

# An Exploration into the Impact of Citizen Journalism on Traditional Journalism in Lesotho

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, technological advancement in communication has given citizens opportunities to be recipients and purveyors of news. Social networking sites propagate citizen journalism, wherein ordinary citizens without professional training gather and disseminate information. This has presented a number of challenges due to limited quality control standards for determining what constitutes news. The study thus sought to establish the depth and breadth of the impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism in Lesotho. The study used the qualitative methodology embedded in a case study design. The in-depth face-to-face interviews with (n=10) journalists were conducted to get insight into the impact citizen journalism has on traditional media. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique. In this case, respondents were selected based on their availability and knowledge of the subject at hand. The findings were analysed using thematic analysis to interpret the findings. The results revealed that citizen journalism had posed an imminent threat to traditional journalism as it plays a complementary role. It was also*

*discovered that the fast passed nature of citizen journalists compromises the quality of the content. The study also revealed that mainstream media professionals face fierce competition from citizen journalism, resulting in poor-quality stories. Therefore, the study recommends that mainstream media should have platforms where citizen journalists can submit content that can be vetted for quality control and ethical considerations.*

**Keywords:** Journalism, citizen journalism, traditional journalism, gatekeeping, quality control.

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## 1. Introduction

Journalism as a concept has grown in democratic societies as a tool meant to satisfy citizens' information needs and be kept updated (McGuckin, 2015). Harcup (2014) posits that journalism is a set of practices by which new, topical information is uncovered and subsequently made publicly available. In addition, McGuckin (2015) states that it has also become a function that simultaneously speaks to and for the wider population. Moreover, Rabia (2017) opines that journalism is the collection and presentation of current events through the media. Journalism has evolved over the years and has different types to feed the needs of different target audiences. The types include, amongst others, Gonzo journalism, Tabloid journalism, community journalism and Citizen journalism. Gonzo is defined as a form of egoistic and highly subjective reporting with the reporter at the centre of the story (Prpić, 2018). Tabloid journalism is sensationalistic (yellow), which has led to a deterioration of serious news gathering and reporting (Bastos, 2019). Community journalism is the kind of journalism that promotes the development and empowers citizens through informal education by reporting everyday events within communities (Meyer & Speakman, 2019).

The technological advancement propagated citizen journalism as another form of journalism which has gained massive popularity in the 21st century. McGuckin (2015) asserts that technological advancement has simultaneously enabled and enhanced peoples' access and ability to create and

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spread more information than ever before. Itika (2019) stipulates that citizen journalism is the process of engaging individuals who are considered not to be professional but are assigned to produce, disseminate, and exchange a wide variety of news and information. Citizen journalism as a practice has immensely benefitted information-hungry societies that are always on their toes to get news updates. The practice has eroded the red tape imposed by the government to access and publish information (Miller-Carpenter, 2019). However, it has brought a myriad of challenges to the traditional media landscape and has arguably changed how news gathering and reporting is done. Despite the purported benefits, Itika (2019) argues that citizen journalism poses a serious risk to society due to a lack of professional training and the fact that they use unofficial sources in their reports. The lack of gatekeepers is another challenge because unfiltered information without ethical consideration is shared in the public domain (Chung et al., 2018; Karlsson, 2015).

There are many studies conducted on the impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism; however, no studies in our knowledge in Lesotho examine this phenomenon. Hence this study endeavours to close this gap. Although citizen journalism is proven to have enhanced news gathering and reporting, it has its flaws due to the nature of reports. It is important to understand its unique traits in order to utilise it to maximum capacity. Therefore, this study explores the impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism practice in Lesotho.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

Social media platforms have eased access to information where the population that is hungry for knowledge access networks such as Facebook and Twitter. These platforms have propelled citizen journalism, where untrained members of the communities have joined the sphere of news gathering and reporting. Explaining citizen journalism, Ekwunife et al. (2020) postulate that it is the involvement and participation of ordinary citizens in news-gathering and dissemination. With citizen journalism, there are no gatekeepers, meaning the information is distributed as raw as it was gathered, and the downside to this practice could be low message quality compounded with misinformation and increased fake news for public consumption (Estelle, 2022).

