

CHANGING PARADIGMS IN COMMUNITY JOURNALISM: JOURNALISTS' EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

Journalism practice is changing due to the use of new media tools that have created multi-media platforms for news production and distribution. These platforms – *Facebook*, *WhatsApp* and *Twitter* – demand new approaches and skills from rural/community journalists. This study investigates how community journalists adapt in the new information age, and the constraints and prospects of community journalism in Cross River State in the midst of digital revolution. Triangulation theory of Technological Determinism and Democratic Participant Media theory are used as the theoretical framework. Census method is used with a population of 40 professional rural/community journalists drawn from *Chronicle* and Federated chapels of Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). Questionnaire is used for data collection. Findings reveal that most community journalists in Nigeria are not highly educated and not keen on embarking on further professional training; many of them do not share their stories via the Internet; and they pay less attention to news and events about rural communities. The study recommends that local news organisations and NUJ should partner with international agencies to fund exchange programmes that promote community journalism; and government should invest in rural telephony to make Internet services accessible and affordable to community journalists and rural dwellers.

Keywords: Community/rural journalism, digital revolution, new information age, new media tools.

Introduction

Community journalism chronicles local news. It provides local citizens with a forum to express their views about the goings-on in their immediate environment. Community journalism is also viewed as natural reaction to out-of-touch mega media and as a result of concerns of the media's slippage into credibility problem and elitism. Unfortunately, one of the fundamental problems of

community journalism is the inability to change and a compulsion to shape the system to maintain and strengthen community's social values and culture heritage.

Another problem faced by community journalism practice is the advent of the Internet and the inability of news organisations and journalists to adapt to these new media technologies. Community newspapers once acted as news aggregators. Today, the Internet via social media has become news dis-aggregators. With the explosion of social media such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Weblogs*, anyone can post news and information online, which sometimes can endanger the community's interest.

Again, paucity of funds has caused the decline of local newspaper industry. It costs a fortune to produce a local newspaper or operate a local radio station without a corresponding increase in profit-generation due to declining circulations, migration of advertising to digital platforms and commodification of news. These have contributed to reduced pagination of each newspaper edition, which in turn limits the amount of information available for readers in the local community. Consequently, these cause the collapse of community newspapers and community radio. For instance, in Cross River, there are only five functional community newspapers, namely *Nigerian Chronicle*, *Glimmer*, *Watchman*, *Median* and *Pillar*.

This research, therefore, tries to find solutions to these problems and then recommend possible ways of promoting community journalism practice in Nigeria. In order to guide the work, the following research questions were raised:

- (a) How have community journalists adapted in the new information age?
- (b) What are the constraints militating against community journalism practice?
- (c) What are the prospects of community journalism?

Literature Review

Dimensions of Community Journalism

Scholars have at different times referred to community journalism as 'public journalism', 'whole journalism' and 'civic journalism.' Often times, they are interchangeably used to represent the concept of community journalism wherein the journalist, as a member of a community, gathers news stories for the good or development of his/her society or community.

In recent times, community journalism has become a new area of focus for mass communicators all over the world. This is because, as rural media, it has the capacity to mobilise people to participate in the governance at the grassroots where majority of the people live, especially in Nigeria. Community journalism is seen, to an extent, as a soothing balm for advocacy and developmental journalism.

However, the term, community journalism was first used in the 1950s by Kenneth R. Byerly, a newspaper publisher turned professor at University of North Caroline, Chapel Hill, USA. He was assigned to teach a course called "Country Weekly Newspaper Production." But Byerly (1961) did not like the course title and decided to change it to "Community Journalism", which means all newspapers published with an aim to serve a particular community or society no matter the place of publication and period. He notes that the term, community newspaper, was synonymous to community journalism. To him, "community newspapers have something that city dailies lack –

nearness to people; this is a great strength and a great problem” (p.25). He describes the concept of friendly neighbour as the nearness to people, which is one of the unique characteristics the community newspapers have over big newspapers or metropolitan newspapers. He maintains that community newspapers today are growing in big city and sub-urban areas with new strength in small cities and towns, thereby offering much in employment, satisfaction, income, service, and ownership.

Traditionally, one of the important functions of the Fourth Estate is that of a watchdog – holding authority to account. This role cannot be fully achieved without local media and community journalists who serve as a link between the local residents and the government. Therefore, community journalism concentrates on reporting news that have effect on local readers. Community journalism focuses on covering local news that involves individuals, suburbs, small towns, neighbourhoods, rather than metropolitan, regional or national or world news. Some of the stories covered by community journalism include school sports, debates, local marriages, cultural events, local crimes, zoning issues and details of community life.

It tries to evoke the creative power of early print media, which helps to form a notable nationhood and delineation of communities. Community journalism is the practice of gathering, packaging and distributing news in predominantly small, distant geographic markets with an emphasis on local news and information about community life (Reader, 2012). According to this author, it is a synonym for small town newspapers, which has gone beyond newspapers in small towns to include various media in many different countries.

