

**Negotiating inclusion: new 'alternative' media and the institutional  
journalistic practices of print journalists in Nigeria**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Student Declaration**

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution.

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## ABSTRACT

This study uses an ethnographic approach (in-depth interviews and newsrooms observations) combined with Critical Discourse Analysis to closely interrogate how journalists in four Nigerian print newsrooms; *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Guardian*, appropriate 'alternative media' content and new media technologies in their newsmaking practices. The choice of these four newsrooms enables a detailed reading of how the process of appropriating new media technologies and alternative media content takes place in Nigerian print newsrooms. The study explores how and whether (or not) these appropriations are impacting on institutional practices of Nigerian print journalists. It also sheds light on the spaces which new media technologies negotiate in these newsrooms and how these journalists negotiate the appropriation of alternative media content. Beyond the everyday newsmaking practices, the study uses the reporting of two key events; the Nigerian elections of 2011 and the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of 2012 to show how journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms negotiate their appropriation of alternative media content and new media technologies in reporting key events. Together, these examples highlight the creative appropriation of new media technologies in Nigerian print newsrooms and the need to avoid technological determinist perspectives which totalise experiences elsewhere as being universal. The study therefore reinvigorates the continued relevance of newsroom ethnography and argues that a sociological approach, which importantly considers local context imperatives, remains useful in understanding how Nigerian print journalists appropriate new media technologies and the resulting alternative journalisms. The findings of the study provide useful insights into the journalistic cultures in Nigerian print newsrooms and highlights how these journalists negotiate their appropriation of alternative media content. While the (disruptive) impact of new media technologies on newsmaking practices in these newsrooms cannot be ignored, the study finds that a number of local context factors constrain and shape how appropriations take place in these newsrooms. Thus, Nigerian print journalists appropriate alternative media and new media technologies to suit traditional journalistic practices. The study's contribution to knowledge therefore lies in acknowledging that, beyond binary assumptions about the impact of new media technologies on journalism practices in Africa, particularly Nigeria, there is the need to consider the creative and complex ways in which journalists in these contexts appropriate these technologies. This study should thus be read as a step towards that end.

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## ACRONYMS

BB BlackBerry

BBM BlackBerry Messenger

BIS BlackBerry Internet Service

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

INEC Independent National Electoral Commission

LASTMA Lagos State Traffic Management Authority

NEPA National Electric Power Authority

NLC Nigeria Labour Congress

NMA Nigerian Medical Association

NYSC National Youth Service Corps

PHCN Power Holding Corporation of Nigeria

TUC Trade Union Congress

UGC User Generated Content



## **DEDICATION**

For my Lord and King: the Triune God

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### Journal articles

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### Book chapters

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Akinfemisoye, M. 2015. Negotiating convergence: 'Alternative' journalism and institutional practices of Nigerian journalists". In H.M Mabwezara (Ed.) *Digital Technologies and the Evolving African Newsroom: Towards an African Digital Journalism Epistemology*. London: Routledge

Akinfemisoye, M. 2014. Challenging hegemonic media practices: Of 'alternative' media and Nigeria's democracy. In C. Paterson (Ed.) *Journalism and Social Media in Africa: Studies in Innovation and Transformation*. London: Routledge

Akinfemisoye, M., and Deffor, S. 2014 Finding viable business models for intermediate and developing world broadcast, print and online newspaper sectors. In P.J Anderson, G. Ogola & M. Williams (Eds.), *The Future of Quality News Journalism: A Cross-Continental Analysis*. London: Routledge

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction and Background to the study

That the proliferation of new information and communication technologies has sparked debates among media scholars is not new. However, there have been many utopian and untested assumptions about what these ‘new’ technologies signal for Africa. This has seen debates which revolve around the idea of the continent “leapfrogging” its way through various aspects of development (Alzouma, 2005; Banda et al, 2009:1; Adamolekun, 1996). This trend of discourse is not only lopsided and misleading, but it also ignores the complexities that shape and constrain how these ‘new’ media technologies are appropriated in various contexts. For journalism in Africa, much attention has been given, for example, to how the proliferation of new media technologies are playing influential roles in the democratisation process (Moyo, 2009; Wasserman, 2005), the role of these tools during political transitions (Agbese, 2006) and how they are increasingly being used by dissenting voices during protests ( see for example, Mare, 2014a; Mudhai, 2004) in providing counter-hegemonic discourses. In writing about these new media technologies and journalism practices in Nigeria, scholars have mostly adopted a technological determinist stance which celebrates the Internet, for instance, as ‘revolutionising’ the Nigerian mainstream media (See Kperogi, 2011). While these studies remain important in understanding trends on the continent, there is however a paucity of empirical research that interrogates how journalists in African print newsrooms appropriate these new media technologies, and the content that circulate on these platforms, what I refer to as ‘alternative media’ and the resulting ‘alternative journalisms’ (I explain how I conceptualise these terms within the context of this study shortly), in their everyday newsmaking practices. This study therefore attempts a “rejection of deterministic perspective” (Robinson, 2009:889) in understanding how alternative journalisms are shaping (or not) the practices of mainstream print journalists in Nigeria; specifically learning how the everyday practices are influenced, if at all, by alternative journalisms.

Against this backdrop, this study explores a site of cultural production that has been described as one of the most resilient parts of Nigeria’s civil society, about which no previous ethnographic study exists--- the Nigerian print newsroom. This thesis examines the everyday practices of journalists in four Nigerian newspaper newsrooms to case study how mainstream print journalists in Nigeria appropriate what I refer to as new ‘alternative’ media in the newsmaking process. I am interested in teasing out



Map of the Federal Republic of Nigeria showing the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory<sup>1</sup>

whether (or not) and more importantly how these appropriations impact on the institutional routines and practices of these journalists.

The period of the 1990s marked an epochal turn in the history of many countries in Africa. Politically, these changes swept beyond the former Soviet Union, Asia, and Latin America to Africa where democracy began to be regarded as a preferred system of government. For Nigeria, the legalisation of political parties' formation in the 1990s and several activities towards democratisation during the same period, as in many African countries, also coincided with the proliferation of new media technologies on the continent and raised the hope that Africa was advancing the democratisation project. The proliferation of new information and communication technologies particularly spurred debates about the potential of new digital technologies to revolutionise and even leapfrog "some stages of development" in Africa and in so doing "positing new media technology as *deterministic* of social progress" (Banda et al, 2009:1).

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved August 31 2015 from <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/nigeria-administrative-map.htm>

For the Nigerian news media, this period also marked a move towards media plurality with the promulgation in 1992 of the Electronic Privatisation Decree which led to the deregulation of the broadcast media and saw the emergence of other players into the formerly government-controlled arena of broadcasting. The influx of new media technologies at this time also saw print journalists, using these tools in their guerrilla journalism activities as a way of clamouring for a transition to civil rule (Agbese, 2006; Ibelema, 2003; Olukotun, 2002a). While the presence of new media technologies has been useful in opening up otherwise closed spaces, there have been calls for caution in the way generalisations are made about what the presence of these new information and communication technologies, mean for media plurality in the nascent democracies of the Global South. As Alzouma (2005: 351) argues, “the general conditions in which people are living do not change suddenly with the introduction of the internet”, as local context factors remain increasingly central to how these technologies are adopted and appropriated.

For journalism practices in Africa, the presence of new digital technologies has been said to be useful, for instance, in improving the physical qualities of newspapers, while the Internet is believed to be providing a platform for mainstream journalists to publish news faster than what used to be the trend. (Akintoye and Popoola, 2010). Elsewhere, the presence of the new information and communication technologies has been credited not only for increasing efficiency among journalists but also with creating a shift in the balance of power and blurring the lines between Rosen’s (2006) “the-people-formerly-known-as-the-audience” and professional journalists. The ensuing discourse has been that with the adoption of the Internet and other new information and communication technologies, journalistic practices are increasingly becoming interactive (Heinrich, 2013) with audiences becoming ‘producers’ who are “involved in produsage – the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (Bruns, 2007:4).

Media scholars have also argued that journalism is undergoing a transformation it has never witnessed since its inception in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Deuze, 2008b; Fenton, 2009; Heinrich, 2011; McNair, 2006; Russell, 2011). Others like Bruns, have argued that, with the increase in new information and communication technologies, the news production processes in mainstream media newsrooms have been altered with mainstream journalists becoming ‘*gatewatchers*’ (Bruns, 2005), together with the audience. These concomitant changes, mostly from newsrooms in the developed economies of the West,



have received substantial academic attention (Deuze 2008b; Fenton 2009; Heinrich, 2011; Hermida, 2011; McNair, 2006; Russell, 2011; Robinson, 2010; Singer, 2009). These findings have led scholars to argue that with the influx of User Generated Content (UGC) and other 'alternative' non-mainstream journalisms, mainstream journalists are increasingly having to practice ambient journalism (Hermida, 2010), network journalism (Heinrich, 2013), networked journalism (Beckett, 2010; Jarvis, 2006; Russell, 2011), networked-convergent journalism (Mudhai, 2011) among others. Hermida (2012:659), in interrogating how the proliferation of new information and communication technologies which enable social media thrive, argues that it is "influencing the core journalistic value of verification" where "open, networked digital media tools challenge the individualistic, top-down ideology of traditional journalism." While these arguments may indeed capture what the presence of alternative media mean for mainstream journalism practices in the developed democracies and countries of the Global North, they do not necessarily consider the contextual factors that may shape and constrain such impact on the institutional routines and practices of professional journalists in African newsrooms.

Thus, this study attempts to explore what the proliferation of new media technologies might mean for the everyday newsmaking practices of mainstream journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms. This study takes its root within the theoretical field of the sociology of journalism. It is premised on the assumption that to understand how and whether (or not) the proliferation of alternative media and its associated journalisms are impacting on the institutional practices of journalists, a sociological approach which takes into consideration the relationship between both internal and external factors remains pivotal.

#### *Definitions of 'Alternative media' and 'Alternative journalism' within the context of this study*

In advancing the sociology of journalism approach to studying how the appropriation of content from 'alternative media' sites takes place in Nigerian print newsrooms, it is useful, for the purpose of scholarly delineation to discuss how this study defines 'alternative media' and 'alternative journalism'. While these terms have been variously defined and conceived, the choice of this nomenclature within the context of this study is used as 'non-mainstream' media content. Perhaps, a question one might ask is what is alternative about 'alternative media' and 'alternative journalism'? The

looseness of these terms lends them to multiple definitions and means that an all-encompassing definition remains elusive (Fenton and Barassi, 2011). Historically, alternative media have referred to medium/media used by dissenting ‘marginalised’ voices seeking to provide ‘counter-hegemonic’ discourses and challenge dominant discourses. These terms have also been used to refer to ‘radical’ media practices (Atton and Hamilton, 2008).

Thus, in spite of the ‘slipperiness’ of alternative media and alternative journalism, they have attracted attention in media and cultural studies (Atton, 2002; Atton, 2013; Atton and Couldry, 2003; Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Atton and Wickenden, 2005; Couldry and Curran, 2003; Hackett and Carroll, 2006; Harcup, 2012; Norris, 1999; Rodriguez, 2001). In exploring how mainstream print journalists in Nigerian newsrooms incorporate and appropriate ‘content’ from non-mainstream sources, mostly mediated by new information and communication technologies, I refer to these ‘content providers’ as alternative media and their practices as alternative journalism. ‘Alternative media’ in this sense provides a wider ‘cloth’ with which to conceptualise these non-mainstream journalistic practices that have been regarded as impacting on mainstream journalism.

In describing alternative media, an approach that one might consider is Atton and Couldry’s (2003: 579) suggestion that alternative media refers to “media produced outside mainstream media institutions and networks”. This definition is not limited to content mediated by new media technologies alone but incorporates others that use other medium. It is noteworthy here too that within the African context, alternative media are not necessarily products of new information and communication technologies. During the colonial era, many African nationalists such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria used various alternative media platforms to contest continued colonial presence on the continent (Mano, 2008; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Olukotun (2004a) reminds us that the *ewi* (praise-songs) of the Yorubas served as avenues for expressing dissent (see also, Barber, 1991). More recently, Mano (2011) too observes that popular music in Africa has variously served as alternative media and a challenge to hegemonic discourses, particularly during the transition to civil rule in many African countries. While I attempt to refrain from leaning towards binaries of what alternative media is (or not), it is however, useful to stress the distinction scholars have made between mainstream media and ‘alternative’ media, broadly conceived. For Hamilton (2001) alternative media are distinct from mainstream media in that they are “deprofessionalized, decapitalized and deinstitutionalized” (Hamilton 2001, cited in Atton, 2002:25). As such, alternative media are “available to ordinary people without the necessity of professional training...and they

must take place in settings other than media institutions or similar systems” (Atton, 2002:25). Couldry and Curran (2003:7) define alternative media as “media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations”. Clemencia Rodriguez’s (2001) use of “citizens’ media” as alternative media follows Downing’s (1984) conceptualisation of the term as radical media. For her, the focus is that these non-mainstream media enables citizens’ empowerment and provide platforms to represent themselves. Rodriguez further argues that the emphasis in the idea of citizens’ media is not so much about its counter-hegemonic stance but more about providing ‘ordinary’ citizens a platform to express themselves. These expressions however challenge the dominant discourses in the ways they are used as citizens’ empowerment. A theme common to the various definitions and forms of alternative media/ journalism is the idea of people who are not professional journalists who ‘chance’ on newsworthy events and provide eyewitness accounts or “the application of their own specialist, amateur knowledge to the issues being reported” (Atton and Hamilton, 2008:126).

