events and/or air their opinions directly on the online news sites. The comments that are directed to the social media pages of the news sites allow interactions to take place. This direction to social media platforms have removed so much congestion and attention from the online news sites. Audience members comment on news stories and air their view on social media and this leads to the next level of audience participation in news processes- conversation. Conversation among audience members on Nigerian online news sites are mainly social interactions on social media platforms and not conversation on news websites directly. This is to prevent personal opinions from affecting the news reports on websites. Collaboration as a higher level in participatory journalism is very minute as only a few Nigerian online news sites mention collaboration with journalists as a part of audience role in news process. All of the news sites except four have email addresses on their websites for audience members to send letters to their editors or comment on their news stories. Online news sites that are not owned by traditional media owners welcome audience members to participate at all levels. However, as the largest percentage of online site owners in Nigeria today are traditional media owners, audience participation is not fully embraced.

### **Conclusion**

As the world evolves and technology adds something unique every day, so is the process of news changing on a daily basis. The audiences before the invention and advancement of the internet were passive participators in the news process. The audience was expected to perceive news the way the media projected it and to respond to the news the way the media wants. With the internet and growth in technology; audience members are now a major part of news processes and not just the usual passive set of persons or people who send their feedback once in a while which may or may not be considered. Despite the fact that the audience was seen as passive traditionally, media houses still generated and disseminated their news stories based on what the audience wanted so they could remain in business albeit; the level of participation by the audience was minimal.

The convergence culture theory lays emphasis on old ways of doing things embracing the new to enjoy better output. The development in technology and the growth of the internet now makes the audience involved in participation, news creation, commentators, collaborators, conversation experts and news shares on different levels. Their participation is however not yet at its peak as many online news sites in Nigeria are controlled by traditional media owners who gate keep so much that the audiences' opinions are most times ignored. The growth and development of other news sites have encouraged audience members to participate fully in news processes and feel like they are recognized.

With the audience as a major part of news processing, the aim is not to overthrow the original process of news but to make it richer. Nigerian journalists and traditional news media outlets should embrace the participation and not see it as a threat to their competence and gatekeeping duties as professional journalists. As Jenkins (2006) said; "no one knows everything; each person knows something and we can out the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills". The skills of the audience members should be seen as an advantage to

professional journalists and together, news processes and the final dissemination will be bigger and better than it has always been in Nigeria.

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