Schramm (1964) claims that community journalism is an extension of mainstream journalism, which nurtures a community and, in turn, helps nations to grow. He maintains that media, via local journalism, connect a specific community through print, electronic or digital; and that community journalism helps in raising the consciousness among the people, identifying the challenges facing the community and helping to find solutions to them. To him, community journalism enables the journalists go into the community, listen to the people carefully and then report on various issues extensively. To him, journalists’ involvement of community in their reportage creates a symbiotic relationship between the media and the people of the community, which further creates social and community bonding among the members.

However, for Robinson (2013), there is change in community; change in the press; change in audiences; and other evolutions and transitions that have come along with the adoption of new digital technologies. He argues that, if the concept of community journalism means nearness to the people’ culture and social norms, then community journalists need to focus on the citizens that make up that community as well as be active participants in the community’s civic life and welfare. But Agbese (2017), in a lecture in community reporting, notes that the focus of community reporting is to give our rural communities human faces and human voices, adding that the first rule in community reporting is for the reporter to know the community he wishes to report on. He also adds that since community journalism reflects the community and tells its stories, it helps in bringing intimacy, care and personal touch as well as embracing a leadership role.

Supporting Agbese, Summers (2017), in his study on the importance of community journalism in a growing world of Internet and social media, adds that having a local news organisation brings interests in the community together to create a personal impact on the readers. To her, local media

help to focus on a specific group of people in a specific area that has common language and knowledge. One of the benefits of community journalism, according to her, is that it encourages journalists and news managers to find ways to capture citizen priorities, concerns and perspectives on important different issues of various communities.

Radcliffe (2018), in his research on how local journalism can upend the fake news' narrative, avers that audiences do not want local news outlets to play only the watchdogs' role; they also want them to be good neighbours, too. He notes that local journalists are often the only journalists that most people will ever meet. So, local journalists should play a major role in how the larger profession is perceived.

In their study on good news, social ethics and the press, Christians, John and Mark (1993) discover that one of the fundamental weaknesses of community journalism is the inability to adapt to changes and be able to promote the community values and cultures. They suggest that community journalists and citizen journalists should be careful so as not to report their selfish interest in the guise of reporting the community interest. They note further that, through community journalism, reporting about wide range of information about the community can change to reporting news and information that try to maintain community values and fortify the status quo. In other words, community journalists pay attention to stories and information that reinforce community's socio-cultural values.

Further research by Meyer and Daniels (2011) examines how community journalism in an online world has affected established communities. They argue that the goals of those who bring online and geographic communities together through information sharing are similar. To them, online environment can be a reliable realm in which professional journalists can create and rebuild connections to the community in which they live in. They suggest that established news media can branch out from their geographic communities and try to expand their content beyond the reach of their printed products or broadcast transmitters. They also insist on the need for more research on how news organizations are applying the community journalism model online and those studies must go beyond case study approaches that focus on specific communities. They conclude that it has become necessary, on daily basis, for community news organisations to understand how people use the Internet and how it affects their information needs and goals.

Approaches to Community Journalism in Digital World

One of the challenges of community journalism in the digital age is that news outlets now compete with every person and local newspaper for information. This raises concerns about the long-term survival of local journalism. But Stonbely and Napoli's (2015) agree that the survival of local journalism is very important as it is the vehicle for citizens to learn about issues affecting their daily lives such as local government, natural disasters, healthcare, crime, primary schools sports and PTA meetings, which are not given much national attention. They discover that the news ecosystem of local communities are reliable, and can be expanded and upgraded to meet the information needs of the local consumers. However, they maintain that local news model and information are now increasingly disseminated through digital-native news producers and social media platforms, ultimately for better understanding of the content they produce and the interconnections that exist between them.

Robinson (2013) recommends the introduction of the concept of reciprocal journalism, which tries to envisage how greater mutual dependence between journalists and audiences, facilitated by digital media, might lead to better journalism in the community context. It states that community journalists can use this approach to not only reconnect citizens to the physical locality of the community, but to recreate that community in virtual realms. He agrees totally that community journalists report information from within their smaller towns for those residents. According to him, there is a new renewed responsibility on the part of the citizens in community journalism as they form expectations and develop standards for online community news, particularly interactive spaces. Citizens are now community advocates within journalistic exploit. He further recommends that community journalists should go beyond this concept by using virtual realms such as commenting spaces or social media platforms to ensure connection is maintained between the journalists and the community as well as continuous re-affiliation with online and print media.