While I by no means attempt a reductive delineation of alternative media and alternative journalism, I refer to these terms, within the context of this study, as newsworthy information or content provided by *outsiders*, who may not necessarily be affiliated to any mainstream media organisation or paid for engaging in such contributions. For the purpose of this study, alternative media and alternative journalism, are used interchangeably and thus defined as ‘journalism’ produced by outsiders and disseminated on non-mainstream media platforms, mediated by new information and communication technologies which may be appropriated by mainstream journalists in the news production process.

Beyond the idea of distinguishing between alternative media and mainstream media along the lines of the former being ‘non-mainstream’, there is also the fact that mainstream journalists use these alternative media. For instance, Jordaan’s (2014) study of how mainstream journalists in two South African newsrooms use social media speaks to the fact that these platforms are not only meant for ‘outsiders’. However, in appropriating the terms alternative media and alternative journalism as umbrella terms for conceptualising content, also dubbed as user (read ‘outsider’) generated content (UGC), which are mostly produced “outside mainstream media networks”, I do not include tweets or Facebook updates, for example, by mainstream journalists themselves. Rather, I limit the definition of alternative media and alternative journalism, within the context of this study, as mentioned earlier to content produced by ‘outsiders’ and

mediated by new information and communication technologies and follow Atton and Couldry's (2003: 579) definition as "media produced outside mainstream media institutions and networks".

### **1.1 Original contribution of this study**

This study differs from others in not only being the first ethnographic study of Nigerian print newsrooms to date but also in providing an African, and particularly Nigerian perspective on how and whether (or not) the everyday newsmaking practices of journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are shaped and constrained, if at all, by alternative journalisms. While new information and communication technologies continue to proliferate in Nigeria, for instance with Internet penetration rising from 0.16% in 2000 to 39.7% as at June 2014 (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2014), there is a paucity of empirical research that interrogates how these alternative media impact (or otherwise) on the institutional practices of print journalists in Nigeria. Agbese's (2006) study makes an important contribution in exploring how information and communication technologies aided Nigerian journalists' work during the transition to civil rule in the 1990s. Kperogi's (2011) study of diasporic online news media owned and maintained by Nigerians in diaspora too, has attempted to show that the reporting of events in Nigeria by these online news sites challenges the media at home (read Nigerian press). There are also others (Olukotun, 2002a, 2000, 2004a, 2004b; Ibelema, 2003, 2008, 2012; Yusha'u, 2009) which have provided useful insights on various aspects of the Nigerian press, from its role during the military era and subsequent transition to civil rule, during election periods and its role in Nigeria's political process, as well as its reporting of key societal issues such as corruption. Olukotun and Seteolu's (2001) study revealed how the Nigerian print media, in the wake of the Fourth republic in 1999, used the Internet, among other sources in exposing the certificate forgery of the former Speaker of the lower legislative house (The House of representatives), Alhaji Salisu Buhari. The speaker was said to have failed to meet the minimum age requirement to be a member of the House and also lied that he had attended the University of Toronto. He was forced to eventually resign, in part, because many Nigerian newspapers ran various reports about the 'scandal' (Dare, 2011).

These studies arguably provide insights and analyses about the Nigerian press which this thesis does not intend to compete with. What this thesis rather does is to critically interrogate how print journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms appropriate alternative media in their everyday news production process in learning how the process of appropriation takes place. I argue that the absence of an ethnographic study of Nigerian

print newsrooms portends a significant lacuna in understanding how journalists in these newsrooms appropriate alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices.

In deploying an ethnographic approach to studying four Nigerian print newsrooms, this study attempts to make an important contribution to African media scholarship by exploring how and whether the appropriation of alternative media by Nigerian print journalists is necessarily facilitating a “centring and decentring” (Ogola, 2014) of non-mainstream voices. Teasing out how these appropriations in Nigerian print newsroom take place, is useful as conclusions about the impact of new media on various aspects in Africa have been appropriated, as Ibelema (2008:36) observes, “out of context [and] sometimes awkwardly”. I therefore concur with Wasserman (2010:29) on the urgency for empirically-grounded studies, particularly from non-Western contexts that:

[W]ill puncture the often exaggerated and technological-determinist views of the potential of new media technologies for journalism, by studying the use of these technologies within the overarching structural economic conditions as well as their actual everyday use... [and] the creative ways in which [mainstream journalists] in the South appropriate and adapt technologies to suit their various socio-cultural and economic settings.

This study thus attempts to make a useful interjection towards that end.

## **1.2 Research aim, objectives and methodological approach**

With these premises in mind, the aim of this research is to critically examine the space that these various forms of ‘alternative’ media are negotiating within Nigeria’s media landscape. With a focus on Nigerian newspapers which have remained “one of the most resilient and daring segments of Nigeria’s civil society” (Olukotun, 2004a:71), we investigate how the notion of networked journalism, defined in part as professional and non-professional journalists working together in the news production process is (or not) taking centre stage in Nigerian print newsrooms, and particularly whether this was evidenced in the reportage of Nigeria’s elections of 2011 and the Occupy Nigeria protests of 2012. This study also closely examines whether the permeation of new digital technologies, which scholars say is making audiences become ‘producers’ and journalists ‘gatewatchers’ (Bruns, 2007; 2011) together with everyone else, is necessarily evident in Nigerian newsrooms and if indeed it is capable of democratising the Nigerian mediasphere and enabling the inclusion of the many voices at the margins in the news

production process. This study thus attempts to interrogate whether the presence of new information and communication technologies, which has brought on an upsurge in the various forms of non-mainstream journalism, is (re)shaping journalism practices in mainstream print newsrooms in Nigeria as well as whether ‘new’ newsroom cultures are (or not) emerging. This broad aim thus leads to the following specific research objectives:

- i. To explore how Nigerian print journalists use and appropriate alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices.
- ii. To interrogate the extent to which the appropriation of alternative media is (or not) redefining and challenging institutional journalistic routines and practices in Nigerian print newsrooms.
- iii. To probe whether local context factors influence how print journalists in Nigeria include non-mainstream alternative media in their coverage of key events.

In achieving the aim and objectives of this research, this study adopts a qualitative approach, using an inductive research approach, to understand how journalists in these newsrooms behave and to uncover the meanings of their daily routines and practices. The qualitative approach deployed in this study combines ethnography of Nigerian print newsrooms and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of news texts, to provide a reading of current trends and practices in Nigerian print newsrooms and how Nigerian journalists include (or exclude) alternative media content in their reporting. Alongside examining everyday newsmaking practices, this study focuses on the coverage of the elections of 2011 and the Occupy Nigeria protests of 2012 as empirical examples.

Earlier newsroom studies and particularly the seminal works of Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1979) which examined the institutional routines of journalists working at four different news organisations in the United States have continued to inspire ethnographic newsroom studies. While there are few emerging newsroom ethnography studies that tell us how mainstream journalists in some African newsrooms are adopting new digital technologies, for example, Mabweazara’s (2010a) insightful ethnographic study of how mainstream print journalists in Zimbabwean newsrooms are deploying new technologies, most studies on the Nigerian press favour the quantitative survey approach (Salawu,

2009). Therefore, deploying an ethnographic approach to studying print mainstream journalists in Nigeria remains useful in investigating the continuities, discontinuities and indeed the ambiguities that permeate newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms. Ethnography of newsrooms has remained an important method for understanding the journalism profession. Thus, this study interrogates what the proliferation of new information and communication technologies might mean within the context of Nigerian print mainstream newsrooms by providing a “nuanced-from-within- analyses” of current trends in these newsrooms.

In hinging this study on the sociology of journalism as a theoretical framework for unpacking newswork in Nigerian print newsrooms, this study takes into account the centrality of local context factors in the performance of journalistic activities. This follows in the tradition of earlier newsrooms studies which have helped shape our understanding of the news production process. As Cottle (2003:5) argues, “if we want to understand why media representations assume the forms that they do, we cannot rely upon the readings of media text alone, no matter how analytically refined and methodologically sophisticated these may be”. It is in this light that the study draws on ethnography of newsrooms and a Critical Discourse Analysis of news texts.

### **1.3 Research context**

The debates around and about media plurality in Africa can not necessarily be separated from the wider ‘wave of democratisation’ (Huntington, 1993) which blew across the continent during the 1990s. While the democratisation project which was born in many African countries in the 1990s saw varying attempts at opening up formerly closed and government-controlled spaces, it remains fraught with various contextual challenges. Thus, in spite of the deregulation of the mainstream media sector this has not necessarily translated into media freedom or the democratisation of the mainstream media landscape. As Blankson(2007: 22) observes “[t]rue media independence and freedom remain quite vulnerable in many [African] countries [where] [m]edia houses and professionals continue to face serious external and internal constraints as they attempt to redefine their new roles and responsibilities in their new [and nascent] democracies.”

Thus, in the face of these constraints, journalists in Africa have broadly continued to marginalise the voices of the people they claim to serve and particularly of those that do not conform to their profit-making ideals. Nyamnjoh (2005b:5 ) further argues that the rhetoric of liberal democracy in Africa is at odds with the “reality of personhood and

agency in Africa, which is a lot more complex than provided for in liberal democratic notions of rights and empowerment.” While this narrative may in fact suggest that journalism practices in Africa are a replica of Western media practices, it is also important to note that Africans, including journalists, have continued to creatively appropriate Western ideas to suit local contexts in their everyday lives and practices. This thus draws attention to the fact that journalism does not exist in isolation of the environment within which it is practiced.

While the very notion of ‘democracy’ remains problematic in that it describes a participatory environment in a broad sense, it also comes with contestations and resistance. In the context of this study, the democratisation of the media is used to the extent that alternative voices are appropriated and included (or not) in the news production process.

Nigeria, as a territory, is home to about 166.6 million people <sup>2</sup> and although a recent survey by Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2014) ranks it 112 out of 180 countries according to a press freedom index, it has a lively media scene. With over 100 newspapers and magazines, mostly privately-owned and commercial in outlook, Nigeria boasts of having the largest press in Africa (BBC News Africa, Nigeria profile, July 2012). The vibrancy of its press thus makes it a valuable site of inquiry for unpacking how and whether the proliferation of new ‘alternative’ media practices are necessarily engendering an open, more inclusive press that remains key in actualising the country’s democratisation project.

In further underscoring the central position which newspapers in Nigeria occupy, Olukotun (2004a: 71) notes that “the print media are emphasised because...they continue to exercise considerable influence on policymaking”. However, the exact statistics for Nigerian newspapers’ circulation and readership is unknown because “Nigerian newspapers ...do not make such information available to the public” (Akingbulu and Bussiek 2010, 9). This is because newspapers have always inflated their circulation figures to attract advertisers and when certain bodies, such as the survey conducted by the Audit Bureau of Circulations in the 1980s, newspaper houses do not agree with such figures. While circulations figures may cause rancour among newspaper houses, these figures, when available, do not necessarily capture newspaper readership in Nigeria.

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<sup>2</sup> Census figures in Nigeria have always been divisive. Quota system and zoning in Nigeria means that resources are distributed according to the population strength of the various ethnic groups. Thus, this has seen different ethnic groups trying to inflate census figures to their own advantage, thus making it almost impossible to have a true picture of the exact population. The figure quoted above is that which is available on the BBC Nigeria profile website and has the United Nations as its source <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949547>



Possible factors responsible for this may be due to the sharing culture among Nigerians and other West Africans, who as Nyamnjoh (2004:54) puts it have a culture of “single-owner-multiple-user”, which sees few people serving as nodes in a network structure thereby making it possible for more than one person to read or share a single newspaper. Although Nyamnjoh here refers to the mobile phone where owners become “points-of-presence” connecting others who may not own mobile phones, it is also applicable to newspaper readership in Nigeria. There are various unofficial newspaper readers’ association where the newspaper vendor is paid a token for the readers to read the newspaper at the newsstand and return such copies without purchasing any. Although newspaper circulation figures in Nigeria are mostly unreliable, even when such are available, they are not necessarily reflective of readership.

In focusing on Nigerian newspapers, four privately-owned national dailies, which are relatively popular among the Nigerian reading public and circulate nationally were sampled for this study. Although it has been argued that the Nigerian press is tailored along ethnic lines and as such no newspaper should refer to itself as being a national publication, (Adebanwi, 2002; See also Yusha’u, 2009) our interest in this study goes beyond the question of whether the Nigerian press is ‘national’ or not to examining what implications the presence of alternative media has for the institutional newsmaking practices of journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms.

Most newspaper organisations in Nigeria have their headquarters in Lagos, South-West Nigeria. Being the former capital of Nigeria, Falola (1999:1) notes that “Lagos remains the hub of diplomatic, media, commercial and banking activities. Three of the four newspapers included in this thesis have their head offices in Lagos. The newspapers are: *The Punch*, which describes itself as being the most widely read newspaper, is a family-owned media organisation with headquarters in Lagos; *Vanguard*, owned by Vanguard Media Limited with headquarters in Lagos and established by a journalist; *Guardian* owned by Guardian Newspapers Limited with headquarters in Lagos. The fourth, *Nigerian Tribune* is Nigeria’s oldest surviving private newspaper established by the first Premier of Nigeria’s Western region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Adesoji and Alimi, 2012) and is headquartered in Ibadan, a city in the South- West of Nigeria.

### 1.3.1 A cursory overview of the Nigerian press

The birth of journalism in Nigeria predates the creation in 1914 of the entity and area now referred to as Nigeria. The introduction of the printing press in Calabar in 1846 and the subsequent advent of Reverend Henry Townsend's *Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba* (translated as the newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba people) heralded the arrival of the newspaper in Nigeria. Although there are debates about the arrival, before the 1859 birth of the *Iwe Irohin*, of newspaper publishing in northern part of Nigeria as early as the fourteenth century, what scholars generally agree on is that the media in Nigeria started as a "largely non- African colonial media that were either 'evangelical' or served as the informational arm of expanding empires" (Musa, 2009:35). This colonial creation has since continued to impact on the structure and posture of the press not only in Nigeria, but in other parts of Africa which share similar media histories.

