Citizen Journalism and the Coverage of the 2015 General Elections in South-East Nigeria: A SWOT Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of citizen journalism in the coverage of the 2015 general elections in South East Nigeria. The survey research method was used and the instrument of questionnaire used for data gathering. The work was anchored on mediamorphosis, source-credibility and the uses and gratifications theories. Findings show that 91% of young people in South-East Nigeria know what citizen journalism is, while 9% do not. 82% of them practiced it during the 2015 general elections in the region while 18% did not. It further reveals that the people embraced this brand of journalism because of its simplicity, cost-effectiveness, instant feedback feature, and its openness to all. It also revealed that the adoption of citizen journalism enhanced transparency in the electoral process, reduced the tendency to fraud and malpractices, facilitated speed and greater accuracy in the process. The work however identified lack of professionalism, credibility question, over sensationalism, anonymity of sources and difficulty in regulation as some of the major weaknesses. Uneven penetration, illiteracy, constant power failure, endemic poverty and systemic corruption were the major threats. The work recommends more efforts to enhance even penetration of ICTs in the country and address the issue of systemic corruption and endemic poverty, as these have continually constituted a major setback to every aspect of her development. It also recommends urgent efforts towards reviewing the various media laws to address the technicalities involved in the new media technologies as this would go a long way in maximizing the observed strengths and minimizing the inherent weaknesses and create better opportunities for the use of citizen journalism to advance the course of democracy.

Key words: Citizen Journalism. Election, Coverage, SWOT and Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the new media in the last few years has introduced the concept of citizen journalism. Citizen journalism is the act of allowing ordinary individuals to play active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information to the public.

Before the advent of the new media and their numerous platforms, the older or conventional media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc) ruled the world.

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Akinwunmi, (2011) [1] observes that they more or less blocked popular participation in the electoral process. This is because there has always been scarcity of space and time given by the conventional media to the citizens to have their say in politics, governance and in the democratic process. Conventional media critics such as [2], [3], [4] cited in [5] therefore argue that citizens were left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans, making them disinterested and cynical about politics, and disallowed them from participating actively in the process.

The emergence of the new media which brought about the concept of citizen journalism is gradually breaking the monopoly of information gathering and dissemination from the conventional media to a more interactive media environment, and the result is a gradual paradigm shift in the way people cover and report issues including citizen involvement in the electoral process. [6] cited in [7] captures it this way:

> We are now in an era where anyone can be a reporter or commentator on the web, the society has now moved to a two-way journalism. In the past, the politicking process has been dominated by the use of traditional mass media - radio, television, newspaper, and magazine etc. This is regardless of the obvious disadvantage of providing one-way non-interactive messages to a large audience. The latest resort to the use of "old' and "new' media for political communication has added impetus to the electorate/candidate relationships due to the interactive nature of the new media.

This corroborates the observations of [8] in [9] that:

> The value of the communication experience has undergone a sea-change; from the need to share it, to the need to share in it. Technology and social media in particular have brought power back to the people; with it, established authorities are now undermined and users are now the experts.

This implies that people can now consume media as wanted and needed rather than allowing media producers to schedule consumption time and content. A person can now communicate to any person anywhere from any place at any time with greater speed and little cost.

In many parts of the world today, individuals, groups, organizations and even nations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the new technologies and other e-media platforms to participate in the electoral process, including the coverage and

reportage of elections and other political activities. From New Deli to New Zealand, California to Cairo, Lagos to London, Jerusalem to Jeddah through Japan to the South Americas, citizens have become empowered to communicate and set the news agenda.

In Nigeria, the 2015 general elections would definitely go down in the annals of history as one in which the electorate did not just passively consume political messages, but indeed, created and shared such messages. The teeming young Nigerian new media users, politicians, local and foreign observers, all got involved in active citizen reporting, using their various devices. This enabled them to share with others their real-time and first-hand accounts of their voting experiences. They made massive use of facebook pages, GSM-SMS, Twitter feeds, YouTube, Black Berry Messenger (BBM), and other social media platforms to cover and report happenings around their vicinities and polling units.