Hastjarjo (2017) opines that there is a decline of news authenticity and trustworthiness. He avers that one of the major impacts of new media and technologies in the community journalism practice is production and manipulation of digital contents. This is made possible by the availability of software, application, and web hosting services that enable practically anyone to become a news producer and publisher, thereby challenging journalists' role as 'gatekeeper' and information provider. This consequently raises issues of accuracy of information and reports.

Lending credence to this, Radcliffe (2018) explains that media institutions are gradually losing trust due to their partisanship. The politicisation of the media, he argues, is as a result of the existing business model where advertisers and ownership structure determine what is to be published or not. He points out that less than half of the news provided by local media outlets is not original as only 17 percent from the survey carried out is "truly local" in the sense that events reported about took place within the city or town. He discovers that local media outlets still find it difficult to adapt to digital technologies as most of them still don't have websites. He admits that many local newsrooms are undergoing period of reinvention and reinvigoration aimed at injecting finance if it has to successfully move forward. He suggests that one of the ways to rebuild trust and confidence in readers or audience is for local news outlets to consistently produce quality news that would add unique value to communities.

Lakshmanan (2018) disagrees on the notion that trust in news was up, especially for the local media. A study by him confirms that there is more trust in local media than for national media. This is because local media outlets blend watchdog reporting with community engagement and integration which the newsrooms can build on to cultivate trust in local readers or consumers.

Today News is Social

Social media fad is in vogue. Social media have been playing significant roles in news gathering and in professional socialisation of journalists. Besides, the social media have made it possible for journalists to explore distant and social spheres, which were before now not unreachable and were not reported. Social media platforms drive today's news transformation by posting links, publications, distributions and archiving. Among the tools that have been attracting attention are *Facebook*, *Twitter* and blogs. Perier, Smyrniaios and Noci (2015) are of the view that while *Twitter* is more of a professional tool, *Facebook* is seen as tool for ordinary people and for personal interactions.

Of course, the Internet has increasingly become an indispensable tool for journalists and all citizens to seek receive and impart information, thereby given rise to new form of blogging to media landscape. In community blogging, local bloggers and community members (many who have no journalism background) come together to write about and advocate for their communities in an online forum. Community blogs also provide service to organizations that encourage civic engagement by giving them a birds-eye-view of the happenings around communities without interjecting themselves into any one community.

Studies have shown that readers or audience experience journalism through the eyes of technology. For instance, Deuze (2003) finds out that new media have accelerated the news gathering process due to its digital nature and offers flexibility to journalists by allowing them to spend more time in the office. This contrasts with traditional journalism routines, which train reporters to search for news on the streets without adequate communication devices for networking and direction. This is the same fate with community journalists who have been grappling with the implications of new media more than two decades into the adoption of such technology.

Pavlik (2001) argues that the advancement in modern technologies have transformed these technical devices, “which offer new ways to process raw new data in all its forms, whether handwritten notes, audio interviews, or video content” (p. 49).

Surveys conducted by Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, and released in December 2018, show that there are about 111,632,516 active Internet subscribers on the licensed service providers utilising the different technologies, i.e. GSM. On his part, Oludimu (2018) reveals that during the launch of NG_HUB by the Manager, Developer Programme at *Facebook*, Chukwuemeka Afigbo, about 26 million Nigerians now log in on the social networking site every month. He also reveals that Nigeria ranks tenth in terms of mobile phones users due simply to increasing smartphone adoption in the country.

Ikoro (2016), an IT professional, based in Houston, USA, in answering questions to how many twitters are in Nigeria, discloses that there are about 7 million *Twitter* users in Nigeria. For the Statistics Portal (2017), the social network penetration in Nigeria, as of the third quarter of 2017, show that *WhatsApp* is the most popular social network mobile messenger with a 41 percent penetration rate; *Facebook* – 41 per cent and *Twitter* – 13 per cent. From the above statistics, there is no doubt that Nigerians are becoming technological savvy as there are increasing usages of the Internet services and social media – *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *WhatsApp* in Nigeria. These increasing uses of social media platforms by citizens have also penetrated deeply into the lives of Nigerians and have impacted on community journalism practice with regard to news gathering and news consumption pattern, thereby transforming community journalism practice in Nigeria.

In their work on journalism and social networking sites and innovation and professional transformation or imposition of sociability, Perier, Smyrniaios and Noci (2015) find out that journalists increasingly tend to integrate these social media platforms into their daily work routines by keeping-up-to-date information, find topics, access sources, promote their work as well as communicate with readers and their colleagues. They posit that the notion of media sociability is made possible within the frameworks imposed by the websites that have made it a vocation to appear as ‘social’ rather than wholly as media. They add that the sociability in social media is

made possible by the immediate visibility to all who are linked to professional journalists and citizen journalists' profiles or sites.

This development, Paterson and Domingo (2008) posit in their research work on making online news and the ethnography of new media production, has led to the rise of 'desk journalism', which has to do with re-processing of existing materials rather than on-the-ground reporting. It, therefore, means that these platforms take part in the restatement process of the dissemination of un-original news content (Messner, Linke and Efford, 2011).