The establishment of this missionary paper started by Reverend Henry Townsend marked the formal arrival of newspaper and mainstream journalism broadly conceived in Nigeria. In historicising the advent of the press in Nigeria, Omu(1978) argues that although it started as a medium for propagating Christianity and Western education, the "early press was inevitably a political press" (Omu, 1978:11) as it served as an outlet for various groups and interests to call for an end to British colonisation. More newspapers were to join the Nigerian media scene but were greeted with repression from the colonial masters. For instance, when in 1863 *The Anglo-African* was started by Robert Campbell, there already existed a paper tax which was put in place by the colonial administrator, Governor Freeman in 1862 (Golding and Elliot, 1979) to discourage the proliferation of "a dangerous instrument in the hands of semi-civilised Negroes" (Omu, 1968:288)

The development of the newspaper in Nigeria, like elsewhere in Africa, as Wilcox (1974:76) observers, "did not stem from the concepts of *individual* freedom but from the background of *national* freedom from colonial rule". This accounted for the nationalist stance, against the colonial powers, which most of the newspapers established during the pre-independence era took until 1960, when Nigeria gained independence from Britain. In writing about the history of the press in Africa, Mano (2008:130) points out that:

[F]actors that led to a viable early newspaper sector in West Africa included the presence of a large population that was western-educated and the absence of a colonial settler population that could undermine the development of the press in West Africa, as it did in other regions of Africa.

With the official end of colonialism that saw many countries in Africa, including Nigeria achieve independence in the 1960s, the media soon became extended mouthpieces of those at the reins of government who used the media to further propagate some of their nationalist ideals. In summarising the history of the Nigerian press, Golding and Elliot (1979:31) argue that “Nigerian journalism was ...created by anti-colonial protest, baptised in the waters of nationalist propaganda and matured in party politics”.

For the most part of the 39 years between 1960, when Nigeria gained independence from Britain, and 1999, when it made a transition to civil rule, the country was run by military dictators. During this period, particularly between the 1980s and the 1990s, several draconian laws which greatly hampered media freedom were promulgated. For instance, it was during this period that two editors of the *Guardian* Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor, were imprisoned in 1984 under General Muhammadu Buhari’s regime for reporting and publishing “falsehoods about an administrative reshuffle in the External Affairs ministry” (Agbese, 2006:50). Another renowned investigative journalist, editor and co-founder of *Newswatch* a news magazine, Dele Giwa, was also assassinated through a letter bomb in 1986. The military dictator in power at the time, General Babangida then proscribed his magazine, *Newswatch* for about six months the following year on the allegation that the magazine published a report on “the systems for the country’s return to democracy” (Agbese, 2006:38).

By the early 1990s the government-controlled broadcast media sector was deregulated. While this did not necessarily translate into total ‘liberalisation’ it at least meant that more players could join the media stage. Although the autocratic government in Nigeria at the time saw the rebranding of the Nigerian press, as Conteh-Morgan contends, as a challenge to “the professionalism, role and corporate security of the military as an institution”, (2000:341) other factors also contributed to making the deregulation of the otherwise government-controlled broadcast sector, a reality. While the deregulation marked a turning point in the history of the Nigerian press, it did not take long for the military regime to clamp down on the activities of journalists, with the promulgation of anti-press freedom decrees such as the *Nigerian Press Council Decree* No. 85 of 1992 and the *Newspapers Decree* No. 43 of 1993. There was also the Decree 22 of 1994 which, according to Falola (1999:197), allowed the then military dictator, General Sani Abacha “to detain anyone without reason and to deny them access to family members, lawyers and the judicial process”. The deregulation of the broadcast media sector in Nigeria came into effect on August 24th 1992 by the promulgation of the National Broadcasting

Commission Decree No. 38 (Nigerian Broadcasting Code, 2010:14). The promulgation of several anti-media laws made the period between 1993 and 1998 a tortuous one for the Nigerian press. Many media houses were closed down and journalists were imprisoned without trial. As Ibelema (2003:163) recounts, "[b]etween 1994 and 1995, for instance, three publishing houses, which by an editor's estimate accounted for 50 percent of Nigeria's newspaper market were simultaneously shut down for about 18 months".

In historicising the dark days of mainstream print journalism in Nigeria, Sunday Dare (2007) in his book, *Guerrilla journalism: Dispatches from the underground*, chronicles what he, as a journalist and newspaper editor during the 1990s, along with his colleagues, went through during the military regimes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, when many were imprisoned without trial and some went into exile. In the face of repressive promulgations, and the assassination and imprisonment of journalists (especially between 1995 and 1998), the media made tortuous progress when Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999. While the Nigerian press has been described as being, "among the forces that have shaped and continue to define the establishment of democracy" (Tettey 2001, 5), Agbese (2006:4) argues that the Nigerian press is also known for "its long history of political advocacy since its inception in 1859". However, scholars writing on the role of technology in Nigeria's democracy have pointed out that the presence of new information and communication technology tools played significant roles in ousting military regime in Nigeria especially in "making guerrilla journalism effective in Nigeria in many ways" (Agbese, 2006:2; See also Ibelema, 2003).

## **1.4 Thesis Outline**

This thesis has eight chapters. This introductory chapter sets the scene for the underpinning arguments of this study. It makes a case for interrogating what the proliferation and adoption of new information and communication technologies for information sharing and dissemination, broadly defined as alternative media, mean for mainstream journalism practices in Nigerian print newsrooms. Apart from the introduction and conclusion chapters, the chapters contained in this thesis overlap and are interconnected as they draw heavily from the ethnographic data collected in four Nigerian print newsrooms. Together, they attempt to illustrate how content from various non-mainstream alternative media platforms are appropriated by Nigerian print journalists. Through these appropriations, one can understand whether the Nigerian media landscape is necessarily 'open' and 'inclusive' of otherwise marginalised voices.

Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the media liberalisation project in relation to the Nigerian media landscape. It argues that while the impact of new information and communication technologies on various aspects of everyday life in Africa, and journalism on the continent cannot be ignored, the narrative of an ‘open’ and ‘inclusive’ media space remains a deferred dream. While highlighting how the mobile phone, for instance permeates various aspects of life, including journalism in Africa, the chapter argues that beyond the binaries of what new media technologies *do* or *not* to journalism, it remains useful to adopt a sociological approach in discussing the appropriations of these technologies in African, and particularly Nigerian print newsrooms. The chapter thus makes the case for a sociology of journalism approach to studying how Nigerian print journalists appropriate alternative media in their newsmaking practices.

Chapter 3 focuses on the philosophical underpinning and methodological approach of the study. It discusses the motivation for deploying a qualitative research approach and highlights the continued relevance of an ethnographic approach to studying newsrooms. The chapter also draws on Critical Discourse Analysis as an approach to analyse selected news texts on the reporting of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests in Chapter 6. The chapter then discusses the study’s sampling method and size; providing an audit trail of the researcher’s approach to selecting the sample size. It ends with the researcher’s reflection on the methods and a note on the ethical considerations of the study.

Chapters 4, 5 6 are the empirical chapters of the study. Chapter 4 discusses the everyday practices in the four newsrooms sampled in this study drawing from the ethnographic data collected in these newsrooms. The chapter discusses emerging trends in these newsrooms and interrogates the impact of alternative media on journalists’ institutional practices. It also questions how, and the extent to which alternative media impinges (or not) on the everyday newsmaking process in four Nigerian print newsrooms. While sections of this chapter mirror each other, it is precisely the messiness that ethnographic data produces that helps to capture a picture of what is going on in Nigerian print newsrooms. The chapter also highlights the centrality of the mobile phone in the newsmaking practices of this journalists and draws attention to ‘emerging’ newsroom cultures. By focusing on the everyday newsmaking practices of these journalists the aim is to show how they negotiate the inclusion of content from these alternative sources

Chapter 5 follows on from the everyday newsmaking practices to discussing some of the dilemmas which the journalists in these newsrooms associate with appropriating alternative media in the news production process. The chapter explores Nigerian print journalists' appropriation of alternative media content and the professional and ethical implications of these appropriations. It also zooms in on some of the ambiguities, contradictions and challenges that mark how these journalists adopt new media technologies and incorporate alternative media content in their reports. The chapter also provide insights into some of the contextual factors that mark the appropriations of alternative media content in Nigerian print newsrooms.

Chapter 6 takes a departure from what the journalists say they do and what the researcher observed them do in the newsrooms to interrogating what the journalistic output ---news texts--- reveal about changing (or not) practices in the way content from alternative media sites are appropriated in their coverage of key events. Using the reporting of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of 2012 as an illustrative example, the chapter analyses sample Nigerian newspaper texts drawing from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The aim is to interrogate whether (or not) Nigerian print journalists' appropriation of alternative media content in reporting the protests engendered an 'open' and 'inclusive' media space.

Chapter 7 again draws from the ethnographic data gathered in the course of this study and steers the discussion towards the reporting of the elections of 2011. The chapter explores some of the ways Nigerian print journalist respond to alternative media content in reporting key events such as the elections of 2011. For some of these journalists, reporting key societal events as elections is importantly the duty of professional journalists and as such collaboration with 'alternative media practitioners' is not promoted. For others, constraining contextual factors shape and constrain the extent to which content from alternative media sites are appropriated and constituted a dilemma in reporting the elections.

Chapter 8 provides the culmination of this study. This chapter provides a synthesis of the study's main findings against its aim and objectives. It discusses the study's contribution to knowledge and acknowledges the study's weaknesses and strengths. The chapter ends with suggestions for future studies and the researcher's reflexivity on the research process.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Confronting the dream deferred: Of ‘new’ media and the case for a sociological approach to studying the African media landscape**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter interrogates the extent to which the proliferation of new information and communication technologies is contributing to the actualization of Africa’s media liberalization project. It situates the study within the context of emerging research on what the presence of new information and communication technologies means for journalism practices in Nigeria. While advocating a non-deterministic approach, this chapter, through a review of relevant literature, provides an appraisal of how ‘inclusive’ and ‘democratic’ African, and in particular, Nigerian newsrooms are in appropriating new media technologies in their everyday news production practices. It also makes a case for a sociological approach to studying African, and particularly Nigerian print newsrooms.

The discussions in this chapter are divided into three sections. It begins with the discussions of the media liberalization project itself and the mixed reactions it has generated. It also highlights some of the contradictions that have emerged with the liberalisation process. The second section focuses on new information and communication technologies and how it has permeated various aspects of life in Africa, particularly journalism. I argue here that while the (disruptive) impact of the presence of alternative media on mainstream journalism cannot be ignored, there is need to be wary of narratives that universalise and totalise experiences elsewhere. The final section locates the study within the sociology of journalism tradition. I argue that beyond advocating ‘Afro-centric’ perspectives, certain ‘Western’-developed theories remain relevant in interrogating the impact of new information and communication technologies on institutional journalistic practices in Nigerian newsrooms.

## **2.1 The media democratisation process: A story of contradictions**

The 1990s, arguably, remain significant for the sweeping democratisation reforms in Africa. It triggered the deregulation of the media sector and the adoption of political pluralism. While the media, prior to this time, had become extended government mouthpieces, this period heralded the entry of private players into the media sector. As Banda (2010:8) puts it, there was “a rekindling of the African private media capital...presenting further opportunities to grow media as businesses and to inject pluralism into local media spaces.” For Nigeria, as elsewhere on the continent, the consequence of the deregulation of the media sector witnessed a flourishing landscape with the establishment of many radio and television stations (Hyden and Leslie, 2002). More newspapers and magazines also came on the scene, “firmly establishing an era of print media independent of party and government ownership” (Agbese, 2006:1; See also Ibelema, 2003). This meant a more open mediasphere that encouraged the participation of new voices.

However, while the media democratisation process was meant to energise the media to hold governments accountable, it did not necessarily usher in the new era that was anticipated. Rather, the process itself was fraught with many contradictions. Although the media reforms minimised the direct influence of the state on the media in many African countries, these governments devised ways of muzzling the press. For instance, In Nigeria, it was during this period that many repressive laws such as the Nigerian Press Council Decree No. 85 of 1992 and Newspapers Decree No. 43 of 1993 which hampered press freedom were promulgated. Journalists were arrested, imprisoned and in some cases assassinated. As a consequence, many Nigerian print journalists went underground between 1993 and 1998 (Agbaje, 1993), practicing a form of journalism that has been described as “guerrilla journalism” (Agbese, 2006; Dare, 2007). This involved a “hit-and-run style in which journalists operating from hideouts continued to publish opposition and critical journals in defiance of the state” (Olukotun, 2004b: 78). This period also coincided with the proliferation of new information and communication technologies on the continent. For journalism in Nigeria, these technologies were harnessed in organising the underground journalism practices during this period (Agbese, 2006). Thus, it is not an overstatement that the African media landscape witnessed phenomenal growth during the 1990s.

In spite of adopting one form of democracy or the other, from the 1990s onwards, in many countries in Africa, journalism continues to face challenges which undermine



the democratisation project. As Obijiofor (2015:122) puts it, “African journalists” are still “an endangered breed”. For example in Kenya, the government in 2007 proposed a bill that was meant to regulate press activities in the country. Although the bill was eventually scrapped (Obijiofor, 2015) the fact that it was even considered suggests one of the ways in which African governments have continued to muzzle the press. The story is the same in other parts of the continent where repressive laws are being enacted to curtail the freedom of the press. For example, Ogola (2015:94) observes that “The Gambia has one of the harshest laws on the right to freedom of expression in Africa.” Elsewhere on the continent, the story is scarcely different.