Organisations like "Enough is Enough Nigeria", "Neighbour to Neighbour" (N2N), "Clamour for Change" (C4C), "clamour for continuity" (c4c) "WangoNet" and "IamLagos" established platforms that enabled citizens to report election-related incidents with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemails. Another group "Reclaim Naija" used text messages and e-mail reports to compile a live online map of trouble spots. There were also "Twitter activists" who undertook the job of looking out for rigging spots and spreading warnings about bombings at polling stations. [10], believes that this massive use of social media culminated in the success of the election acclaimed the freest and fairest in the history of the country.

However, Omenugha's observation disagrees with that of [11], who argue that the practice of citizen journalism during the Nigerian 2011 general elections did the nation greater harm than good as it provided avenue to disseminate provocative and inciting messages that eventually precipitated the post-election violence and tensions witnessed in many parts of the country, the north in particular. This study examines how this new brand of journalism added to the success of the said elections and/or how it aided the violence that precipitated the announcement of the results.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The coming of the new media has brought about the idea of citizen journalism. This type of journalism is made possible by new media technologies especially the social interactive media that enable everyone to play active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information to the public. This brand of

journalism is participatory, minimizes the tendency to fraud and electoral malpractices, and enhances greater accuracy and transparency in the electoral process.

During the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, this brand of journalism was widely practiced especially by the teeming youths of the South-East. Both the local and foreign observers attest to this. Meanwhile, a Human Rights Watch report says "...although the elections were heralded as among the fairest in Nigeria's history, they also were among the most controversial".

The report gets a support from the observations of [12] who believe that social media play huge role in instigating and fuelling the violence. They argue that during the period under review, many Facebook pages were awash with false rumours and gossips that added to hitting up the polity and creating unnecessary tensions. The GSM short message service (SMS) was used to spread false election results that differ from what the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) eventually announced. This made electorates believe that their votes did not count and that they were massively rigged. There was what [13] refer to as "social media war" on the various social media platforms, making use of all kinds of abusive languages, all manner of attacks and counter attacks among members and supporters of various opposition parties and groups. Several insulting and inciting messages flourished on facebook and GSM-SMS. These culminated in the violence and tensions witnessed before, during and after the elections in many parts of the country,with some states ordering non-indigenes to leave [14].

The study is worried that if the nation fails to learn from the incidents of 2015, their reoccurrence in future elections in the country is a possibility. This is because the use of social media in the political process in Africa has continued to grow, and the practice of citizen journalism has continued to take its root in the continent.

OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study was to examine the influence of citizen journalism in the 2015 general elections in South East Nigeria. Specifically, the study was meant to:

- Determine the strengths of citizen journalism in the coverage of the 2015 general elections in South East Nigeria.
- Identify the weaknesses.
- Highlight the opportunities, and

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- Examine the threats.

Research Questions

- What were the strengths of citizen journalism in the coverage of the 2015 general elections in South East Nigeria?
- What were the weaknesses?
- What opportunities has it created?
- What were the major threats?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE/EMPIRICAL WORKS

For better understanding of our subjection of discussion, we devote this section to conceptual clarifications.

The Old Mass Media System

The concept of mass communication as practised in traditional journalism is one in which thousands of newspaper copies roll off the press daily or weekly onto the newsstands, and where the newsroom is a large area fitted with desks, typewriters, computers, and dozens of reporters with news copies moving from one desk to another (Dare, S. 2011). Under this arrangement, journalists are trained professionals, who set the news agenda with the editors acting as the gatekeepers. This is perhaps why only this category of persons was usually referred to as "the newsmen". The mass media when viewed from this perspective is usually classified into two broad categories: the print and the broadcast media. The print media dates back to 1450 A.D. when Johann Gutenberg printed the first bible. Since then, the print media family includes books, journals, magazines, newspapers, drawings and paintings, maps, calendars, cartoons, billboards, and indeed all printed materials. The broadcast media on the other hand include radio and television mainly [15].