Beside Blogging, there is an emergence of mobile news across the world. Hastjarjo's (2017) study on local journalism in new media landscape, opportunities and challenges attests to the fact that there is emergence of mobile news. He finds out that there are increasing numbers of mobile device users in Indonesia with 326.2 million mobile subscriptions (2% growth since 2015). Out of this number, he discovers that 85% of adults own a mobile device, 46% of them own smart phones while half of the users (48%) use the Internet every day, and 70% users access news from their mobile device (41% increase from 2015).

In their research on pathways to news and carried out by Mitchell, Shearer, Gottfried and Barthel (2016), they discover that people are moving from print to broadcast and online. They find out that 66 percent of U.S.A adults say they get news from both mobile and laptops, depicting that online news organisation play a large role in how people receive their news, compared to getting news through people with whom they are close.

Summers's (2017) study of the importance of community journalism in a growing world of Internet and social media, avers that online news consumers increasingly follow news organisations, individual journalists and citizen's journalists on social media sites and they distribute news online or share stories behind the stories that did not make it in print version. He observes that mobile news is important because participants (audience or news consumers) feel they can have an impact on their communities by using the various media platforms possibly via social media. Indeed, social media and social networks today form indispensable tools for the dissemination of news and receiving of information across borders. According to him, citizens not only read news from their local community with tablets and smart phones, they can also share and post links to stories, comment, or contribute themselves, thereby making the news social.

Ate and Ikerodah (2012) are of the view that community media have the powers to evolve social change that could lead to rural transformation in different areas, arguing that even though there are some few of community newspapers in Nigeria today, these papers are too insignificant to take care of the large and heterogeneous audience at the grassroots level. They further argue that in terms of broadcast media, though most state-owned radio and television stations in the country do broadcast in local languages, the establishment of full blown community broadcasting in Nigeria is still a matter of debate. They suggest that it is has become pertinent for stakeholders in the industry to integrate community media with new media technologies for effective and efficient result, maintaining that now is the time to embark on comprehensive community journalism accordingly.

Robinson (2013) again avers that since one of the core understandings of community journalism is centred on the citizens and journalists, the media revolution can reinvigorate feelings of

belonging and connectedness to home. The study, therefore, suggests that any community news must incorporate citizens by sharing the platform for production and not just as members of the audience. To him, there is need for commitment on the part of both journalists and citizens to utilise these media technologies, and excise those fundamental principles of community journalism that go back more than half a century. He argues that it is high time community journalists and community publisher became more proactive by having on-line version of their publication to take care of Internet buffs.

While Summers (2017) argues that online does not replace the newspaper, rather it is an extension, adding that online can only do it all and brings everybody on the same playing field, Agbese (2017) points out that coverage of the rural communities has never been a successful journalistic enterprise in our country as rural newspaper publishers do not have enough funds to spare on the coverage of the rural communities. Agbese insists that because of poor funding, publishers cannot afford to keep reporters in rural communities in order monitor and report on the communities. He further points out that low patronage of community newspapers militates against the commercial interests and therefore publishers don't consider it good business to invest much money in community newspaper for the interest of rural dwellers.

Corroborating Agbese (2017) on the challenges facing community journalism, Ozoem (2019) in his paper on community newspapers as crucial agents of rural development finds out that lack of financial power to continue publication; quackery among the community newspapers; poor management of media resources; political interference, illiteracy and low patronage are major constraints hindering successful practice of community journalism. He, however, recommends establishment of valuable community newspapers; that community publishers should employ the services of trained journalists to curb quackery and ensure effective coverage of news events in the community.

But Olaiya's (2015) paper, revving up community newspaper in Lagos and presented at the maiden conference organised by Lagos state government for organisations active in community reporting, advocates bringing back the good old days of community reporting especially in 1920s were community newspapers in Lagos alone drive all politics of the locals, thereby deepening democracy as well as giving grassroots voice through the community media. He suggests that community media organisations need to form association to protect their interest in the area of rural reporting and promote better relations with local communities and win the confidence of the community stakeholders.

However, Moemeka (1981), Myers (2000), Kurpius (1999) and other experts highlight the relevance of community media in different spheres of human endeavour. To them, community journalism encourages journalists and news managers to find ways to capture citizen priorities, concerns and perspectives on different issues of importance to many different communities. As part of the process of creating connections to citizens, news managers are now finding ways to incorporate diversity of voices and communities in their news reporting. To them, community journalism helps both news content and source diversity as it encourages citizens' discussions, views and issues using a wide range of community perspectives.