For journalism in Nigeria, the repressive atmosphere, in which journalists functioned before 1999 with the return to civil rule, still lingers. In spite of the passing of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill into law on May 24, 2011, eighteen years after it was first promoted by “three major civil society groups: the Nigeria Union of Journalists, the Media Rights Agenda and the Civil Liberties Organisation” (Ojebode, 2011:269), the FOI Act has neither provided journalists with more freedom nor is a ‘democratic’ and inclusive’ press yet to be seen. Journalists are often harassed while on duty with several cases of beating and assault (Obijiofor, 2015:125-126). This is in spite of having the freedom of the press enshrined in the country’s 1999 constitution. To date, there have been several cases of the state’s attempt at curtailing press freedom. In Nigeria for instance, in spite of freedom of the press enshrined in country’s 1999 constitution, there have been several cases of the government’s attempts and outright cases of hampering press freedom. In June 2014, for example, many prominent national newspapers were banned<sup>3</sup> from circulating in some cities including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Although this ban was soon lifted, the fact that there was an initial ban is reflective of many cases in Africa where the ruling class has seen to it that the press is muzzled and made to do the bidding of the ruling class (See for example Ogola, 2011, on the political economy of the media in Kenya). Thus, while one cannot ignore that the media democratisation project in Africa made way for a multiplicity of voices, the absence of an enabling environment where journalists are free to perform their societal duties is still a reality for many African journalists.

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<sup>3</sup>There were indications that the Nigerian government had on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June and Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> June confiscated and destroyed copies of about four national newspapers scheduled for distribution across some cities in the country and including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The media felt they were targets of the military because they had exposed the military’s inability to rescue the over 200 girls abducted in Chibok, Borno state. <http://www.punchng.com/news/gratuitous-military-sss-assault-on-the-press/>

Beyond journalists' harassment and the 'toothless' Freedom of Information Act is the situation where "[a]dvertisers and owners have often replaced [African] governments as censors or opened a more insidious front of censorship" (Kupe, 2004:354). I discuss this challenge more substantively later chapter in the thesis (see chapter 5). Many media organisations in Africa are not only intimidated but they are also forced to seek favours from governments and the big companies that provide the advertisements. Although the presence of these privately-owned media organisations mean that there is an alternative to government-owned stations, it is still the government in many African countries that financially oil the wheels of these privately-owned commercial media outlets. For example, in Nigeria, *Next* Newspaper published by Pulitzer- Prize winner Dele Olojede, stopped publishing both its print and online editions because advertisement dwindled. It was claimed<sup>4</sup> that the newspaper's 'controversial' reporting of issues in Nigeria might have been responsible for withdrawn adverts. This forced the newspaper from being published six days a week into becoming a weekly until it ceased publication in September 2011 having been in circulation for about three years.

Thus, as Kupe (2004: 354) observes, in spite of the "democratisation wave" of the 1990s that saw the embrace of multiparty system and the liberalization of the media sector, "in many African countries so-called reformist regimes have found ways of managing pluralist media environments, including surrogate forms of ownership masquerading as private and independent media". As such one finds that in spite of the deregulation of the media sector in many African countries, the pluralised media environment has not necessarily heralded an open and inclusive media landscape. Rather, various constraining forces coalesce to restrain the African media's ability to provide a critical space for the kind of free (political) engagement that was earlier anticipated. Nonetheless, the point needs to be made that the very existence of other non-state media outlets on the African media scene is a significant leap towards media democratisation.

The next section discusses how the pervasiveness of new information and communication in Africa is 'impacting' on journalism practices.

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<sup>4</sup> In reporting the 'demise' of *Next* newspaper, AP's Jon Gambrell noted that "[t]he newspaper's crusading political stance hurt ad sales, as the salutatory advertisements heaping praise on politicians and the country's elite...never made it into its editions." More on this report can be found here: <http://www.ned.org/cima/pulitzer-winners-nigeria-newspaper-stops-printing>

## **2.2 Journalism and new information and communication technologies in Africa**

The proliferation of new information and communication technologies in the 1990s came with celebratory and glowing praise about the role of these ‘new’ technologies in shaping various aspects of life in Africa (Adamolekun, 1996; Banda *et al*, 2009). For some, it signalled Africa’s way of ‘leapfrogging’ several stages of development with ICTs serving “as the engine of economic growth in Africa, affording hitherto technologically backward societies an opportunity to leapfrog some stages of development, to achieve an ‘information society’ or ‘knowledge society’” (Banda, 2010:10).

However, the assumption of ‘newness’ with reference to these technologies is problematic. Scholars argue that what is new, and indeed ‘new’ technology is relative to what existed previously (Lister et al, 2003). As Flew (2002:1) argues, there is usually “the temptation ...to equate ‘newness’ with what has been most recently developed”. Within the African context, Nyamnjoh (2005:4) argues that “Africa’s creativity simply cannot allow for simple dichotomies or distinctions between old and new technologies, since its people are daily modernising the indigenous and indigenising the modern with novel outcomes”. As such, defining ‘newness’ needs to be measured against the context within which such technologies are adopted. In the African context, not only is it reductive to distinguish between old and new but it in fact ignores the socio-cultural context which remains important for such discussions. As Nyamnjoh (2005:39-40) observes,

[o]ne finds on the continent people in tune with online newspapers and facilitated by multimedia connectivity, just as one finds straddlers of indigenous and modern media, creatively drawing on both to negotiate themselves through the communicative hurdles and hierarchies on the continent.

Therefore, what is new transcends beyond the most recent invention. For journalism in Africa, the discussions of the impact of new media technologies have been polarised between optimists who celebrate the technology, pessimists who highlight the negative features of the technology as undermining journalism practices and those who advocate a more nuanced sociological perspective to the debates. For some scholars, the proliferation of new information and communication technologies in Africa not only encourages citizen engagement with the media, but it is also “serving to ‘democratise’ the media.” (Banda, 2010:16). While the ‘transforming’ impact of these technologies on journalism in Africa, as elsewhere, (See for example Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Domingo

et al, 2008; Gillmor, 2004; Heinrich, 2011; Pavlik, 2001; Russell, 2011; Singer et al, 2011) cannot be ignored, the context of practice remains central to these discussions. In the economically-developed Western contexts for instance, the narrative is that the proliferation of these new technologies and the attendant alternative journalisms is making journalists become ‘gatewatchers’ together with everyone else, or indeed those now called *producers* (Bruns, 2005; 2007). It is also argued that the presence of new media technologies has given rise to various forms of alterative journalisms including grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2004); citizen media and citizen journalism (Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Bruns, 2007; Rodriguez, 2001) and is blurring the lines between producers and consumers (Nightingale and Ross, 2003).

However, there is need to acknowledge that although the institutional practices of journalists in African newsrooms follow those of Western newsrooms, they are still necessarily unique “because they emerged and operate under different socio-political, cultural and economic circumstances” (Salawu, 2009:82).

Nonetheless, journalists in African newsrooms as Berger (2005:1) observes, are “far from being mired in ‘backwardness’ or passively awaiting external salvation in regard to attempts to use ICTs. Nor are they lacking when it comes to critical perspectives with ICTs and global information networks”. In Nigeria, there have been attempts by some Nigerian newspapers to harness the opportunities the Internet affords by setting up a paywall system on their websites. *Punch* newspaper for instance in May 2009 attempted a paywall system on its website where readers were asked to pay a subscription fee of 1,500 Naira (approximately £5) per month to access its online content. Although this proved unsuccessful, with *Punch* reverting to making its online content free, the experiment in itself suggests that Nigerian print journalists, as their colleagues elsewhere on the continent, are proactively and creatively appropriating these new information and communication technologies for their advantages (Akinfemisoye and Deffor, 2014). It should also be pointed out that the idea of the paywall remains a controversial one even in the economically- developed Western contexts (Williams, 2014).

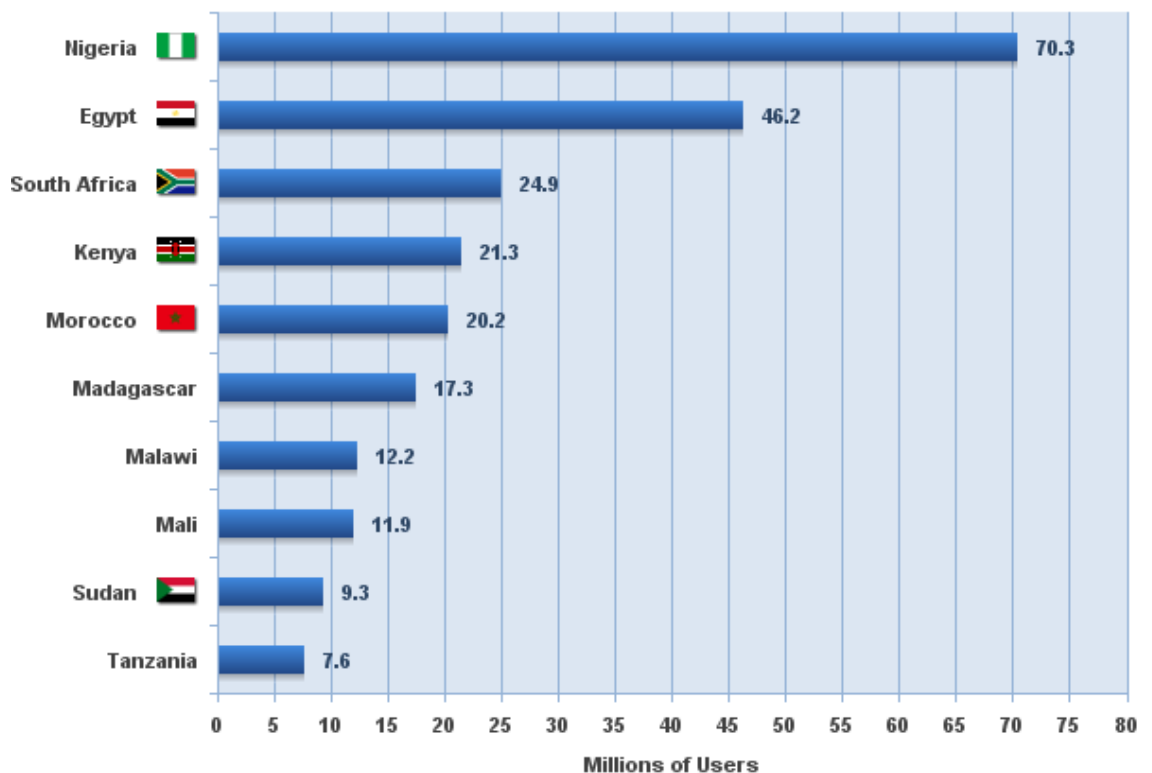
There is also considerable evidence suggesting that journalists in many African newsrooms continue to creatively adopt and appropriate new information and communication technologies in their journalistic practices in spite of stifling circumstances (See Bosch, 2014; Mabweazara, 2014; Mare, 2014b). Taking this

argument further is Wasserman (2005:165) who observes that even when these new digital technologies proliferate in Africa, they do not necessarily circumvent old structures but help to “enlarge and accelerate processes already in place in societies and organisations rather than create entirely new forces”.

However, as Nyamnjoh (2005:10) argues, the idea that the presence of new information and communication technologies is capable of transforming various aspects of development in Africa is not only utopian but remains a mirage in that “the basic equipment is either lacking or defective and ...information is largely the preserve of the government [and as such] the information highway is still to become a reality, let alone a super one”. The idea that there is a highway in fact remains problematic. As Nyamnjoh (2005:10) argues, “the concept of an information superhighway can hardly be understood in Africa... because the highway is yet to be travelled by enough Africans and /or Africa-based users”. Adamolekun (1996:25) also adds that while many countries in Africa are latching on to the information highway, it remains the reserve of the elites. He also argues that in Nigeria, “only multinationals, high networth individuals and some individual business people are linked with the I-way” while others remain mere spectators. While Adamolekun’s observation might have been relevant at the time of his writing, post-2000, the story is different. Figures from the latest ITU World telecommunication/ICT indicators database reveal that by the end of 2014, “in Africa, almost 20% of the population will be online”, double what obtained in 2010.

In Nigeria, as elsewhere on the continent, the adoption of new information and communication technologies continues to witness a geometric progression. The penetration of the Internet in Nigeria, according to Internet World Stats, shows a rise from 0.16 per cent in 2000 to about 39.7per cent as at June 2014 as Figure 1 below shows (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2014). Most of the major national dailies in Nigeria have an online presence on various social networking sites and operate functioning websites where online versions of their newspapers are published. The story is similar for media organisations around Africa (See Ogola, 2015)

## Africa Top 10 Internet Countries 2014 Q2



Source: Internet World Stats - [www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm)  
 297,885,898 Internet Users in Africa estimated for June 30, 2014  
 Copyright © 2014, Miniwatts Marketing Group

**Figure 1**

While there is no disputing that Africa is still the least connected continent in comparison to others, and that the challenge of access to these technologies is still a reality for many, Africans have found ways around these challenges. As Nyamnjoh (2004:39) observes “the bulk of ordinary people in Africa refuse to celebrate victimhood. Thanks to their ability to manoeuvre and manipulate, and thanks to the sociality and conviviality of their cultural communities,” Africans are devising creative ways, even if it means travelling through country roads, to latch on to the information highway. One of the ways in which the creative adoptions of new information and communication technologies are manifest on the continent is influenced by what Ogola (2015: 100) calls the “cultural context of usage”. This is evident in the example of the mobile phone where the “single-owner-multiple-user” phenomenon means that those who own mobile phones serve as links and “points-of-presence” for others to communicate with their family and friends (Nyamnjoh 2004:54). Thus, those with access serve as nodal points in a network system, facilitating access for others who may not necessarily own or have access to these technological devices (Olorunnisola, 2000).

In his study of how civil societies in Zambia and Kenya are adopting new information and communication technologies, Mudhai (2004: 319) observes that “despite limitations of resources and cost of Internet access, larger numbers of African NGOs, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, are making effective use of Internet communications tools, including e-mail and the web”. While Mudhai’s observation is about how civil societies in these two African countries deploy new media technologies, it is useful to make the point here that whether we are examining civil societies or journalism practices as this study does, these ‘new’ technologies are being creatively appropriated. As Nyamnjoh (2005:4) observes, “no technology seems too used to be used, just as nothing is too new to be blended with the old for even newer results.”