However, one major limitation of the old mass media system is scarcity and huge cost of print space and broadcast airtime. Another is that feedback is limited and delayed. Also, the mass media messages are intended to a large heterogeneous audience. In other words, they lack direct personal appeal. They are not interactive, and as such, the audience cannot consume contents as wanted but as scheduled by producers. This is why new media proponents such as [1] argue that the old media more or less blocked popular participation in the communication process.

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The New Mass Media

The advent of the Internet, also called the "virtual world," or "cyberspace" (first popularized by William Gibson's classic *Neuromancer* in 1984) has brought a new vista to the area of human communication. The Internet and other online networking technologies are fast changing the media landscape and redefining the concept of mass communication.

The birth of social media is perhaps the most phenomenal among the various platforms of communication made available by the advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The possibilities they have created in the area of human communication and interaction are beyond limits. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has barely made everyone who can use them a mass communicator. The implication is that the sit-down- and watch audience is now a relic of the past. This means that citizens have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages. The making of news is thus, no longer the exclusivity of the conventional journalists. [16], refers to this development as a paradigm shift resulting from "the fragramentation of the Internet".

Writing on this development, [17] observe that the new media of communication have in no small measure helped the community to be aware of each other. Expounding on this, [18] concurs McLuhan's prophecy that the media will shrink the world:

> As the media shrink the world, people will become increasingly involved in one another's lives, and as people come to know more about others who were hitherto separated from them by distance, they will form new beneficial relationships [19].

Baran's argument is relevant to this discourse as it draws attention to what social media is doing in the area of human communication, especially as it concerns the fostering of relations and interaction among people. Lending his voice to this, [20] in his study titled *"Time Running Out for Newspapers"*observes that the birth of the internet and Web 2.0 has broken all known information barriers, this development has made it possible for citizens to act as agents of information and contributing to the public information sphere. He writes:

> We now live in a world of 'ubiquitous media tools", a world that confers on any citizen (with new media tool kit) the ability to transmit, share or create content almost in real time. A citizen at the location of an important event instantly gets the opportunity to

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> capture the event and feed the content into the various
> social media outlets in cyber space

This implies that the new technology has the capacity of boosting participation because of its openness, conversation and connectedness. This offers citizens opportunities for participation, interactivity and creativity. This feature in particular gives citizens competitive voice, thus, offering representative democracy at its best. This means that whether the messages are texted, tweeted, posted or pinned, citizens' voice now matters. Again, volume and speed of communication is now greatly enhanced. They are highly accessible, affordable and portable, enabling ordinary citizens opportunity to report events with greater speed than the traditional media reporters.

Citizen Journalism Defined

Several scholars have added their voice to conceptualizing the term "citizen journalism". According to [21], citizen journalism is the act of allowing ordinary individuals to play active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information to the public". It is the kind of journalism in which the users or audience create contents online rather than wait to be fed by the traditional media outlets. According to Serena Carpenter, a citizen journalist can be described as an individual who intends to publish information meant to benefit a community. [5], simply defines it as "journalism of the people, by the people and for the people".

Citizen journalism is also known as "public journalism", "participatory journalism", "democratic journalism", "guerrilla journalism" or "street journalism. It is the latest buzz word to describe a global publishing phenomenon that began as an amateur pursuit but which now has increased fragmentation of the mass media's once passive consumer audience [7], [9] describe it as:

> an alternative and activist form of newsgathering and
> reporting that functions outside mainstream media
> institutions, often as repose to shortcomings in the
> professional journalistic field, which uses similar
> journalistic practices but is driven by different
> objectives and ideals, and relies on alternative sources
> of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism.

Rosen, (2010) explains the term as "when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another'. [10], believe that "the intent of this brand of participatory journalism is to provide independent, reliable, accurate and wide-range of relevant information that a democracy requires." It

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describe a scenario where ordinary citizens now perform roles that were hitherto played exclusively by the traditional journalists.