However, literature has failed to examine the community journalists' experiences in Cross River State with regard to using their medium to promote and strengthen community values cultural

heritage in this digital era. Again, the challenge of training and funding associated with community newspapers in Nigeria has not been emphasised. These are the concerns of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Since theoretical framework tries to provide a connection between current study and existing knowledge expressed as theory and assists the researcher interpret the results, this study is anchored on Triangulation Theory. Triangulation Theory involves using more than one theory for a single study. It helps cross-verify facts; gives authenticity to the information and validate claims from one source (Andrew-Essien, 2017). Therefore, Technological Determinism and Democratic Participant Media theory are used for this research.

Technological determinism theory, also known as reductionist theory, not only resolves around supposition that technology defines nature in any given society, but that technology is the driving force of culture and determinist course of history. It posits that technology is influencing the level of knowledge in a society (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017).

The technological determinism is espoused further by media non-conformist, Marshall McLuhan (1964), whose idea is that technology has the ability to drive human interactions and create social change. McLuhan states that “we are living in the new age of technology never experienced before” (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017. p.298). Known as “Oracle of the Electronic Age,” McLuhan is of the view that “new electronic media is changing people’s way of thinking and feeling” (pp. 2298-299). He predicts “the concept of global village, where people would be connected worldwide through participation in smaller communities and determine the mode of interaction between individuals (p.299). They explain that the Electronic Age is the age of cyberspace or superhighway which has changed the mode of news gathering and dissemination as a result of Information Communication Technology, ICT, revolution. Simply put, technological determinism theory advocates the influence of technology on the society.

The concept of technological determinism expresses McLuhan’s belief that the nature of the media technology, prevailing in a society at a given point in time, greatly influence how the members of that society think and believe” (Defleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982, p.184; Anderson & Ross, 2002, p.270; Danesi, 2002, p.6).

However, it is interested in how the journalist operates within a given technological era in the emerging world of ICT, which has a great deal of influence on the knowledge expected of journalists and how such knowledge is deployed in achieving a timely and credible presence on the newsstands for print and airtime for broadcast channels.

Ekeanyanwu and Edewor (2009) posit that:

The nature of media technology prevailing in a society at a particular point in time greatly influences how the members of that society think, act and behave Books and other print media, for example, are said to promote causes-effect thinking in societies where print dominate, because the technology of print forces a linear form of presentation either across or up-down a page (p.17).

Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982) aver that one of the most important characteristics of the audience-media encounter is the technological properties of the medium. Thus, McLuhan’s perhaps best known expression “the medium is the message”. This suggests that invariably, the

medium through which a message is being put across invariably affects the message and the impact it has on the audience.

For the Democratic Participant Media, the theory proposes alternative grassroots media in which citizens can express their needs. Democratic Participant Media Theory, developed by Dennis McQuail in 1987, is a working normative media theory that embraces the principles of democratisation of the media for the purpose of accessibility by all and sundry. He emphasises the need for popular participation and plurality in ownership and access to the media. The theory emphasises the principles of democratisation of the media and its accessibility to all citizens and community.

He posits that the theory calls for the establishment of local media by local communities and groups in order to meet their own needs and aspirations. The theory advocates for a small scale, interactive and participatory media forms which are better than large scale one-way and professionalised media. It is also known as 'Reactionary theory' because it is response to elitist nature of the press.

McQuail (1987) insists:

The central point of a democratic-participant theory lies with the needs, interests and aspirations of the active receiver in a political society. It has to do with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back, the right to use the means of communication for interaction in small-scale settings of community, interest group, sub-culture (p.122).

McQuail (2010) argues that the theory is proposed to take into account much ideas expressed and to look after the needs of the citizens. It challenges the dominance of centralized, commercialized, state-controlled and even professional media. He adds that the key to applying this theory lies in the new technology of times and favours small scale media, non-commercial and often committed to a cause. Insisting that participation and interaction are key concepts, he contends that the emphasis of Democratic-Participant Media Theory is on the basis of society and on the value of horizontal rather than vertical (top-down) communication.

Corroborating, Ojobor (2002) avers that "there is in this theory a desire for horizontal rather than vertical (top-down) communication; a reaction against commercialisation and monopolization of privately owned media or monopoly journalism, centralism and bureaucratisation of public broadcasting institutions" (p.15). He opines that one of the basic principles of the theory is that "individual citizens and minority groups have rights of access to media (rights to communicate) and rights to be served by media according to their own determination of need" (p.16).

Asemah (2011) is of the view that "the theory favours multiplicity, smallness of scale (community newspaper, radio, television, etc.) locality, decentralisation of the media where all groups, communities individuals, etc, can own, have access to and operate small media organisations" (p.154). He argues that it is when this is done that the people can have their views, opinions and ideas aired out as well as take part in governance.

Asemah, Nwammuo and Nkwam-Uwaoma (2017) assert that the theory calls for "development of innovative, small media that can be directly controlled by group members. And if they cannot afford such media, then government should subsidize them through funding and training on how to operate small media" (p.60).