It is also in this vein that some scholars highlight the way in which these ‘new’ media technologies are increasingly playing significant roles in the democratisation project in Africa. For them, these technologies are redefining the way information is shared and disseminated despite the issue of limited access. The monopoly once enjoyed by mainstream media organisations is also said to be giving way to a variety of media that encourages participation (Arnstsen 2010). Among these scholars is Dunisami Moyo (2009) who provides empirical evidence from the 2008 Zimbabwean elections to suggest that the new media facilitate democracy by acting as ‘monitors of democracy’. In his study of how citizens actively used mobile phones in sending Short Messages Services to each other during the Zimbabwean elections of 2008, Moyo (2009) found that the government’s restriction on information was disrupted by the activities of these citizens. Although this led to cases of rumour mongering in some cases, the activities of these citizens was important because they bridged an important gap in providing information about the election. In Moyo’s (2009:553) words:

In a situation where information flows are restricted and the mainstream media are unable to fulfil the citizens’ informational needs, the ‘parallel market of information’ became the dominant source of a mix of information and disinformation --- attributes that used to be the monopoly of professional journalists and mainstream media.

This challenge to mainstream media is also evident in newsrooms elsewhere. Lily Canter finds from her study of regional newsrooms in the UK that “the rise in participatory journalism has led to new challenges for journalists as they strive to negotiate the often murky waters of user-generated content” (2013:604). In many African newsrooms, the relationship between journalists and readers is not necessarily hierarchical but rhizomatic. With many of these media organisations online, and with some presence on various social

media platforms especially Facebook and Twitter, there is some engagement and interaction taking place. While these engagements might be taking place through these platforms, it raises important questions about whether such comments made by readers beneath stories published on these media's websites are necessarily democratising the media space. Ogola's (2014) study of two community radio stations in Kenya provides instructive evidence. His study found that there are those who would rather engage with the more traditional media than 'post on Facebook'. In the case of Kibera residents in Kenya, the peculiarity of the radio ---its orality, meant it was already part of existing local communicative practices (Ogola, 2014).

However, the adoption of these new media technologies has also seen the rise in the number of diasporic online news outlets that are able to report exclusives without fear of state censorship. Writing from a Zimbabwean perspective, Ndlela (2010:94) observes that the presence of new information and communication technologies has "created opportunities for the establishment of a counterpublic sphere, revitalizing citizen-based democracy on the basis of access, participation and pluralism". He also observes that alternative media thrives in Zimbabwe partly because of the "repressive media environment in Zimbabwe [which] has ignited the rapid growth of political news web sites hosted in foreign domains" (2010:93). The same is true of diasporic news sites established by Nigerians in diaspora such as *saharareporters.com*, *ElenduReports.com*, *HuhuOnline*, among others (Kperogi, 2012) that serve as news sources for Nigerian journalists.

In spite of the optimism expressed about the potential of these technologies to 'leapfrog' and challenge mainstream journalism and other aspects of society in Africa, scholars have also warned that caution should be taken in highlighting the 'openness' and 'democratising' benefits of these technologies. For Curran:

the idea that cyberspace is a free, open space where people from different backgrounds and nations can commune with each other and build a more deliberative, tolerant world overlooks a number of things. The world is unequal and mutually uncomprehending (in a literal sense); it is torn asunder by conflicting values and interests; it is subdivided by deeply embedded national and local cultures (and other nodes of identity such as religion and ethnicity); and some countries are ruled by authoritarian regimes (2012:11).

Curran's concerns are again resonated in Markham's (2010:77) argument that the democratising potential of the Internet and other new information and communication



technologies is not only overstated but contributes to an illusion of what these technologies can *do* to mainstream journalism. He argues that although these new information and communication technologies facilitate information sharing which may be construed as contributing to the democratisation of communication, for instance in the way blogs are used, “[a]ny argument that posits blogging as a democratising influence on journalism risks committing the casting in political terms what is instead a cultural phenomenon” (Markham, 2010:78). Markham further argues that the very notion of the Internet’s ‘inclusion’ capacities is questionable where deep divides still exists between those who are able to participate and those who are not, adding that the “relative freedom of communication [which the Internet is said to afford] is not in itself a sufficient criterion of democratisation” (2010:82). Within the African context, Adamolekun (1996:30) notes that in spite of the proliferation of new information and communication technologies, high illiteracy levels and poverty, for instance, means that “many people in Africa are still ignorant of the information superhighway [and]... still go about their daily chores the way they know best” preferring face-to-face interactions (Nyamnjoh, 2005).

For African journalism, there have also been warnings of the dangers of the supposed ‘open’ space that the Internet allows which has seen the rise, for instance, in Southern Africa of “vigilante journalism”. According to Mano (2010:58), “vigilante journalism involves online editors explicitly inviting readers/ Internet users to openly participate in ‘naming and shaming’ or humiliating those thought to be responsible or related to perpetrators of injustice”. Other scholars sceptical of journalists’ adoption of these ‘new’ technologies also highlight issues around ethics. For Paterson (2014:260) the “embrace of digital technology in the journalistic sphere has always challenged existing ethical and regulatory frameworks, and the nature of those challenges in Africa is vastly different from those described by Euro/American-centric scholarly literature.” Also expressing similar concerns, Chari (2009:1) observes that with the proliferation of new information and communication technologies, “journalists no longer feel compelled to adhere to the [profession’s] ethical canons”. This has seen plagiarism becoming the norm among some African journalists (Chari, 2009; Chapter 5 of this thesis shows how this is happening in Nigerian print newsrooms).

While highlighting that the proliferation of new information and communication technologies has expanded the spaces for expression, it is useful to note that the existence of spaces for expressing dissent is not necessarily a recent invention. Such spaces are in fact characteristic of the traditional African communication systems. Karin Barber (1991)

and Ayo Olukotun (2002) among others inform us that *ewi* (poetry) and other praise songs among the Yorubas of south western Nigeria which are traditionally used to maintain the dominant discourse by traditional monarchs also become tools “in which commoners use... to voice their grievances” (Olukotun, 2002b:196). In his article titled *Traditional protest media and anti-military struggle in Nigeria 1988-1999*, Ayo Olukotun (2002b) explains how some Nigerian musicians sang anti-government songs during the Military era, demanding a civil government. Mano (2011:92) further lends credence to these arguments by arguing that popular music has also served as a platform for popular expression in Africa. He observes that “[m]usical texts authored in upheaval and crises are invested with meanings that offer an important avenue to mediate key political topics that the public yearn for but cannot find in the mainstream media”. A Nigerian example is Fela Anikolapo Kuti whose music was renowned for the satire and metaphor-laced lyrics that critiqued the Nigerian government. Writing about a similar example in Zimbabwe, Mano (2007:61) highlights the role of popular music during the 2000s when the state clamped on the activities of the private press:

[P]opular music can act as a variety of journalism at certain historic moments and in specific contexts. Where the mass media are weak and opposition political parties are frail, music can serve as the voice of the voiceless by offering subtle avenues of expression. Popular music can perform the journalistic function of communicating daily issues that challenge the powerful and give a voice to the disadvantaged.

Mano further argues that popular music in Africa “has to a large extent built on traditional musical practices and formats... [and serves as] a way of questioning and challenging that which does not make political sense to the people” (2011:92).

With the proliferation of new media technologies, there have also been a number of examples from the ‘realm of the popular’ that offer both space and means through which state power is confronted. During the *Occupy Nigeria* protests in January 2012 for example, music, drama, humour, among others were employed as a means of challenging the Nigerian government’s removal of fuel subsidy. An example of one such popular music is *Hear the voice* by Aduke<sup>5</sup>. The music was released on YouTube during the protests and circulated widely on various social media platforms.

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<sup>5</sup>Aduke, whose real name is Ayobamidele Aladekomo sang the song *Hear the voice* during the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of 2012. Code-switching between English, Yoruba and Pidgin the song has lyrics such as: *Give us light, water, good roads to waka*

In sum, beyond celebrating or deriding the impact of new media technologies in Africa, it is the ways in which these technologies are creatively appropriated to suit local demands and contexts that are significant. As Wasserman (2005:174) rightly points out that:

[j]ust as one should avoid a crude technological determinism in exploring the positive potential of new media such as the Internet, one should also not overstate the negative aspects...[to the extent that one] lose[s] sight of the innovative use of these technologies...on the continent.

As such, the focus, I argue, should not necessarily centre on whether these new technologies ‘leapfrog’ development in Africa, or whether indeed they are (or not) ‘transforming’ journalism practices on the continent. Rather, a more sociological approach, that importantly highlights the role of socio-cultural factors in shaping the adoption of new media technology, remains useful.

### **2.2.1 Embracing mobility: Localised appropriation of the mobile phone**

Across Africa, the mobile phone has not only been described as the “most potent tool for alternative communication” (Moyo, 2009:556), but its ubiquity has also earned it a title as the “new talking drums of everyday Africa” (de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, and Brinkman, 2009). Its pervasiveness in Africa has also made the continent the fastest-growing with regards to mobile telephony with latest figures from the International Telecommunication Union suggesting about 70% penetration (ITU, 2014). In Nigeria for instance, “until 2001, the telecommunication services in Nigeria were accessible only to the rich few” (Ojebode, 2012:1) Mobile phone penetration in Nigeria has risen exponentially since. From barely 0.042% penetration with about 19,000 fixed phone lines for a population of about 45million in 1960 (Ojebode, 2012) the Nigerian Communications Commission puts teledensity in Nigeria as of February 2014 at 92.14% with over 145 million subscribers (Nigerian Communications Commission 2014). A UNESCO (2013) report too points out that “over 90 percent of Nigerians have access to a mobile network, and mobile phones

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*Awa la t’eka, allow us to live better; Hear the voice of the wailing masses, they are wailing for food, they are wailing for shelter...* By specifically listing some of the basic amenities that many Nigerians ask of the government, *Aduke’s Hear the voice* resonated with many Nigerians during the protests. The version of this song on YouTube can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHcYQCZZ-gM&list=PL56CD91887A47BCE6>

are fast becoming a major gateway to the internet”. While statistics and data from within Nigeria are not always reliable, these figures are nonetheless reflective of significant mobile phone penetration in Nigeria. They also importantly highlight that the adoption of the mobile phone in Nigeria, as with other parts of Africa has exceeded that of fixed telephones (See Willems, 2013).

In discussing the ubiquity of the mobile phone, Brinkman, de Bruijn and Bilal (2009:83), writing from a Sudanese perspective, observe that “the mobile phone has had consequences for the way in which social differentiation is conceptualised. Some people regard it as an “equalising” force...lessening the gap between the rich and the poor”. In embracing mobility, Nyamnjoh (2005:209) observes that “the dramatic increase in the sale and theft of cell phones is an indication that this technology has been eagerly grasped by [Africans] exploring ways of denying exclusion its smile of triumph”. As such, the mobile phone plays an instructive function in bridging communication gaps in Africa. In her study of the mobile phone’s appropriation in Pinyin and Mankon, two communities in Cameroon, Henrietta Nyamnjoh (2013) points out that the mobile phone not only serves as a bridge linking family members residing outside Cameroon with those back home but it also enables ‘virtual mobility’ where migrants can ‘participate’ in happenings back at home virtually(94).

The adoption of mobile phones in many African countries also arguably constitutes an important tool in many areas of development (See Bratton, 2013). For instance, farmers in Uganda are using their phones to monitor the prices of agricultural produce. In Kenya, M-PESA (mobile money) is said to be facilitating cash flow. The service has also since spread to other countries within the region and beyond. Banda (2010:14) agrees that the mobile phones in Africa are becoming almost indispensable considering that “[it] constitute[s] the only feasible telecommunications option” that is increasingly “becoming a seventh mass medium” in Africa (Ibid: 16). Also as Nyamnjoh (2005:209) puts it, the mobile phone “has become like the long arm ...capable of reaching even the most distant ‘sons and daughters of the soil.’”

The mobile phone is also becoming central to journalism in Africa. Mabweazara’s (2010a) study of six newsrooms in Zimbabwe, finds that the mobile phone has become an integral part of the newsmaking practices of these journalists. He observes that the mobile phone’s “inherent properties have spawned unprecedented flexibility in the professional communicative practices of journalists” (Mabweazara, 2011:705). My discussion later in the thesis also supports this finding. The mobile phone has become

pervasive in Nigerian newsrooms that the official working hours for these journalists is not limited to when they are physically in the newsrooms or on official assignment. They are able to connect with news sources and with breaking news at any time of the day. Also, having a mobile phone has meant that the newsrooms become mobile as journalists are able to file in their reports from the field (Mabweazara, 2011). The mobile phone not only enables a wider participation in the newsmaking practices of these journalists but “the SMS facility has [also] rendered the mobile phone an agent of citizen inclusion and visibility in the media” (Ibid. 703). In spite of the mobile phone’s pervasiveness in Nigerian print newsrooms, various contextual challenges (I discuss this point in detail in Chapter 4.3) shape and constrain its appropriation. Thus while the presence of new information and communication technologies are promoting wider access to news sources for these journalists, several institutional routines and practices (to an extent) remain.

### **2.3 Theoretical overview: Locating the study within the sociology of journalism tradition**

The sociology of journalism mostly centres around the processes and routines through which journalists gather information from events and turn them into news. The approach primarily focuses on the journalists, their interactions with themselves, their organisations and the newsrooms structures. While the sociology of journalism approach has been mostly influenced by Western media scholarship, it remains a useful approach for interrogating newsmaking practices in Nigerian newsrooms for a number of reasons. The institutional journalistic practices in many African newsrooms have roots and are influenced by practices in United States and United Kingdom. This might in part, be because journalism training on the continent was introduced and patterned after those of the Western context. For instance, studies of the syllabi of many communications department of universities across Africa show that journalism education in Africa continues to draw largely from Western models (Mano, 2009; Salawu, 2009). Also, Mabweazara (2015:107) observes that “African journalists continue to seek examples of “best practices”, training and education from Western countries”.