Citizen journalism is made possible by social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace and the Blogosphere. All the content generated from these social media platforms alongside comments from the audience and message board postings, pictures and video uploads constitute what is now known as the User Generated Content (UGC), which is a feature closely associated with the citizen journalism concept.

In his epoch work on 'Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa' [11], sees citizen journalism as "a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens now take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community". The study identifies two types of citizen journalism: institutional and non-institutional citizen journalism. Banda explains that non-institutional form of citizen journalism is where the individual is at the core of the practice. Here, private citizens generate content and share among a network of friends and online. Institutional citizen journalism on the other hand has a defined organizational structure and some minimal constraint. Here, institutions rather than private citizens are at the core of the practice. A good example is the opening up of traditional media websites allowing traditional journalists to interact via comments and feedback using citizen journalism platforms. He cites *the BBC* and *the Guardian* of London as good examples of traditional media institutions that have fully embraced in different ways this form of citizen journalism to different degrees.

Citizen Journalism and Elections in Nigeria

The last few years has seen the introduction of social interactive media in the political process. This has brought about the concept of citizen journalism; a situation where anyone can become a mass communicator simply by mastering the use of social media platforms that allow users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information, as well as publish their own views on the internet. The facebook, among others, is widely used in Nigeria and indeed, other African countries.

Many scholars, among them, [12], [17] believe that this breakthrough no doubt, has democratizing effects as it offers citizens opportunities for more fully engagement in the political process. This was the case during the 2015 general elections in south east Nigeria and indeed, the country all over. The elections witnessed a remarkable use of social media as a political communication tool in the country.

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[8], believe that three major issues underline the tremendous use of the technology during the 2015 elections. Firstly, it reflects a global trend towards "internet elections" or "e-electioneering", the tendency of some Nigerian politicians to tap into the opportunities offered by the technology for on-line campaigning and the will of Nigerian civil society and the electorate to take up social media as a tool for improving the efficiency of election observation.

Prior to the 2015 experience, elections in the country had been largely marred by irregularities and other malpractices such as disenfranchisement of prospective voters, snatching of ballot boxes from election officials and stuffing of the boxes with invalid ballot papers, as well as allegations of collusion between election officials and politicians to alter election results and subvert popular mandate [17]. Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe (2012) believe that this severely dented the integrity of elections in Nigeria and triggered demands for freer, fairer, and more transparent elections.

To do this, various organizations, institutions and individuals set up social media platforms that enabled the citizens to oversee the electoral process and report electoral malpractices to authorities through their mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices. Through social media platforms, overwhelming number of videos, photos, tweets and comments were shared. Omokri, R.O. (2011), notes "the widespread use of these real-time media severely limited electoral malpractices because we found that people were aware that they were on camera and this made them operate at their best behaviour". Attahiru Jega, Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), also agrees that the use of social media by citizen journalists during the 2011 elections "enhanced transparency in the electoral process and made INEC more accountable to the public in the conduct of elections" [16].

The elections offered citizens opportunity to have their say in the political process. Citizens made massive use of facebook, Twitter, YouTube, bulk text and voice messages in unprecedented numbers to win supports and canvass for votes. Adibe, Odoemelam and Chibuwe (2012) observe:

> During the elections, many Nigerians were armed with their blackberries and Twitter feeds. One of such Nigerians was Gbenga, a 33 year old IT consultant and an activist. His team had designed a smart phone application called Revoda which allowed voters to instantly upload reports of delayed voting materials and intimidating gangs at their local polling stations to their

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database; a daily summary was then sent to Nigerian election officials and Western observers as well as posted on their Revoda website; this allowed many people within and outside Nigeria to follow the process. Photos, pictures, details and videos from polling stations were quickly uploaded to Facebook and YouTube.