To Folarin (1998), the theory espouses alternative press, community cable TV, micro-media in communities and ethnic minorities. The theory favours media that are close to the grassroots; small-scale and participatory while cautioning that communication should not be left in the hands of professionals alone.

Yarosan and Asemah (2008) state that the theory stresses decentralisation, localism as well as favours multiplicity and smallness of scale (community newspaper, radio and TV) locality. In essence, the theory clamours for citizens' participation in the dissemination of information through the use of different communication channels such as mobile phones and the Internet which invariably have become possible through the practice of citizen journalism.

From the foregoing, both Technological Determinism and Democratic Participant Media theories are relevant in the study of new media, social media, community journalism, rural broadcasting and community media as well as social change.

Therefore, Technological Determinism and Democratic Participant Media theories are justified in this study because it provides the platforms for community journalists and community media to participate in the dissemination of information about various community in which they live in through their various medium.

Again, since the study investigates how community journalist are adapting in the midst of media revolution and the extent to which citizens interested in information contributors are coping with ever changing media environment, then the triangulation is suited for this purpose as it helps in explaining and clarifying the concept of community journalism and interpreting some phenomena.

And because the researcher investigates the future of community journalists and community journalism in the era of new media technologies and how the concept can be used to drive social change, the theories are quite apt.

Research Methodology

Census methodology is used for this study. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) argue that the goal of scientific research is to “describe the nature of population—a group or class of subjects, variables, concepts or phenomena” (p. 87). They add that census is the process of examining or investigating an entire class or group. According to Kothari (2013), census entails a complete enumeration of all items in the population. “It can be presumed that in such an inquiry, when all items are covered, no element of chances is left and highest accuracy is obtained” (Kothari, 2013, p.55).

The population of this study consists of all registered journalists with Nigeria Union of Journalists, NUJ, working in Chronicle and Federated Chapels. From NUJ record you have a total of 40 with Chronicle, (28) and Federated Chapel (12). Therefore, all the journalists in these community media organisations numbering 40 constitute the population of the study.

The instrument used for data gathering is structured-questionnaire. Its use is relevant because of its anonymity and the confidence it gives respondents to express themselves freely without pressure. Besides, questionnaire ensures uniformity through standardised questions. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. While the first section seeks data on the demographic

characteristics of the respondents, the second section consists of closed-ended questions relating to the research objectives, which require respondents to select an answer from the list of responses already provided. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents through the Chapel chairmen. Efforts were made to ensure the samples were representative of age and media group and gender. Out of the 40 questionnaires distributed, 39 respondents returned. The questionnaire has 13 questions.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

This study tries to establish the possibility that there are changing paradigms in community journalism especially among the local journalists. Here, the results of the data collected are analysed; responses from the sampled respondents are presented using variables, frequencies and simple percentage format while the interpretation follows immediately thereafter. These data from the respondents are analysed in line with the research questions.

Table 1: Socio- economic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	34	87
Female	5	13
Total	39	100
Age (years)		
21 – 40	5	13
41 and above	34	87
Total	39	100
Professional Qualifications		
PGD Journalism	2	5
B.Sc Mass Com	1	3
HND Mass Com.	15	38
OND Journalism	21	54
Total	39	100

Demographic information (Questions 1-3 on the questionnaire) is presented in Table 1 above indicating the frequency and percentage distribution of the gender, age, and professional qualifications of respondents. The distribution shows male dominance of the journalism profession at the local level with 34 (87%) males and 5 (13%) females.

On the age distribution, 34 (87%) respondents fall within the age bracket 41 and above with only 5 (13%) respondents falling within the age bracket of 31-40. The data above suggest that the respondents are predominantly getting to the peak of their journalism profession, an indication that the young generation are not interested in community journalism practice.

With regard to professional qualifications of the local journalists, the data above show that 21(54%) respondents have Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in journalism; 15 (38%) respondents have Higher National Diploma (HND); 2 respondents (5%) have Post-Graduate

Diploma in Journalism, (PGDJ) and 1(3%) respondent has Bachelors of Science (BS.C) in Mass Communication.

These show that majority of the community journalists in Cross River State are not highly educated and not keen on embarking on further training in their chosen profession so as to keep them abreast of modern trends in journalism and new media technologies. It further depicts the fallen standard in the profession as most of the journalists are not interested in updating and upgrading the standard though enrolling for higher studies in journalism training institutions.