The fast-paced nature of citizen journalism with the aid of social media has left journalists frustrated because news consumers are beginning to realise the importance of getting fresh news daily (Ekwunife et al., 2020). This is problematic to the traditional journalism practice because citizen journalists can now dictate different approaches to the story while also putting a dent in issues of accuracy as a basic ethical principle in journalism. Lee (2014) argues that this results in the fixation of speed-driven journalism, which means that journalists now have to find and report new stories faster, usually at the expense of accuracy. It is, therefore, prudent to examine the impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism.

## **1.3. Research questions**

To find out the impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism practice in Lesotho, the study sought to answer the following questions.

- RQ 1: How does citizen journalism impact traditional journalism practice?
- RQ 2: How has citizen journalism changed the media landscape?
- RQ 3: To what extent have citizen journalism affected the quality of news produced by traditional journalism?

## **1.4. Theoretical framework**

The theory that best informs this study on the impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism practice is Gatekeeping theory. The theory was first developed by Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), a German psychologist and pioneer in social psychology. He developed this concept in his quest to understand human behaviour (A la Chantal 2021). The theory was first formalised and adopted into journalism

and mass communication by David White, who looked into what an editor considers when deciding which news will make the paper. The theory is used by individuals based on personal or social influences to filter information to be shared with the group (Grosheck, 2020). Furthermore, Grosheck (2020) argues that this theory defines the processes that individuals use to select the information while excluding those that may be irrelevant or unwanted. The theory of gatekeeping has two principles, namely: Gatekeeping sets a specific standard for information value, while the second is that the gatekeeper decides the information that should get past them and what information should not.

The first principle dictates that gatekeeping sets specific standards for the information value of news stories. The criteria for selection depends on set news values with, amongst others, news should affect many people, controversial topics and issues that can be the most popular to arouse human interest (Shraddha, 2018). The second principle is that the gatekeeper decides the information that should get past them and what should not. Clark (2015) states that the notion of a journalist as a gatekeeper rests on their ability to detect, emphasise, and disseminate what is important. Gatekeeping Theory is the most relevant to the study because those who have information use their own filters or discretion to select the information that should be shared with the masses, whether through traditional journalism or citizen journalism.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Traditional journalism**

Traditional media is one of the best tools used to feed the masses with information. This has been in existence for decades to quench the thirst, especially in rural areas where modern media has less penetration (Mathiyazhagan et al., 2015). Traditional media are defined as media outlets attempting to convey messages to specified targets and mainstream media such as newspapers, radio, television, news magazines and online offshoots that form part of traditional journalism. However, Hill (2022) study on Citizen Journalism vs Traditional Journalism revealed serious challenges faced by traditional journalism as local newspapers, magazines, and newsrooms have closed due to pressure from citizen journalism. Hill (2022) further adds that investigative journalism and in-depth news reports are diminishing as journalists fail to ask tough questions leading to quality stories. Koukouridou (2014) states that citizen journalism through Social media has altered the traditional journalism practice by diversifying its content delivery in a bid to cater for the masses. In addition, Koukouridou (2014) mention that the traditional media grip on the audience is slowly diminishing as the audience is beginning to take charge of content development and dissemination.

Adding to the woes of traditional journalism, the quality of content is often compromised as mainstream media reporters rush to be the first to release the story on their websites (Hill, 2020). In consonance, Kitty (2020) asserts that while seasoned reporters chase the scoop, the race to be the first to publish the article is likely to compromise the quality of the stories published. For example, in 2014, local media outlets published pictures of children with measles-like symptoms shortly after being vaccinated with the Rubella vaccine, attributing the ailment to the vaccine, an issue that was later refuted by the Minister of Health claiming those pictures were fake (Mokhethi, 2017).

No matter how fast-paced citizen journalism is, Hasan and Ditchburn (2014) write that it can never replace traditional media due to their level of training and experience in the journalism field but can only complement traditional media efforts in ensuring timely news delivery to the masses. Moreover, Noor (2016) revealed that journalists are fully aware of the impact of citizen journalism but still uphold that citizen journalism supplements the work of mainstream journalists. Furthermore, Kitty (2020) argues that traditional journalism is always on the toes, resulting in a lack of originality in content distributed as mainstream media uses content from citizen journalists to produce content.