Mention must be made of organisations like "Enough is Enough Nigeria", "Neighbour to Neighbour" (N2N), "Clamour for Change" (C4C), "clamour for continuity" (c4c) "WangoNet" and "IamLagos". These organizations established platforms that made it possible for citizens to report election-related incidents with pictures, videos, text messages and voicemails.Another group "Reclaim Naija" specialized in circulating text messages and e-mail reports to compile a live online map of trouble spots. Many Twitter activists volunteered for the job of looking out for rigging spots and spreading warnings about bombings at polling stations. Many recent writers argue that this massive citizen involved in the reporting process gave rise to the success of the election acclaimed freest and fairest in the Nigeria's political history. Others maintain that the violence witnessed before, during and after the was large because of the uncontrolled use of the unfettered media platform.

Writing on the problem of weak or absence of regulation of the technology, Kidafa, Odoemelam and Elechi (2011) observe that "regulating traditional media was upheaval, but has became more difficult with the emergence of social media". They argue that if human society must not fall beyond the short, nasty and brutish clime described in George Orwells' animal farm, the use of the new technologies in the political process must be monitored to counter Ekwe, et al (2011) proposition for "the anarchical theory of the media". The theory according to them foresees a society in chaos owing to disorder in seeking, receiving and disseminating of unfettered information.

Theoretical Base

The work is anchored on the mediamorphosis, the source-credibility and the uses and gratifications theories.

Mediamorphosis Theory

The mediamorphosis theory was propounded by Roger Fidler in 1997. The theory talks about the consistent transformations taking place in the media across the globe. In his ground-breaking work *"Mediamorphosis: Understanding the New Media"* Fiddler explains

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mediamorphosis as the transformation of communication media, usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovations. The essence of mediamorphosis brings the idea that the media are complex adaptive systems. Fiddler argues that new media do not arise spontaneously and independently; rather, they emerge gradually from the metamorphosis of older media. He maintains that the media would continue to metamorphose as new forms of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) continue to emerge, and that the emerging forms of communication media would continue to propagate dominant traits over the earlier conventional ones.

A cursory look at the assumptions of this study and the arguments of this study rveals a close link as the new interactive social media platforms have emerged to give voice to the citizens that were hitherto subjected to the bureaucratic hegemonies of the conventional mass media system.

The Source-Credibility Theory

This theory was propounded by [12]. This theory talks about having the right source for the right message. Supporters of the theory argue that having the right source can increase the effectiveness and credibility of a message and vice versa.

To demonstrate this, Hovland and Weisse designed an experiment in which the same messages were presented to some people as coming from a high-credible source and to other people as coming from low-credible source. This would allow them to determine the effect of the source variable alone. The results according to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) showed that the high-credible source did produce more opinion change on three out of the four topics presented to the respondents as against the low-credibility source that produced opinion change in one. Hovland and Weisse inferred that the expertness and trustworthiness might be important.

The import of this theory to this discourse is that the question of source credibility has always been raised at the mention of citizen journalism. .. note that this has in no little measures restricted total embrace of the concept.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The theory is associated with the works of [16]. It belongs to the limited or indirect effect theories of mass communication. The theory according to Anaeto, Onabanjo and

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Osifeso (2008) is concerned with what people do with media instead of what media do to people. The assumption is that people now influence the effects media have on them. That is to say that uses and gratification theory takes a more humanistic approach to media use and effect. It assumes that members of the audience are no more passive but play active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. Rosen, J. (2006) notes that the main thrust of the theory is that audience members have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to, and retain media messages because of the perceived gratifications derivable from such messages. Thus, this theory emphasises the fact that people are important in the process of communication because they choose content, make meaning and act on that meaning [1].

The uses and gratification theory better explains the concept of citizen journalism practice because this genre of journalism has broken the monopoly of the conventional media. Practitioners are now able to select and use the technologies of choice, making them active audience rather than passive consumers of media products.

METHODOLOGY

The study used survey research design. The population consisted of the youth in the five states of the South-East Nigeria (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo). Our choice of the youths as the focus population was based on the fact that they constitute the active users of the various social media platforms.

According to the Nigeria National Youth Policy document (2001) which defines youths as "all young persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria", the total number of such persons in the zone during the 2006 National Housing and population census was 5,465,185. The breakdown was as follows: Abia 948,460; Anambra 1,392,609; Ebonyi 725,649; Enugu 1,089,279 and Imo 1,309,188.