Table 2: Proportion of respondents who social media platforms for interactions

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
<i>Facebook</i>	31	80
<i>Twitter</i>	4	10
<i>WhatsApp</i>	4	10
Total	39	100

Table 3: Proportion of respondents who use social media outlets for news and information distribution

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
<i>Facebook</i>	5	13
<i>Twitter</i>	0	0
<i>WhatsApp</i>	2	5
None of the above	32	82
Total	39	100

Table 4: Proportion of respondents whose news organisation have online version

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	4	10
No	35	90
Total	39	100

Tables 2-4 above show that, to an extent, the community journalists have embraced the social media fad just as most citizens as shown in Table 2 in which 31 (80%) respondents use *Facebook* and 4 respondents (10%) each use *WhatsApp* and *Twitter* accounts just for social interactions. In the Table 3, 32 (82%) respondents don't distribute community news and information through any of the social media platforms; 5 (13%) respondents use *Facebook* and 2 (5%) respondents use *WhatsApp*, an indication that the majority still operate an analogue system of publishing as they don't share community news and information on the Internet, which is the a major elements of new media and modern journalism.

Table 4 depicts that 35 (90%) respondents don't have online version of their community papers while 4 (10%) respondents only have online version of their newspapers.

Table 5: Proportion of respondents who agree that cultural and historical challenges are hindrances to reporting their neighbourhood

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	29	74
No	10	26
Total	39	100

Table 6: Proportion of respondents who agree that community newspaper don't pay attention to locals issues as crimes, birthdays, burials, council election, primary and secondary sports

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	31	79
No	8	21
Total	39	100

Table 7: Proportion of respondents who agree that the rise of the Internet and proliferation of free news online have affected the revenue stream of community news organisation

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	35	90
No	4	10
Total	39	100

In Table 5, the majority of respondents, (29/74%), agree that cultural and historical challenges are some of the hindrances to journalists' reporting of their neighbourhood, while 10 (26%) respondents disagree with that.

Table 6 shows that 31 (79%) respondents agree that local news organisations don't pay attention to local stories including local crimes, marriages, birthdays, burials, council and community elections, primary and secondary schools sports, while 8 (21%) respondents agree that community news organisations carry local stories. This is a contrast to the aim of community journalism which Agbese (2017) says is to give the rural communities human faces and human voices. Once a community newspaper does not reflect the community and don't tell community stories, it therefore lacks the intimacy, care and personal touch and cannot create an impact on the readers. Consequent upon this they lose patronage and revenue to sustain the organisation.

For Table 7, the Data show that 35 (90%) respondents agree that free online news have impacted negatively on their revenue stream, while only 4 (10%) respondents disagree.

Table 8: Proportion of respondents who agree that community journalism should continue to uphold the principle of objectivity, accuracy and fairness in the midst of news digitalisation

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	39	100
No	0	0
Total	39	100

Table 9: Proportion of respondents who agree that there is need for formal and informal content collaboration between big media organisations and local media, between citizens and community journalists

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	37	95
No	2	5
Total	39	100

Table 10 Proportion of respondents who agree that there is need for community journalists to embrace investigative journalism, create neighbourhood pages and sites to promote community journalism practices

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	39	100
No	0	0
Total	39	100

Table 11: Proportion of respondents who agree that there is need for local news organisations to hook up to Google and adapt business model of digital distribution channels to improve revenue streams

Response	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	38	97
No	1	3
Total	39	100

Table 8 above shows that all the respondents (39/100%) hold tenaciously to the principle of objectivity, accuracy and fairness as it would restore readers' confidence in the profession and uphold truth which is one of the hallmarks of journalism practice.

The data in Table 9 show that while 37 (95%) respondents agree that there is urgent need for collaboration among big news organisations and the local journalists and between citizens and community news organisations, 2 (5%) respondents don't want such collaboration.

Analysis in Table 10 shows that all the respondents (39/100%) agree on the need to create neighbourhood pages and embrace investigative journalism. Creating neighbourhood pages would make the community feel a sense of belonging and make the community newspapers more interactive and participatory while embracing investigative journalism would add credibility and expose the malfeasance within the communities they write about.

Table 11 depicts that 38 (97%) respondents agree that it is high time local news organisations and journalists hooked up to Google and Facebook as well as other new business models of digital distribution to improve upon their revenue base.

Discussion of findings

Having analysed the data appropriately, this section discusses the findings from the data collected from respondents using research questions as guide.

RQ1: How has community journalists adapted in the new information age?

Findings in Tables 2-4 reveal that community journalists have embraced Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp for interaction for social interaction and entertainment. This is in line with Perier,

Smyrnaioi and Noci's (2015) view that Facebook is a tool for ordinary people and for personal interactions while Twitter is a professional tool.

The finding further reveals that the majority of the respondents, (32/82%), are not Internet savvy as they don't engage in networked journalism where journalists share community news and information from their news organisations on social media outlets via to readers/citizens just as the majority don't have online version of their newspapers. Community journalists in Cross River still operate an analogue journalism. These corroborate Radcliffe's (2018) work that local media outlets still find it difficult to adapt to digital technologies as most of them still don't have website. Besides, it supports Christian, John and Mark's (1993) view that one of the fundamental weaknesses of community journalism is its resistance to change. However, the findings contrast Meyer and Daniels's (2011) assertion that news organisations, including community media, are shifting their product (news) to the Web, perhaps to find out how their audience react differently to online information.