## **2.2. Citizen journalism**

Citizen journalism is not new and has been practised for centuries. However, this was edged out in the 19th century when journalism schools were founded, and then the field began to be populated by a pool of trained journalists (Bharti,2019). Walters (2011) defines citizen journalism as the involvement of untrained individuals who have assumed the responsibility of news gathering, writing, and disseminating information. Moreover, Taibi and Na (2020) write that citizen journalism has diversified platforms where the masses are able to obtain information; thus, this has a commercial impact on mainstream media.

Although citizen journalism has diversified information sources, this seems to have negatively affected traditional journalism. In affirmation, Taibi and Na (2020) state that as a result of citizen journalism, media consumers have varieties to choose from; hence this has led overall commercial impact on mainstream media. Advertising is dwindling as most media consumers no longer rely on mainstream media for information (Taibi & Na, 2020). In addition, Walters (2011) writes that since there is no financial gain for user-generated content, ethical obligations are ignored, while at the same time, the quality of the content could also be highly questionable. Bharti (2019) criticises the authenticity and legitimacy of the information presented by citizen journalists. This means that basic journalism training is essential for people associated with citizen journalism, as basic journalism rules will be incorporated into their reporting.

Regarding the issue of quality and authenticity of the information, Hill (2022) states that there are no gatekeepers for citizen journalism because most practitioners act independently without professional qualifications. Bharti (2019) argues that citizen journalists should differentiate fake news from factual news, as their content could be damaging to consumers. Hasan and Ditchburn (2014) posit that social media platforms used by citizen journalists are slowly diminishing the quality of journalism as content is not monitored. Citizen journalists rush to be the first to broadcast the uncensored footage online, often before 'real' reporters, and this could have dire consequences (Hill, 2022). Moreover, Bharti (2019) states that the other worrying aspect of citizen journalism is how information is sought from the sources because ethical and illegal means are used therein in other instances. Taibi and Na (2020) further criticise citizen journalism outlets by arguing that some of their stories are either fabricated or plagiarised.

## **3. Methodology**

This study is lense within interpretive paradigm. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) state that interpretive research is based on the argument that human experience and social backdrop shape social reality, making it appropriate to research human behaviours. This study adopted qualitative approach. Qualitative method generates non-numerical data in order to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour, and interactions (Pathak et al.,2013). This study further employed a multiple case study design. Stake (2006) states that multiple-case studies provide for broad examination of research questions and theory development. Case studies explore difficult subjects in the natural setting to better understand them (Heale &Twycross, 2018). The population of the study consists of editors and reporters from the local media outlets in Maseru. The sample for this study consisted of editors (n=4) and the senior reporters (n=6) who were selected using purposive sampling. In this case, respondents were selected based on their availability and knowledge of the subject in hand.

Data were collected using in-depth face-to-interviews with both editors and senior reporters. Rutledge and Hogg (2020) state that an in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique used to conduct detailed interviews with a few participants. In addition, Creswell (2014) states that in-depth interviews can be conducted face-to-face, telephonically, or even in a focus group setting which involves asking questions to obtain information relevant to the study. The researchers sought

permission by writing a letter to the editors, and as soon as permission was granted, the researcher also briefed the participants on the purpose of the study. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary. Therefore, they could withdraw at any time should they feel uncomfortable. Finally, participants were presented with consent forms to sign. To ensure anonymity, the participants were given pseudo-names such as “respondents” (Creswell, 2014).

### **3.1. Data Analysis**

The study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) example. Scharp and Sanders (2019) state that a theme captures the crucial aspect of the data in the most intriguing manner, irrespective of whether it captures the majority experience. The study thus employed latent thematic analysis because we went beyond the explicit or surface meaning of the data set (Byrne, 2021). In order to ensure trustworthiness, the study was shared with the co-authors to ensure all information presented was captured correctly. It was also shared with the colleagues for their constructive criticism, and upon getting their feedback and making necessary corrections; the study was then shared with the participants to verify if their views were captured correctly. Finally, the study was sent to a language editor for proofreading and editing.

## **4. Presentation of Data**

Data in this study were analysed thematically in relation to the research questions as follows. Where the major themes represent each research question.

### **4.1. The impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism practice in Lesotho**

In order to respond to question 1, the following themes commercial impact, increased competition and publications downsizing were identified from the data collected during the interviews.