However, the point needs to be made that while most of the institutional practices in many African newsrooms follow those of Western newsrooms, they have their distinctive

features and have evolved their own unique traditions and characteristics. As Bourgault (1995:20) observes:

The traditional oral tradition, the discourse style it fostered, and the value systems it nurtured disappeared neither with colonialism nor with independence which followed it. African traditional culture simply became intermixed with the alien forms thrust upon it. African traditional forms are, *prima facie*, forms of communication, and they are suffused in and through both the practices and the content of the mass media of Black Africa.

Nonetheless, these well-established theories provide useful insights for interrogating how Nigerian print journalists are appropriating alternative media content in their everyday newsmaking practices. Kupe (2004:355) also lends credence to this argument, pointing out that the “theories of media production—including sociology of the media—that are well developed for Europe and North America appear to be applicable to our context”

This study thus follows Ngomba’s (2012:177) submission that “where ‘Western’ theories appear relevant and promising... African scholars should neither shy away from using them, nor be apologetic when using them critically”, as it is less productive to reinvent the wheel in attempting to discuss journalism practices in Africa. As Murdock (2012:66) reminds us, “we have a rich stock of concepts and ideas to draw upon... [because] [w]e are a part of a continuing conversation about the structure and meaning of [journalistic practices] and the ways they are [or not] changing... [As such], [t]o refuse their invitation to debate is to condemn ourselves to regularly reinventing the wheel.” Mabweazara (2014:2, emphasis in original) also aptly notes that “the very fact that journalism as an *institutional* practice has a long history in Western scholarship, [underscores] the continued relevance of traditional--predominantly Western theoretical approaches”. As such, while we agree that journalism practices in Nigerian print newsrooms are by no means *exactly* the same as what obtains elsewhere in other African newsrooms or in those of Western countries, we argue that the practices in these newsrooms have largely borrowed from those that we find in the West.

However, it is useful to take note of the centrality of context in appropriating these Western theories as “meaningful theorization has to be contextualized”(Nyamnjoh in Wasserman, 2009:283) in an attempt to “critically situate, adapt and possibly modify [these] theories to suit African realities” (Mabweazara, 2014:2). While there have been calls for “Afrocentric” theories, particularly those which emphasise African values in journalistic practices, as advocated for by Francis Kasoma(1996), these calls have largely

disregarded the complexities of applying such approaches in Africa. This is partly because the notion of 'Africanness' and what is inherently 'African' remains not only problematic but ignores the complexities and differences that are specific to each African country. It also fails to take into account that within these individual countries themselves, there are varying cultures evidenced by languages and ethnicities, even among those who live in close proximity to each other. As such, Tomaselli (2003:428) warns that we must steer clear of the "utterly reductive assumption that the 54 African countries, and myriad arrays of cultures, religions and languages, can be prescriptively reduced to homogenous sets of continent-wide social and cultural "African values"".

Media scholars from the sociology of journalism tradition agree that news production undergoes a series of routinised processes that are shaped and constrained by various factors including the organisations within which journalists work, as well as other contextual influences (Schudson, 2005). While the sociology of journalism approach insists that news is not a collection of facts but that news is indeed a story and "a depletable consumer product that must be made fresh daily"(Tuchman, 1978:179) it is also useful to point out that the news production process does not occur in isolation of the environment and context within which it is located (Schudson,2005). In other words, the everyday interactions of journalists with the wider socio-cultural setting, more than merely journalists and their news sources, shape the news production process. "These cultural givens" as Schudson (2005:186-187) puts it, "transcend structures of ownership or patterns of work relations" in that these journalists are also part of the wider social-cultural contexts that they are reporting about.

Consequently, because journalists are part of these wider social settings, their reporting of events is usually constructed and framed from mostly "unquestioned and generally unnoticed background assumptions" (Schudson, 2005:189) which colour how news is gathered and reported. Schudson (2005:189-190) succinctly puts it that "news is a form of literature and that among the resources journalists work with are the traditions of story-telling, picture-making, and sentence construction [which] they inherit from their own cultures".

Throughout media studies, scholars have made several attempts at unpacking what journalism means, what it does and how it operates. Since journalism does not exist outside the society within which it functions, scholars have generally attempted to understand news work from a sociological perspective and this approach has remained an

important yardstick for measuring and explaining what journalists do (Zelizer, 2004). As such, the sociology of journalism and the sociology of news (Schudson, 2003; 2005) examines the ways in which mass media organisations determine what events are news worthy, how news sources are determined and how journalists turn these news worthy events into news following a set of criteria, dubbed news values (Brighton and Foy, 2007). Central to the arguments advanced by sociology of journalism scholars is broadly the idea that news is socially-constructed and is shaped by the interactions between journalists and the society on one hand, and between journalists and the media organisations they work for, on the other. More specifically, Zelizer (2004:47) argues that “sociological inquiry positions its target of analysis squarely within the network of individuals engaged in patterned interaction in primarily complex settings”.

The origins of the sociology of journalism tradition can be traced to the Chicago School during the 1920s and 1930s. Robert Park, a journalist at the time, who later became an academic in the sociology department at the University of Chicago, is credited for being influential in deploying ethnography as a means to understanding the everyday practices of journalists (Murdock, 2012:52; Zelizer, 2004:47). The interests in unpacking how journalists do what they do continued to rise and has seen the growth of the body of scholarship around the sociology of news, which is interested in explaining that news is a product constructed by journalists and also the way journalists go about these ‘constructions’ as members of particular institutional and social settings (Schudson, 2003; Tuchman, 2002, Zelizer, 2004).

Although the study of journalism through a sociological lens arrived in the United Kingdom later than it did in the United States, it soon found home among British sociologists in the 1960s and 1970s who were keen on understanding how journalism could explain “sociological concerns” (Zelizer, 2004:50). Useful to mention here are the pioneering works of Jeremy Tunstall, *Journalists at Work*, which was the first book-length study of British specialist journalists from a sociological perspective and subsequently followed by Micheal Tracey (1977), Philip Schlesinger (1978), Peter Golding and Philip Elliot (1979) among others (Zelizer, 2004:50).

While scholars have attempted organising the research on the sociology of journalism into “coherent organisational schema”(Zelizer,2004:51), this body of research has defied such fine demarcations as it has developed and borrowed from various theoretical frameworks including “mainstream sociological research, scholarship on the



political economy of news and cultural approaches to news” (Ibid.; See also Manning, 2001). Thus, the sociology of journalism provides a nuanced and rich perspective for unpacking the institutional practices of mainstream print journalists in Nigeria.

As Zelizer (2004:52) explains, these early studies were concerned with the routines and practices of journalists and paved the way for the ‘gatekeeping’ research. With roots in social psychology, the “gatekeeper theory” was first applied to studying journalistic practices by David Manning White. His work, *The Gatekeeper: A case study in the selection of news* (1955) found that in determining what counts as news senior editors monitoring the information gates selectively choose the information that becomes news (Zelizer, 2004:52). Since White’s seminal work, the concept of the gatekeeper has become a useful theoretical frame in explaining how the subjectivities of journalists influence what gets selected as news as well as how journalists carry out their duties in the news production process (Manning, 2001; Zelizer, 2004). However, the gatekeeper theory has been criticised for ignoring the context within which journalists work and the fact that journalists do not perform their duties in isolation of the organisations within which they work (Cottle, 2000a, see also, Golding and Elliot, 1979).

Beyond examining how journalists behave and the impact of the institutional and social setting on the news production process, there are also some sociology of journalism scholars who advocate that the examination of newsmaking practices should also focus on the interactions between journalists and their news sources. These arguments are concerned with the notion that news sources, particularly the institutional official sources that enjoy privileged positions in the news, are central in the news production process and as such, examining the relationship journalists have with news sources can highlight how they influence the newsmaking process (Atton and Wickenden, 2005; McNair, 1998). The emphasis here is that news as a journalistic product does not mirror reality (Schudson, 2003:33) but is a function of the routines and processes which characterise the news production process. While this by no means suggests that journalists randomly select what becomes news, the focus here is that the news production process follows a routinized process of information gathering that is shaped and constrained by a number of internal and external factors before such information becomes news (Schudson, 2003:33-35). As McNair (1998:64), writing from a sociological perspective points out,

journalism, like any other form of cultural production, always reflects and embodies the historical processes within which it has developed and the

contemporary conditions within which it is made. Concepts such as objectivity and balance---so important to journalists in their everyday work--- have complex socio-historical roots which reflect the values and ideas of the societies within which they emerged. In this sense too, journalism is a social construction.

The argument that news is socially constructed also finds support in Tuchman's (1978) contention that

[n]ews is located, gathered and disseminated by professionals working in organisations...it is inevitably a product of newswriters drawing upon institutional processes and conforming to institutional practices. Those practices necessarily include association with institutions whose news is routinely reported. Accordingly, news is the product of a social institution, and it is embedded in relationships with other institutions. It is a product of professionalism and it claims the right to interpret everyday occurrences to citizens and other professionals alike.

As such, journalists do not simply *subjectively* decide to tag any information as news but they do so within the parameters and frames of the institutions within which they work and draw from their own professional repertoires as journalists. Thus, understanding these institutional practices would be useful in unpacking how mainstream print journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are responding to the proliferation of new 'alternative' media in their everyday newsmaking practices.

However, it is important to note here that while the sociological approach to studying journalistic practices draws our attention to the bureaucratic settings within which journalists work and how they exercise their own professional judgement in the news production process, it ignores the wider cultural context which shapes journalistic practices. If we are to have a grasp of whether or not the proliferation of new 'alternative' journalism is impacting on the institutional newsroom practices of print journalists in a particular socio-cultural context, as this study does, then it is important to examine the cultural dimension to the news production process. As Cottle (2000a:428) explains, the sociological approach focuses on "strategic and definitional power...routines of news production and processes of source intervention and how each conditions the production of public knowledge [while the cultural approach examines]... the symbolic role of news actors and how they perform/enact within the conventions" of the journalistic practice. In other words, the sociological approaches have tended to zoom in on the "strategic and

definitional power” of journalists while failing to acknowledge that culture “variously conditions and shapes patterns and forms of news [production]” (Cottle, 2000a:429).

In light of the foregoing arguments, it might seem that the sociological and the cultural approaches are mutually exclusive. This is however not the case. Both approaches in fact work together and are collectively central to the body of scholarship that define the sociology of journalism. Although the sociological approach tells us that news is “socially-constructed” (Schudson, 2005), taken alone, this approach to studying the news production process “tend to lack a sense of the *culturally mediating* nature of news approached not just as a cipher of social interests and political power but in terms of its very constitution as a *cultural medium* of communication” (Cottle, 2000a:429, emphasis in original).

Consequently, this study appreciates the richness that the cultural approach to studying news production offers, by focusing not only on the professional and organisational context within which journalists work, but also on the cultural context which speaks to “how they *perform/enact* within the conventions and *textual structures* of news representation” (Cottle, 2000a:428-429). In attempting to unpack how journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are appropriating (or not) new alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices, this study agrees with the observation of scholars at the Glasgow University Media Group that news is not only socially-constructed, it is “a cultural artefact; it is a sequence of socially manufactured messages, which carry many of the culturally dominant assumptions of our society” (GUMG, 1976:1).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the media democratisation project of the 1990s in relation to the Nigerian media landscape. While acknowledging that the proliferation of new media technologies, which coincided with the media democratisation project, is impacting on various aspects of life on the continent, the chapter highlights the localised appropriations of these technologies. Although the presence of these technologies has spurred celebratory narratives as providing spaces for political engagement, the chapter draws attention to the fact that the existence of spaces for expressing dissent is not necessarily an ‘invention’ made possible by new media technologies. The chapter also discusses how the mobile phone has assumed a central position in the everyday lives of Africans who are creatively appropriating these technologies. It further highlights its centrality to journalism practices in many African newsrooms. While refraining from taking a

technological-determinist stance, the chapter advocates a sociological perspective and justifies the choice of sociology of journalism as a preferred framework for understanding the everyday newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists.

The next chapter discusses the study's methodological approach.

## CHAPTER 3

### Research Methodology

#### Researching Newsroom Cultures and Journalists' Newsmaking Practices in Nigerian Print newsrooms

##### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological approach of this study. As Tuchman (1991:79) advises, choosing a methodological approach for any study 'depends upon the question one wants to answer'. The broad aim and objectives of this study thus informed the choice of a qualitative approach which allows for a robust and fuller comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation. The choice of a qualitative approach is also, in part, because researching the newsroom practices and cultures of journalists in any given context requires much more nuanced analysis than a quantitative survey would reveal. Consequently, beyond recording the frequency of events or other statistical details which is mostly the orientation in quantitative research, using a qualitative approach provides an avenue for exploring how Nigerian print journalists appropriate new media technologies and alternative media content in their newsmaking practices. The study thus adopts a combination of ethnography of Nigerian print newsrooms and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of sample news texts produced in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of 2012.

The rest of the chapter proceeds through six sections. The first provides a justification of the choice of the qualitative approach deployed in this study and discusses the philosophical underpinnings of the study. The next section, divided into two sub-sections, focuses on the study's research strategy and design. It makes a case for the choice of an ethnographic approach to studying Nigerian print newsrooms and goes on to provide rationale for Critical Discourse Analysis of news texts. The third discusses the sampling method and provides the audit trail of the research process. The fourth section is the researcher's reflection on the fieldwork. The fifth discusses the research's ethical considerations while the sixth section concludes the chapter.