The sample size for each of the states was 385. This was determined using the Australian Sample Size Calculator.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
Male	213(55%)	206(54%)	199(52%)	201(52%)	196(51%)	203(55%)
Female	172(45%)	179(46%)	186(48%)	184(48%)	189(49%)	182(45%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The table above shows that an average of 203(55%) respondents from all the states studied were male while 182(45%) were female.

Table 2: Age Categories of Respondents

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
18-23	109(28%)	111(30%)	117(31%)	100(26%)	134(35%)	115(30%)
24-29	174(45%)	175(45%)	127(33%)	197(51%)	155(41%)	157(41%)
30-35	102(27%)	99(25%)	101(26%)	88(23%)	96(24%)	113(29%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The data presented in the second table above show the average age of the respondents as follows: 18-23 years were 115(30%), 24-29 years were 157(41%) and30-35 were 113(29%).

Table 3: Do you know what citizen journalism is?

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
Yes, I do	350(91%)	344(89%)	349(91%)	355(92%)	359(93%)	351(91%)
No, I don't	35(9%)	41(11%)	36(9%)	30(8%)	26(7%)	34(9%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The table above shows that an average of 351(91%) respondents know what citizen journalism is, while 34(9%) do not.

Table 4: Did you practice citizen journalism during the 2011 general elections?

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
Yes, I did	305(80%)	333(86%)	325(84%)	317(82%)	302(78%)	316(82%)
No, I did not	80(20%)	52(14%)	60(16%)	68(18%)	83(22%)	69(18%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The table shows that an average of 316(82%) respondents from the five states studied said they practised citizen journalism during the 2011 general elections in South East Nigeria while 69(18%) said they didn't.

Table 5: Research question 1: What were the strengths of citizen journalism in the coverage of the 2011 general elections in South East Nigeria?

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
Simplicity	102(26%)	97(25%)	99(26%)	90(23%)	79(20%)	93(24%)
Low cost	89(23%)	114(30%)	107(28%)	102(26%)	91(24%)	101(26%)
Instant feedback	109(29%)	71(18%)	84(22%)	93(25%)	104(27%)	92(24%)
Open to all	86(22%)	103(27%)	95(24%)	100(26%)	111(29%)	99(26%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The table above shows the views of the respondents on the strengths of citizen journalism in the coverage of the 2011 general elections in South East Nigeria. 93(24%) identified its simplicity, 101(26%) talked about the cost-effectiveness, 92(24%) said it gave opportunity for instant feedback of messages, while 99(26%) said the strength was on its openness to all.

Table 6: Research question 2: What were the weaknesses?

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
Lack of professionalism	89(20%)	97(26%)	83(22%)	89(23%)	78(20%)	87(23%)
Encouraged sensationalism and combative journalism	79(23%)	81 (21%)	91(24%)	81(21%)	92(24%)	85(22%)
Lack of credibility	99(26%)	75(19%)	82(21%)	94(24%)	71(19%)	84(22%)
Absence of clear regulation	67(18%)	70(18%)	50(13%)	60(16%)	61(16%)	62(16%)
Anonymity of sources	51(13%)	62(16%)	79(20%)	61(16%)	83(21%)	67(17%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The above table contains respondents' views on the observed weaknesses of citizen journalism in the coverage of the 2011 general elections in South East Nigeria. Here, an average of 87(23%) said there was lack of professionalism in the use of citizen journalism during the 2011 general elections. 85(22%) said it encouraged sensational and combative journalism. 84(22%) doubted its credibility. 62(16%) pointed out the absence of clear regulation, while 67(17%) said the anonymity of sources was a weakness.

Table 7: Research Question 3: What opportunities did it create?