#### **4.1.1. Commercial impact**

The respondents revealed that citizen journalism birthed alternative sources of information, which has affected the mainstream media's commercial aspect. This was substantiated by one participant who said that:

*Content consumers are no longer stuck with us, there are many alternatives to get the very same information but faster than radio and television” (Respondent 1).*

Another respondent added the following comments:

*“Other sources of information have negatively affected the news production and the mainstream media because the public can now choose what they want” (Respondent 4).*

The majority of the participants further admitted that print media is feeling the adverse effect of citizen journalism because the readership statistics have decreased, thus affecting the circulation of the newspaper, which is translated to low advertising. One participant uttered the said the following:

*“Reduced readership means that the newspaper circulation will automatically decrease, meaning the paper no longer reaches the audience it used to, and that has serious implications on the business side of the media” (Respondent 6).*

Another respondent added:

*“Advertisers are also questioning the viability of the adverts placed because if the circulation is low, not many people will see the advert or act upon what is expected by the advertiser. Advertisers will not advertise in a publication that is struggling with copy sales” (Respondent 3).*

In addition, another respondent said:

*“Low copy sale results in the loss of revenue, thus threatening the financial stability of the organisation because advertising is the main source of revenue for mainstream media” (Respondent 8).*

The respondents revealed that mainstream media had sought solutions in cut-throat tactics where the focus is on using strong words and explicit images to attract ratings in the broadcast. They added that this means a shift in content in order to make money for the station.

*“You cannot differentiate print from broadcast when looking at the content shared, the headlines are highly sensational, and pictures and footage also are of the explicit nature because the audience has shifted to what citizen journalism is pushing” (Respondent 10).*

#### **4.1.2. Increased competition**

All respondents are of the view that the media landscape has become highly competitive for professionals. Respondent had this to say:

*“The rush to publish by citizen journalists has posed competition between traditional and citizen journalism on who gets to publicise the story first” (Respondent 2).*

Another respondent added:

*“Masses have adopted the fast-paced nature of the internet; therefore, they rely on videos found online instead of relying on newspapers which is slower because timeliness is of the essence” (Respondent 5).*

Touching on the issues of increased competition, respondents noted that if traditional journalism does not evolve with the changes, it runs the risk of losing out to citizen journalists. Respondent said the following:

*“The public is beginning to question the dependability of traditional journalism because stories are taking forever to be in the public domain” (Respondent 4).*

#### **4.1.3. Publications downsizing**

All study respondents share the same sentiments that a lot of media outlets are trenching senior reporters and editors in response to the shift in the media landscape and admitted that this is negatively affecting the quality of content produced. To clarify these issues, respondent said:

*“Newsrooms are now filled with inexperienced reporters who cannot produce good quality political news and analysis. Seasoned reporters and experienced editors are no-longer permanent features in the newsrooms” (Participant 5).*

#### **4.1.4. Citizen journalism complements traditional journalism**

All participants stated that traditional journalism is not under threat but claimed that citizen journalism supplements traditional journalists' work. Respondent said the following:

*“There is no way citizen journalism can replace or overtake traditional journalism, it is just a myth. We still have people who rely on traditional media for quality content because there are gatekeepers” (Respondent 1).*

The respondent stated that there is mounting pressure on traditional journalism, and this has forced them to rethink the profession and find avenues to develop exclusive stories. Respondent said:

*“Traditional journalists have to devise means to for exclusive stories because citizen journalism is pushing them under the bus. Content from citizen journalism should only serve as news tips for traditional media to pursue” (Respondent 2).*

All Respondents acknowledged that versatility is crucial because competition posed by citizen journalism calls for dynamism. Respondent added this:

*“Change is imminent. They have to spice it up, push it a notch higher because citizen journalism is on the loose” (Respondent 3).*

In addition, all respondents concur that citizen journalism affords ordinary citizens a platform to bring to light issues that will often be overlooked by professional journalist, meaning that they complement traditional journalism.

*“Media sets the tone of what should be topical in the news. Therefore, for stories they believe are not important, they will never see the light of day in the mainstream media. Citizen Journalism has enabled ordinary citizens to tell their stories and report about issues happening around them” (Respondent 4).*

## **4.2. How citizen journalism changed the media landscape in Lesotho.**

In order to respond to question 2 on how citizen journalism changed the media landscape in Lesotho, the identified theme is that the journalism profession has changed.