### 3.1 Studying Nigerian print newsrooms: Rationale for qualitative approach and some philosophical underpinnings

Qualitative research continues to be celebrated because of the flexibility it affords a researcher to observe and capture meanings from interacting with members of a social group or community. Of the two major research methods –the qualitative and the quantitative, this study adopts the qualitative method. In comparing these two methods, Priest (2010:8) points out that ‘qualitative methods are designed to explore and assess things’ while quantitative methods ‘use numbers’ and are closely linked to the positivist school of thought. Beyond qualitative research not being framed by statistical quantification, Patton (1990:94) argues that qualitative methods “are ways of finding out what people do, know, think and feel by observing, interviewing and analysing documents.” For Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3),

qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world... This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them.

The qualitative approach is also a method of choice adopted in this research because it not only allows the researcher to explore an area where little is known but is ‘typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants’ point of view’ (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005:94) rather than testing hypotheses as in the case in quantitative research.

Creswell (2009:4) also concurs that “qualitative research is a means for *exploring* and *understanding* the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (emphasis added). In this study, I attempt to understand how mainstream journalists in Nigeria carry out their daily routines and whether (or not) their institutional practices are being eroded with the presence of alternative media.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011:4) qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to ‘study *the performances and practices of human communication*’ (emphasis in original) and as such makes it accessible for exploring issues of culture while giving room for the researcher’s interpretation of the phenomenon being studied. While quantitative research usually employs statistical and mathematical techniques in describing a phenomenon, it is limited in explaining the socio-cultural life-worlds of

social actor. Qualitative research allows the researcher to study and interact with social actors on a first-hand basis and in their '*naturalistic contexts*' (Jensen, 2002:236, emphasis in original). It is also a practical research methodology that allows the researcher to gather rich and robust data from which interpretation and useful conclusions can be drawn. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:94) also explain that a qualitative research approach is "typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view". Because a qualitative research is mostly inductive, the researcher mostly "seek[s] to discover patterns that may point to relatively universal principles" (Babbie 2010:56).

Despite the viability of the qualitative method, one of the major challenges a qualitative researcher faces is deciding what philosophical underpinning will best capture and explain what the study is about. Examining the 'foundations of our thinking' is a major prerequisite for academic scholarship as this plays an important role in determining how to achieve the aim and objectives set out in a study. Creswell (2009:5) also stresses the importance of the philosophical foundations by noting that they, although buried within the research, 'still influence the practice of research and need to be identified'. It is therefore necessary that a researcher understands the schools of thought his or her study leans towards as this will say something about how the data is gathered and analysed. Bryman and Bell (2003:19) argue that "the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built from the perceptions and actions of social actors" remains crucial in qualitative research. Since the data generated for this study is based on what professional journalists in Nigeria say and write, it will be empirically unsound to consider their responses and their output in form of news stories as objective realities. Kvale (1996:41) takes this argument further by explaining that "the conception of knowledge as a 'mirror of reality' is replaced by the conception of the 'social construction of reality' where the focus is on the interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the social world."

As such, this study's epistemological orientation takes root in the social constructivist approach. Social constructivism is an approach to qualitative research which allows the researcher to tease out the 'complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas' (Creswell, 2009:8). Deploying the social constructivist approach also enables the researcher to "address the processes of interaction among individuals"

(Creswell, 2009:8) while paying attention to ‘the specific contexts in which people live and work’. In this type of research, the aim is to interpret the ‘meanings others have about the world’ (Creswell, 2009:8) and in this research, it is to make sense of what a particular group of people (Nigerian journalists) think of their practices as they co-exist with another group ( alternative media practitioners).

Qualitative research therefore allows the researcher to draw on a number of approaches such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, ethnography, among others (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008) which can “provide important insights and knowledge” (Nelson et al, 1992:2). Thus, this study’s epistemological position is interpretive and hinges on phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology involves seeing the world from the point of view of the subject being studied while hermeneutics is concerned with exploring hidden meanings within texts. In keeping with the qualitative research reasoning, this study is inductive and draws themes and patterns from the data collected before interpreting what the data might mean.

Consequently, the interpretivist research approach affords the opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of how journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms carry out their journalistic practices while providing the researcher a rich and robust data as well as a nuanced description of their activities. What makes the interpretivist approach even more useful is that there is an understanding of the fact that the researcher is part of the research process and she is able to reflect on the reasons that certain decisions were taken in the field. Walsham (2006: 321) reminds us that “we are biased by our own background, knowledge and prejudices to see things in certain ways and not others”. With the interpretivist research approach, an important variable in the mix is the research context. This is, in part, to ensure that the researcher’s interpretation of the activities of the subjects is done in line with the context within which they exist. In underscoring the centrality of context in qualitative research, and in particular from an interpretivist approach, Altheide and Johnson (1997:178) tell us that the researcher needs “[a] commitment to understand the contexts, definitions and meanings of the members [of the community being studied so that she can] systematically ... check impressions and understandings”. In reiterating the importance of the context, particularly in studying African, and more specifically for this study, Nigerian newsrooms , in order to avoid replicating findings



from Western spheres that have been mostly misappropriated within the African context, Wahl-Jorgensen (2004:352) argues that:

“To attain an understanding of the cultural specifics of journalism, and of what journalism could and ought to do in particular contexts, critical journalism studies must be empirical. It must seek to understand more fully the conditions under which journalists do their work”.

Thus, the ethnographic immersion, in the four Nigerian print newsrooms sampled for this study, is to ensure a deeper understanding of the research context so as to guide my interpretations of current trends and practices in these newsrooms.

By way of a recap, the emphasis is on studying a particular phenomenon—how professional journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are negotiating their hegemonic territories with the proliferation of alternative journalisms — and building “patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up” (Creswell, 2009:175). I attempt to, by describing the everyday practices in these newsrooms, understand not only what journalists do with new digital technologies in their newsrooms but why they choose to (or not) incorporate content from non-mainstream alternative media in their reports as well as how they negotiate inclusion in the ways these inclusions are (or not) made.

## **3.2 Research Strategy and Design**

### **3.2.1 Deploying Ethnography: Watching from the inside**

The precise definition of ethnography remains elusive and scholars do not have a consensus as to what constitutes an ethnographic research. Epistemologically, ethnography has roots in qualitative research and is concerned with describing the activities of a group of people. It is concerned with ‘studying at first-hand what people do and say in particular contexts.’ According to Atkinson and Hammersley (2007:3), “ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s everyday lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said and /or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts ... gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry”. Ethnography is generally agreed to be based on observations and interviews carried out over a period of time. It is usually based on observing actors in a social setting (Silverman, 2013). As Luders (2004:225) concurs,

ethnography seeks to ‘investigate in particular the perspectives of participants, the nature and forms of their knowledge, their interactions, practices and discourses’.

Following a similar line of thought, Eberle and Maeder (2011:54) point out that

doing ethnography means using multiple methods of data gathering, like observations, interviews, collection of documents, pictures, audio-visual materials as well as representations of artefacts. The main difference from other ways of investigating the social world is that the researcher does ‘fieldwork’ and collects data herself through physical presence. In contrast to survey research, ethnographic research cannot be done solely from a desk.

It is in this light that my immersion in these newsrooms proves useful to this study.

Notwithstanding the varied definitions of ethnography, there seems to be unanimity, among scholars, in terms of what ethnography does and entails. They all agree that it involves fieldwork where the researcher studies the members of a particular community in their own setting. Brewer (2000:6) observes that “ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture the social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner”. For Barbie (2001:281) ethnography is “a study that focuses on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation”. In Lüder’s (2004:225) words, ethnographic research focuses on ‘how the particular realities are ‘produced’ in practical terms’. It also investigates ‘the perspectives of participants, the nature and forms of knowledge, their interactions, practices and discourse’. While Born (2005:15) on her part describes the ethnographic approach as “a sharp tool for discerning not just the unifying features but the divisions, boundaries and conflicts of the society being studied”.

Beyond what ethnography entails or what it means to be an ethnographer, an ethnographic study is importantly about “the everyday” (Medrado, 2013:1), the immersion in a particular environment, not only to be aware of the cultures that shape their everyday practices but also to learn and understand these practices. It is against this backdrop that this study deems an ethnographic approach useful because it not only provides an avenue being immersed in Nigerian print newsrooms but it also enables a nuanced learning of the everyday newsmaking practices of these journalists. As Cottle (2007:1) also argues,

“ethnographies of news production remain as essential as ever for explaining and understanding the complexities involved”. Tedlock (2003: 165) similarly notes that “ethnography involves an on-going attempt to place specific encounters, events and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context”.

Ethnography thus particularly stands out as a useful method for unpacking how mainstream journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are negotiating their hegemonic positions as ‘society’s truth-tellers’ (McNair, 1998:65) in the ways content from various alternative media are incorporated in their coverage of news worthy events.

It can thus be deduced from the foregoing that ethnography involves the researcher being immersed in the environment of the social actors being studied. Ethnography broadly speaking is a qualitative method that affords the researcher the avenue for observing the subjects or people being studied in their ‘natural’ environment and at the same time “tr[ies] to minimise the impact of their presence on the subjects’ actions” (Have, 2004:6). Apart from allowing the researcher to have a first-hand contact with the subject being studied, ethnography distinguishes itself from other methods of inquiry in that it affords the researcher the avenue to probe open-ended questions which might not be possible with other surveys (Howard, 2002:557).

Deploying ethnography thus requires that the researcher observes and interviews members of the community being studied, while paying keen attention to ‘the ways people work and interact, the documents they produce and use, the content of their communication, the timeframe of social processes and so on’ in order to understand the culture being studied. As such, ethnography places the researcher within the cultural context of the phenomenon being studied and allows, beyond what the people say they do, the researcher to see what they actually do.

While originally linked to anthropological fieldwork where specific cultural communities were observed and studied, ethnography has been adapted to studying journalistic practices. In providing empirical insights into journalistic routines and cultures in newsrooms, early news production studies utilised ethnography. This first generation of newsroom ethnographies such as those of Tuchman (1978) Gans (1979), Fishman (1980) among others have been referred to as the ‘first wave of news production studies’ (Cottle, 2000b). Barbie Zelizer notes that that these ethnographers had “one focal point of analysis—usually the newsroom— frozen in order to flesh out the practices by which it was inhabited” (2004:68). More recently, ethnography of newsrooms has been revived as a

useful approach to studying the news production process (See Mabweazara, 2010a; 2010b Paterson and Domingo, 2008; Domingo and Paterson, 2011; Paterson, 2008; Pujik, 2008; Singer, 2008). As such, the newsroom remains an important field if one is to make sense of whether or not the presence of new digital technologies and other alternative media are reshaping the traditional journalistic structures in Nigeria. Being the 'hub' where most of the news production takes place, the newsroom provides an avenue for exploring the complexities involved in the daily routines of journalists at work.

However, the newsroom has been critiqued for narrowing the results a newsroom ethnographer is likely to come up with at the end of the study. Commenting on the need for ethnographers studying journalistic practices to widen their scope, Zelizer argues that "few, if any, news organizations operate with the same degree of dependence on "classic" newsrooms that they displayed in earlier decades" (2004:68). Zelizer here alludes to the decentralisation of news work which now exists in many newsrooms. She therefore advises that "decisions taken at a far more diverse set of venues ---in the field, internet or telephone exchanges, social gatherings, publishing conventions--- should not be left out of the picture" (Ibid.).

In arguing for a decentralised approach to ethnography of newsrooms, Wahl-Jorgensen (2009) also argues that there is a temptation among newsroom ethnographers to 'study up' and ignore "[o]ther forms of journalism production that operate at the peripheries of the newsroom --- even though they may be an integral part of the content put out by news organisations" (30). Thus, this study attempted to pay attention to some of the concerns raised by scholars including Zelizer and Wahl-Jorgensen above. This researcher not only interviewed journalists at their desks in the newsroom but also at the refectory which was also another important site where journalists met up to discuss some of the stories they were working on. Journalists across various rungs and desks in the dailies and weekend titles newsrooms' at *Guardian*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Vanguard* and *Punch* were observed and interviewed. There was also an attempt at including the views of non-mainstream alternative practitioners in this study. To do this, I interviewed a popular Nigerian blogger who runs an active Twitter account and was particularly active tweeting and co-ordinating protests online during the Occupy Nigeria protests. However, I found that this distracted from the aim of this study which is concerned with how mainstream print journalists in Nigeria are responding to the proliferation of new 'alternative' journalisms. As such, this study does not include interviews with alternative media practitioners.

Furthermore, it is not always easy to capture all the subjects in a society when deploying ethnography. The challenges of deploying traditional newsroom ethnographies are becoming more evident as news production is increasingly becoming a decentralized activity, where the journalists do not necessarily have to be physically present in the newsroom to produce news. Even when they are in the newsrooms, observing them at work can prove strenuous for the researcher as the mobile phone and the Internet, among others are taking over one-to-one interactions in the newsrooms. This example from my fieldwork diary illustrates this point vividly:

It's 13:20p.m. A political correspondent arrives at the newsroom and goes straight to his desk. While still typing chat messages back and forth on *BBM*, he connects his laptop to the power circuit. As his computer comes alive, he makes a quick call on his phone suggesting that he is following up a story. Next, he is on *Facebook* and barely spends five minutes there before signing out. He shouts across to the new editor, asking if he received the story he emailed to him earlier.

(Field notes, *Vanguard newspaper* 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013)

The above scenario is an example of how new digital technologies are 'interfering' in the news production process. Beyond explaining what happens in the field, ethnography enables the researcher to describe the context within which existing cultures and practices present in a social setting occurs so that an outsider can understand the culture under investigation.