However, these answer the RQ1 that though majority of local/community journalists are yet to adapt to the technological innovations and application of new media tools in the cause of carrying out their professional duties especially in this era of digital communication, but at least a few journalists have queued into the new information age.

The findings justify the theory of technological determinism which advocates the influence of technology on the society. The theory is also interested in how the journalists operate within a given technological era following the emergence of information communication infrastructures and how journalists deploy these technologies in achieving a timely and credible presence on the news-stands for print and airtime for broadcast.

RQ2: What exactly are the constraints militating against community journalism practice?

Findings in Tables 5-7 reveal that local journalists frown at socio-cultural cultural and historical inhibitions that pose great challenge in reporting the local communities. Besides, it reveals that community journalists have failed to report citizens' priorities, concerns and perspectives on different local issues. This is against the objective community journalism which is to capture local crime, chieftaincy affairs; school sports, marriages and burials that are hitherto neglected by national or big media outlets. This suggests that community journalists rather pay more attention to politics and elitist journalism, thereby attesting to Franklin' (2006) argument that in the new millennium, local newspapers are only local in name as town or city written on the newspapers' masthead may be one of the remaining features.

This study again finds out that the majority of the respondents, (35/90%), also frown at proliferation of online news as it negatively affect their revenue streams due to low patronage of community newspapers by rural dwellers. These community readers have migrated to the Internet surfing for free news and information. This of course, supports authenticates Agbese's (2017) argument that low patronage of community newspapers militates against the commercial interest and, therefore, publishers don't consider it good business to invest much money in community newspaper for the interest of rural people.

Findings from this section have answered the research question with regard to the constraints militating against community journalism practice.

RQ3: What are the prospects of community journalists using the tools of new media technologies?

The data presented in Tables 8-11 show that all the local journalists (39/100%) hold on tenaciously to the canons of journalism which entails journalists being objective, accurate, fair to all and responsible in their reportage, thereby validating Hasan's (2010) view that one of the aims of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information to be able to function in a free society.

Finding also reveals that the majority of the local journalists, (37/95%) crave for content collaboration between big news organisations on one hand and among local journalists, citizens and community news organisations on the other hand. This aims at improving the quality of news and then gives local news national outlook, thereby making the community have a sense of belonging just as it makes the community newspapers more interactive and participatory. This, however, vindicates Robinson's (2013) argument that time is ripe for reciprocal journalism that advocates for mutual dependence between journalists and audiences, facilitated by digital media and may lead to better journalism in the community context.

Respondents in this study equally advocate for a return to investigative journalism and creation of neighbourhood pages perhaps as one of the remedies against the current trend of desk journalism (Peterson and Domingo, 2008). This would not only restore the quality of news, but would restore readers' trust and confidence, thereby corroborating Radcliffe's (2018) suggestion that one of the ways of to rebuild trust and confidence in readers or audience is for local news organisations to consistently produce quality news that would add value to communities.

Further finding also reveals that the majority of the local journalists are totally in support of improving upon the revenue streams of their news organisations through monetisation of online news. They, therefore, suggest that local news organisations better hook up to business models available online, thereby justifying the research question with regard to prospects and opportunities available for community journalists if they embrace the new technologies and incorporate new media tools in community journalism reporting. The findings again justify the Democratic participant media theory which advocates the establishment of local media, interactive and participatory media forms which are better than big media.

Conclusion and recommendations

Having analysed the data and discussed the research questions' findings, this study establishes the fact that community newspaper has become a sine qua non for rural integration as it gives the grassroots a voice in affairs that concern them. The paper concludes that this can be made possible, in this digital age, if there is a link between community journalists and the citizens. The research is an exploratory work in the field of community journalism, but its assumptions are important for the practice of journalism in a society that aspires to democratise the media and be heard in the global community.

In the light of the above, this paper recommends as follows:

1. That Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and news media organisations should organise trainings for community journalists to keep them abreast of current trends in community reporting. The trainings and workshops should focus on how to adapt to new media

technologies to not only help raise their revenue base, but improve upon their reporting skills.

2. That local news organisations and NUJ should partner with a few international agencies such as the Philippine-based Centre for Community Journalism Development (CCJD); a USA-based International Journalists Network (IJNet) and Maastrich, Netherlands-based European Journalism Centre (EJC) with a view to securing funds and exchange programmes for the purpose of promoting community journalism.
3. That government should invest in rural telephony with a view to making the Internet services accessible and affordable to community journalists and rural dwellers. This would not only make it easy for them to access news and information, but would in turn encourage and accelerate participatory community journalism.

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