### **4.2.1. Journalism profession has changed**

Study respondent state that to meet the demands of hungry content consumers, mainstream media now resort to online with shorter and different angles to the story to maintain their leadership status and gather reactions from the audience. The respondent said this:

*“Remember, you have to be relevant and show that you are competent and capable of giving news quickly, that is what the masses want. The reason why newspapers use their online platform to publish news is because they want to ward-off competition from citizen journalism,” (Respondent 6).*

The respondent also said the glory and recognition traditional reporters used to enjoy is now gone.

Another Respondent added:

*“Traditional media practitioners no longer command the respect they once had, they are now fighting for recognition in the advent of citizen journalism” (Respondent 3).*

The respondents mentioned that citizen journalism had reformed journalism due to the speed at which information is disseminated, meaning the time reporters used to take to produce thorough stories has vanished into thin air.

Another Respondent added:

*“Serious journalism is no longer at play, the mainstream media is now developing content to appeal to the audience. The shift has also been felt where reporters no longer rely only on computers to write stories, but smartphones do it better and faster” (Respondent 7).*

Respondents stated that traditional journalists are forced to be versatile to report for both print and online, as well as to adapt to the new style of news presentation pushed by citizen journalism.

Another Respondent revealed:

*“The approach taken by citizen journalists has also framed the way consumer look at the content. Therefore, traditional journalists ought to change to remain relevant” (Respondent 1).*

### **4.3. Effect of citizen journalism on the quality of news by traditional journalism**

To respond to the third question on the extent citizen journalism has affected the quality of the news produced by the traditional journalism, the following themes were revealed; credibility of the sources, quality of the stories and fabrication and a lack of originality and plagiarism.

#### **4.3.1. Credibility of the sources**

All respondents say they doubt the credibility of the sources citizen journalists use, given the shallow information they write. The participants add mainstream media is deemed to be authentic and credible due to the sources they interview in their reports.

*Citizen Journalist often pick random people as sources in the story, this does not mean when you have information, it qualifies you as a credible source” (Respondent 9).*

#### **4.3.2. Quality of the stories and fabrication**

Respondents were vocal when it comes to quality of the stories produced, as they accused citizen journalists of fabricating stories and ignoring journalistic ethics and values. The respondent said the following:

*“The fact that citizen journalists are not recognised as the official members of the media, sources are reluctant to talk to them. The interesting thing they do is to create imaginary sources thus end up fabricating the stories” (Respondent 4).*

Another participant added:

*“Some citizen journalists’ use anonymous to conceal their sloppiness and fake stories disseminated to the masses” (Respondent 5).*

The Respondents further raised the issue of the quality of the content by citizen journalists, saying it is average. They also accused citizen journalists of lowering the standard of traditional journalism based on the content produced.

Another participant added:

*“If you look at their content, one wonders whether they sat to think before disseminating it. That is a disgrace to our profession” (Respondent 10).*

The other contributing factor to poor quality, according to respondents, is the issue of gatekeeping, saying that in cyberspace, there are no gatekeepers to check for quality and ethical considerations.

Another participant added:

*“Citizen Journalism sometimes publishes one-sided stories or can also upload unethical content due to lack of vetting” (Respondent 6).*

Respondents stated that editors and publishers face must deal with advertisers who also dictate the content, and this frustrates them because they are torn between quality control and risk losing advertng.

Participant stated that:



*“The main source of revenue to mainstream media is advertising, and sometimes editors have to slightly bend the rules to accommodate the demands of the advertisers. These advertisers can just meddle with editorial content. Remember, this is not their forte” (Respondent 5).*

### **4.3.3. Lack of originality and plagiarism**

Alluding to the issue of lack of originality and plagiarism, the respondent said the copy is the same, what varies is the medium and the anchor who will be presenting the news. Respondent said this:

*“Content seen on print is identical to what has been carried by the broadcast media” (Respondent 2).*

Another Respondent stated this:

*“Due to time and resource limitations, reporters often use material from other media outlets to develop their own stories” (Respondent 4).*

Another Respondent added:

*“Citizen Journalism is characterised with plagiarism, where they would randomly pick stories from mainstream media but fail to acknowledge the source” (Respondent 5).*

## **5. Discussions of Findings**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of citizen journalism on traditional journalism practice. It also explored how the media landscape has changed because of citizen journalism. It further delved into how citizen journalism has affected the quality of news produced by traditional journalism.