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
It gave voice to all	108(28%)	90(23%)	97(26%)	89(23%)	97(26%)	96(25%)
It enhanced transparency in the process	76(20%)	83(20%)	78(20%)	81(21%)	81 (21%)	80(21%)
Reduced the tendency to fraud and malpractice	51(13%)	61(16%)	71(18%)	94(24%)	75(19%)	70(18%)
Enhanced speed and greater accuracy	59(15%)	65(19%)	51(14%)	60(16%)	70(18%)	61(16%)
Made campaigns easy	91(24%)	86(22%)	88(24%)	61(16%)	62(16%)	78(20%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

Research question three sought respondents' views on the opportunities created by social media in the coverage of the 2011 general elections in South-East Nigeria. The

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generated data as presented in the table above show that an average of 96(25%) believe that citizen journalism gave voice to all, 80(21%) said it enhanced transparency in the electoral process, 70(18%) believe it reduced the tendency to fraud and malpractice, 61(16%) said it enhanced speed and greater accuracy, and 78(20%) were of the view that it made campaigns much easier.

Table 8: Research Question 4: What were the threats?

Variables	Abia	Anambra	Ebonyi	Enugu	Imo	Average
Uneven penetration of ICTs	68(18%)	81(21%)	79(21%)	67(17%)	77(20%)	74(19%)
Increasing sentiments and lack of trust	82(21%)	71(18%)	67(17%)	71(18%)	71 (18%)	72(18%)
Illiteracy	61(16%)	72(19%)	76(20%)	54(14%)	65(17%)	66(17%)
Constant power failure	51(13%)	75(20%)	57(15%)	60(16%)	70(18%)	63(16%)
Endemic poverty	71(18%)	58(15%)	41(10%)	61(16%)	52(14%)	57(15%)
Systemic corruption	52(14%)	28(7%)	65(17%)	72(19%)	50(13%)	53(14%)
Total	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%)	385(100%

Source: Field Survey, February, 2013

The table above show the data generated from research question four. The data show that 74(19%) of the respondents believe that uneven penetration of ICTs constituted a threat to citizen journalism during the 2011 general elections in South East Nigeria. Increasing pervasive sentiments and lack of trust accounted for 72(18%). 66(17%) identified illiteracy, 63(16%) pointed out constant power failure, 57(15%) said it was the endemic poverty in the region, while 53(14%) were of the opinion that systemic corruption in the country was a major threat.

CONCLUSION

From our findings, we conclude that:

- 91% of young people in South-East Nigeria know what citizen journalism is, while 9% do not.

- 82% of young people in South-East Nigeria practiced citizen journalism during the 2015 general elections in South-East Nigeria while 18% did not.

- Citizen journalism was practiced by many young people in South-East Nigeria during the 2015 general elections because of its simplicity, cost-effectiveness, instant feedback feature as well as its openness to all.

- Citizen journalism lacks professionalism, credibility, encourages sensationalism and combative journalism, many of the sources are anonymous and regulation is difficult.

- It gave voice to many Nigerians during the elections, enhanced transparency in the electoral process, reduced the tendency to fraud and malpractices, enhanced speed and greater accuracy and made campaigns easy.

- The major threats to citizen journalism in the coverage of the 2015 general elections in South East Nigeria were uneven penetration of ICTs, increasing pervasive sentiments and lack of trust of the new technologies, illiteracy, constant power failure, endemic poverty and systemic corruption.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the conclusion, we recommend that:

- Deliberate efforts must be to enhance even penetration of ICTs not only in Nigeria but indeed, Africa.
- It is high time the country and the continent addressed the issue of corruption and poverty as these have continually constituted a major setback to every aspect of their development.
- Periodic public enlightenment on the use of new media platforms for political purpose is crucial. The government should be at the vanguard of this campaign, using such instruments like the ministries of information at both state and federal levels, the National Orientation Agency and the mass media.
- Efforts should be made towards monitoring, moderating or regulating the new genre of journalism in order to minimize the observed weaknesses and maximize the intrinsic values in the electoral process.
- To achieve the above, it is imperative that the various media laws are urgently reviewed to address the technicalities involved in the new media technologies; this we believe would go a long way in making it

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more useful in the electoral process and more beneficial to the society.

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