The findings from this study reveal that citizen journalism directly impacts the commercial aspect of mainstream media due to dwindling readers who have found other alternative sources, meaning that advertisers also are beginning to question whether mainstream is still viable for business. This finding resonates with Taibi and Na's (2020) findings which state that citizen journalism has opened more platforms for media consumers hence this has led overall commercial impact to mainstream media. The finding further reveals that reduced readership statistics directly affect newspaper circulation meaning that advertisers will not advertise in a publication, that is, struggling with copy sales, and this threatens the revenue stream for media. In consonance, Taibi and Na (2020) affirm that advertising is dwindling as most media consumers no longer rely on mainstream media for information. In order the beat completion and earn more audience, the findings show that mainstream media has settled for cut-throat tactics where the focus is on using strong words and explicit images to attract ratings in the broadcast. This is commensurate with the theory's principle that gatekeeping sets specific standards for information value, and the information shared should be of value to the audience.

On whether there is increased competition between traditional and citizen journalism, this study has established that the media landscape has become highly competitive for professionals as both traditional and citizen journalism fight for the spot to be the first to publicise the story. Hill (2020) affirms that mainstream media reporters rush to be the first to release the story on their websites in a bid to ward off competition. Similarly, alluding to increased competition, participants revealed that there is increased competition, and as such, if traditional journalism does not adapt, it runs the risk of losing out to citizen journalists. This finding further reveals that public doubt the dependability of traditional journalism as citizen journalists usually break news on the Internet before professional journalists. In support, Hood (2011) posits that citizen journalism has posed fierce competition to traditional media, where professional journalists' purpose, place, and industry are being scrutinised.

All study participants share the same sentiments that a lot of media outlets are trenching senior reporters and editors in response to the shift in the media landscape. The study findings are consistent with Hill's (2022) study on Citizen Journalism vs. Traditional Journalism revealed serious challenges faced by traditional journalism when the author stated that mainstream media newsrooms have closed, thus succumbing to pressure from citizen journalism. It was further established that the newsrooms are now left with inexperienced reporters who cannot produce good quality political news and analysis. Hill (2022) asserts that investigative journalism and in-depth news reports are diminishing as journalists fail to ask tough questions leading to quality stories.

Regarding how Journalism profession has changed, the results show that traditional journalism has resorted to publishing shorter versions of the story online to maintain their leadership status and also check the response from the audience. The findings confirm that the traditional journalism profession acknowledges the shift in media that is fast-paced and focuses on grabbing the attention of the audience. At the same time, there is a notable shift in how traditional journalists publish their news to accommodate the new style of writing pushed by citizen journalism. Hood (2011) supports the findings by stating that citizen journalism has waved the exclusive rights that traditional media had on news gathering and reporting by giving citizens a right to choose the media to access information.

In relation to the credibility of the sources used, it was found that citizen journalism content is highly questionable as their sources of information are not legit. This finding aligns with Bharti's (2019) criticism of the authenticity and legitimacy of the information presented by citizen journalists considering sources interviewed. Itika (2019) also corroborates the findings that citizen journalists' authenticity of their information is highly questionable because they gather their stories from unofficial sources. However, the results reveal that mainstream media is deemed to be authentic and credible due to the sources they interview in their reports.

The study further reveals that quality of the stories and fabrication are some challenges citizen journalism brings. It was revealed that citizen journalists often fabricate stories and ignore journalistic ethics and values. The findings are aligned to the gatekeeping theory principle that standards are set for what is valuable in information dissemination. In affirmation, Walters (2011) writes that since there is no financial gain for user-generated content, ethical obligations are ignored while at the same time; quality of the content could also be highly questionable. The results further show that the fast-paced nature of citizen journalism has forced traditional journalists to rush to publish the stories first, and this compromises the quality of the reports. This finding is also consistent with Lee's (2015) argument that citizen journalism has resulted in the fixation of speed-driven journalism, which means that journalists now must find and report new stories at a faster pace which is usually at the expense of accuracy. This view is also confirmed by Kitty's (2020) assertion that; while seasoned reporters chase the scoop, the race to be the first to publish the article is likely to compromise the quality of the stories published.

The results further show that another contributing factor to poor quality is the issue of gatekeeping because there are no gatekeepers in cyberspace to check for quality and ethical considerations. This is commensurate with the Gatekeeping Theory principle that the gatekeeper decides which information should get past them and what information should not. Therefore, this means that it is the discretion of the citizen journalist to decide on the content they want to disseminate. This finding is also in line with Hill's (2022) position that there are no gatekeepers for citizen journalists, as most practitioners act independently without professional qualifications. Hasan and Ditchburn (2014) also share the same sentiments that citizen journalism is slowly diminishing the quality of journalism as content is not monitored, and there is also a lack of editorial control over the material shared and retrieved online. It was also discovered that editors battle for quality control while also working hard to please the advertisers because they are the main sources of income for the mainstream media.

On the issue of lack of originality and plagiarism, the results revealed that there is lack of originality and plagiarism. Both mainstream and citizen journalists often carry similar stories that vary in the medium and anchors presenting the stories. This aligns with the thought that traditional journalists are always on their toes, and this has also resulted in lack of originality in content distributed as mainstream media uses content from citizen journalists to produce content (Kitty, 2020). The finding further reveals that citizen journalism is characterised by plagiarism, where they would randomly pick stories from mainstream media but fail to acknowledge the source. It was also revealed that citizen journalism does not threaten the existence of traditional journalism, but it plays a complementary role. Itika (2019) supports the finding that citizen journalism simultaneously competes with and complements professional journalism as they offer an alternative perspective, thus promoting democratic conversation in the public domain.

The results further revealed that citizen journalism gives ordinary citizens a platform to bring and highlight issues that are often neglected by professional journalists meaning that they complement traditional journalism. In affirmation, Nah & Chung (2016) postulate that citizen journalism has brought to light opinions that the mainstream media would otherwise overlook, thus making information more accessible to all. The study revealed that citizen journalism provides news tips and information which is crucial for mainstream media to follow up on and to come up with well-researched stories from different angles. It was further established that traditional media is feeling the nudge to be versatile if they are to remain relevant in the field.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The data collected during the study reveals that not many challenges are posed by citizen journalism to mainstream journalism. The impact of citizen journalism on traditional media can never be ignored as publications are downsizing due to dwindling readers. This has a direct impact on the commercial aspect as advertisers are also pulling out. The net effect of this is the quality of stories produced, which are left in the hands of the rookies. Therefore, the media environment has become highly competitive for both professional and citizen journalists as each strives to be the first to publicise the story. The tight competition further calls for serious transformation if traditional journalism wants to remain relevant to its audience. It is clear that fast-paced citizen journalism has an over-spill effect on traditional journalism as professionals use their online platforms to publish shorter versions of the story to maintain their leadership status and to also check the response from the audience. Traditional journalism must also employ cut-throat tactics to grab the attention of the audience.

Furthermore, it was revealed on the one hand that citizen journalism has tendencies to ignore journalistic ethics and values as they often fabricate stories, while on the other hand, traditional journalism is always in a rush to be the first to publish their stories which in turn compromise the quality of the reports. Since there are no gatekeepers in cyberspace, vulnerable audiences will continue to be fed with unvetted information. There is little restraint for citizen journalism as they can randomly violate ethical standards in the absence of gatekeeping, and there are no serious repercussions for the violation. The media is flooded with stories that lack originality, as mainstream media is always chasing what citizen journalists are doing. It can further be concluded that citizen journalism does not pose any imminent threat to mainstream journalism, as content consumers believe their stories are authentic and credible. It should be noted that citizen journalism complements traditional journalism in covering stories that would often be overlooked by professional journalists. Citizen journalism also provides story tips for mainstream media to follow and come up with researched stories. It is therefore recommended that mainstream media should have platforms where citizen journalists submit their content, and then it should be vetted for quality control and ethical considerations to ensure that information drafted by citizen journalists is

authentic and credible. Traditional journalist professionals should work hand in hand to improve quality and to have a greater impact on information dissemination.

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