In surmounting some of the challenges a newsroom ethnographer is likely to encounter with the decentralisation of the news production process made possible with the presence of new digital technologies for instance, Philip Howard argues that ethnography be combined with social network analysis. Combining these two research components produces "*network ethnography*" which can be used in analysing "knowledge networks or communities of practice" (2002:550). However, while Howard's "synergistic and transdisciplinary method" (2002:551) of *network ethnography* can be useful for studying organisations via new media technologies and would need to be combined with other methods for a robust data set, the cultural context one is studying remains important in choosing a method of inquiry. As such, studying Nigerian print journalists using network ethnography may not necessarily capture the often subtle cultural dimensions of the news production process.

Against this backdrop, this study adopts the traditional ethnography which has remained a viable tool for explaining the life-world of journalists and their daily routines. The reason for this choice is partly because low Internet penetration in Nigeria would make deploying network ethnography quite challenging. Also, studying journalists in their 'natural habitat' is central to this study as it allows for an exploration of the complexities involved in how Nigerian print journalists deploy alternative media tools in their everyday newsmaking practices. Again, the traditional "newsroom ethnographies have enabled us to go straight to the heart of news organisations and show us how journalists go about their daily routines" (Willig, 2013:373). Christine Hine also aptly notes that "an ethnography is inseparable from the contexts in which it is employed" (2000:13). The context of this study is central to our understanding of what the proliferation of new alternative media means for the institutional practices of Nigerian print journalists.

It is therefore in the light of the foregoing, that deploying network ethnography within the context of this study is limiting. Although most Nigerian newspapers maintain an online presence, they still remain traditional in their news production processes. As such, being *in situ* in these newsrooms was central for capturing nuances in the newsmaking processes in real time. Thus underscoring the continued relevance of the traditional ethnographic approach for studying the complexities at play in the way journalists in Nigeria print newsrooms deploy alternative media.

While the ethnography of newsrooms conducted in the 1970s and 1980s provided theories that have influenced media studies, Cottle (2000b:19) argues that these 'first wave' newsroom ethnographies have become 'orthodoxies' that have "become increasingly out of touch with today's production practices, diversified news ecology and wider news culture" and therefore needs re-evaluation. Thus, Cottle (2000b:21) calls for a 'second wave' of ethnography of newsrooms which "sets out to theoretically map and empirically explore the rapidly changing field of news production in today's differentiated ecology of news provision". Consequent upon this call, there is evidence in recently published works on the scholarship of newsroom practices and cultures that Simon Cottle's (2000b) calls for a "second wave" of newsroom ethnography has continued to attract interest in investigating whether (or not) new media is changing newsroom cultures (See Patterson and Domingo, 2008; Singer et al, 2011). Cottle's call for a "second wave" of news ethnography contends that "much more knowledge is required, for example, about

processes of ‘technical embedding’ and the ‘social shaping’ of news technologies in use by journalists as well as the impact of these technological changes upon working practices, source involvement and news output” (2000b:33). Contingent upon this call therefore is the need to examine how Nigerian print journalists are appropriating these new information and communication technologies and whether indeed the presence of alternative journalism is negotiating spaces within their institutional newsmaking practices.

In spite of the various methods of inquiry available for questioning whether and how digital technologies are (or not) (re)shaping newsmaking practices in the Nigerian journalistic landscape, ethnography of newsrooms has remained an enduring method of choice for explaining the social and cultural milieu in which journalists carry out their daily routines and has proven useful in shaping our understanding of news work. “Ethnographic studies of news production” as Cottle (2007:1) contends, “have provided invaluable insights into the nature and determinants of news production and a necessary corrective, therefore to grand speculative claims and theories about the news media, these more grounded studies have variously examined the daily routines, bureaucratic nature, competitive ethos, professional ideologies, source dependencies and cultural practices of the news media”.

This study thus takes seriously the call from Cottle (2003:432) that “we need to examine the fast changing ecology of news, its changing industrialised and technological basis and its response to the changing structurations of society”. Ethnographic study of newsrooms is, to use Anderson’s (2013:167) words, ‘reassuming its pride of place on the list’ of possible research methods for investigating newsroom cultures and trends. Ethnography provides robust data and allows the researcher to make sense of the phenomenon being studied as it makes it possible to interview the subjects and also observe first- hand the practices that are being carried out by being immersed in the situation.

Cottle notes that “ much more knowledge is required for example about the processes of ‘technical embedding’ and the ‘social and professional shaping’ of news technologies in use by journalists as well as the impact of these technological changes upon working practices, source involvement and news output” (2000:33). Cottle (2003:4) further recognizes that all too often, the newsmaking practices of mainstream journalists have not been adequately analysed and captured by media studies, particularly within the political economy and cultural studies schools. He argues that:

In between the theoretical foci on marketplace determinations and play of cultural studies, there still exists a relatively unexplored and under-theorised ‘middle ground’ of organizational structures and workplace practices. This comprises different organizational fields and institutional settings, and the dynamic practices and daily grind of media professionals and producers engaged in productive processes...[The] ethnographic approach often proves invaluable as a corrective to speculative and abstract theory and the generalising claim to which this can give rise. Too often, the complex and multi-dimensional nature of media production is short-circuited by those holding a priori theoretical commitments, or rigid political views and expectations” (Cottle, 2003:4-5).

As such, in deploying ethnography, we can interrogate whether there is necessarily a challenge to the hegemonic practices that characterize newswork in mainstream newsrooms in Nigeria. It can therefore be concluded that ethnography of newsrooms brings to the fore the socio-cultural realities in the newsroom, and provides useful evidence in explaining whether or not the proliferation of digital technologies is rewriting and reshaping journalistic practices in Nigeria. The ethnographic approach deployed in this study also provided insights into everyday routines and practices of Nigerian journalists in the news production process and helped in understanding how they continue to contest and negotiate their hegemonic position as the mainstream when they appropriate content from other non-mainstream media sources. Following is an attempted appraisal of the two components of ethnography of newsrooms, as used in this study; in-depth semi-structured interviews and newsrooms observations.

### ***3.2.1.1 The Interview as a useful data gathering tool***

The interview has remained popular as a research method across many fields. Its prevalence as a method of data gathering has led some scholars to argue that we now live in an ‘interview society’ (Atkinson and Silverman 1997, quoted in Fontana and Frey, 2005: 698) It can be used by a researcher to gain information about events that have happened in the past as is the case in this study where Nigeria’s elections of 2011 is being used to benchmark whether or not the proliferation of new ‘alternative’ media is impacting on the daily routines and practices of journalists. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011:3), the interview provides the researcher a window into the interviewees’



world to “understand their perspectives on a scene, to retrieve experiences from the past, to gain expert insight or information, to obtain descriptions of events or scenes that are normally unavailable... or to analyse certain kinds of discourse”. Fontana and Frey (2005:698) note that interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. In structured interviews, the researcher usually has a set of scripted questions that are strictly followed throughout the interview exercise. The semi-structured interview sees the researcher utilising a pre-written interview guide and the questions asked are typically open-ended. This allows the researcher to ask follow up questions based on the response of the interviewee during the interview process. With the unstructured interview, the researcher mostly serves as the moderator who guides the conversation and it ‘involves asking relatively open-ended questions of research participants in order to discover their percepts on the topic of interest’ (Firmin, 2008:908).

In understanding the perspectives of Nigerian journalists with regards to what the proliferation of alternative media means for their institutional practices, the interview proved to be a useful tool. I adopted an in-depth semi-structured interviewing style to enable me keep track of the questions I wanted to ask the journalists and also to allow them speak in detail about their profession and what they think alternative media means for their institutional practices. The semi-structured interviewing method also allowed me to ask probing questions from some of the answers the journalists provided. While the conversation was mostly revealing about various aspects of current journalistic practices, I had to ensure that I re-iterated the questions I wanted them to answer in order to remain on track. For instance, during the interview with a senior journalist and editor at *Guardian*, he went as far as telling me how many photographers were in the newsroom when he started working as a reporter about thirty years ago and how many photographers currently work in the newsroom. While this is useful in terms of explaining how the presence of new information and communication technologies is making journalists multi-skilled, I had to be tactful in bringing the conversation back to answering the questions I was asking. As I was not physically present to observe how journalists incorporated or interacted with alternative media texts during the elections of 2011, interviews, which have been described as a “principal alternative to observation” (Lindlof, 1995:163) proved a useful method in understanding how the elections were reported. Newsroom observations however, formed an integral part of understanding the daily routines in Nigerian newsrooms.

### ***3.2.1.2 Newsroom observation: Unpacking the ‘unsaid’***

Earlier newsroom studies have, based on long periods of ethnographic immersion in various newsrooms provided useful insights into the working practices in newsrooms (Tuchman, 1978; Shoemaker and Reece 1996; Cottle, 2007). These studies have revealed that a number of factors, including ownership structures, financial constraints, news values, among others impact and shape how journalistic cultures are formed. Although most of these newsroom studies have been based on newsrooms in the west, more recently there have been interests in non-Western settings. For instance, Hayes Mabweazara’s (2010a) ethnographic study of how print journalists in Zimbabwe deploy new ICTs demonstrates that newsroom ethnographies remain relevant for understanding the news production cultures prevalent in various locations.

This study also recognises that to have an in-depth understanding of how Nigerian journalists carry out their daily routines, it is vital to be at their workplace in order to observe their practices as this will provide an insight into the subtleties and dynamics at play in the news production process. In Cottle’s words, “[p]articipant observation is the only method by which the normally invisible realm of media production can be recorded and made available for wider considerations” (2009:260).

By conducting newsroom observations, the researcher, as Herbert (2000, 551) puts it, “gains unreplicable insight through an analysis of everyday activities and symbolic constructions”. In addition to gaining insights into the everyday newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists, Quandt (2008:135) also notes that newsroom observation “is the method of choice when trying to get a first impression of the work routines and work conditions of journalists”. In studying the overt and covert in the newspaper newsrooms visited for this study, I adopted a form of observation by observing the journalists ‘at work’ without participating at any stage of the news production process. For this study, my status was that of a non-participant observer. Having worked for a few years as a print and broadcast journalist in Nigeria, my immersion in the newsrooms to observe the journalists at work was not totally strange. Although Metcalf (1998:327) argues that “[a]lmost by definition, ethnographers are outsiders”, in studying these newsrooms, I was fishing in familiar waters. I took on the role of an observer looking out for both the unspoken and overt.

Beyond being embedded physically in the newsroom, my research role as a non-participant observation, which meant that I did not take part in the news production process in these newsrooms, provided a leeway for me to be creative and reflexive in the process. I did not have to cover any beat nor did I have to take part in the news production process, as Hasty (2005) for instance had to, in her study of Ghanaian journalists. I could easily ask questions about what I was observing and piece all the information together in understanding the daily workings in the newsroom. I also observed the daily editorial conferences held in the four newsrooms as it is during these meetings that major decisions about what would get published in the newspapers are made. Being in the newsrooms without participating in the news production process also meant that I was able to “reflect upon the taken-for-granted assumptions” (Cottle, 2009:267) of happenings in the newsrooms. Cottle aptly captures the usefulness of observation in understanding the experiences of a group of people, arguing that “perhaps more than other methods... is destined to be reflexive, open to the contingencies of the field experience and therefore less than strictly linear in its execution or predictable in its findings” (Cottle, 2009:270)

By being physically present in the newsroom, I could see the newsroom layout first-hand, which also revealed some unspoken rules and practices among the journalists. The following scenario from my observation at *Guardian* for instance revealed that the objects in the newsroom and how they are arranged point to a larger hegemonic structure:

“I moved from observing the reporters on the news desk to the sports desk. I noticed that there were generally more men than women in the newsroom at about a ratio of 3:1. The sport desk had no woman present during my observation. After observing what one of the sports reporter was doing--- copying and pasting a sports story from an online source, I got up to get a piece of paper. On my arrival, I realised that the chair I was sitting on was gone. I found another one not too far off and decided to grab it. Just as I was going to move the chair, another reporter on the Sports desk shouted ‘Don’t move that chair, it’s for our *oga*<sup>6</sup>[sic] (boss) on this desk. When next you stand up, keep an eye on the chair you were sitting on else it will develop wings’”. (Observation field notes at *Guardian*, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2013)

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Oga’ is used among Nigerians to refer to one’s boss, among peers or to denote seniority. While ‘oga’ is a common parlance among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria and has become part of the Nigerian pidgin-English, it is used in the context of the conversation above to refer to sports editor.

The ‘*oga*’s’ seat here also provides insights into some nuances common in the newsrooms visited for this study where senior editors who may not necessarily be older than other journalists are patronised as ‘aunt’, ‘uncle’ when they are not related or even ‘*oga*’ in the offices. As such, the ‘*oga*’s’ seat is not to be taken lightly as it symbolises a position of authority. Thus, the ‘*ogas*’, ‘aunties’ and ‘uncles’ in these newsrooms, as Richardson (2007:31) puts it “gain power from their social relation to others and their positions in a hierarchical social system”. While this particular chair was not any different from the rest, the fact that the sports editor, was revered even in his absence, suggests how hierarchical positions in the newsroom get played out not only on the pages of the newspapers but also on the seats in the newsroom. The scenario above also corroborates the idea that apart from newsroom observation revealing implicit details ‘about that particular setting at that particular time’, it also serves as important building blocks that ‘can help us build up a much more complete picture’ (Hansen and Machin, 2013:63) about the practices of the people in a setting.

Deploying newsroom observation also made me experience first-hand how Nigerian journalists in their interactions with texts from alternative media sites, for instance, negotiate their hegemonic traditional practices. This method allows the researcher to “look into the inner sanctum of media production, that privileged domain which media professionals ply their trade, make their decisions and fashion their collective outpourings...” (Cottle, 2009:260). It also makes the researcher privy to “behind the scenes of media output...[and] reveal[s] the complex of forces, constraints and conventions that inform the shape, selection and silences of media output”(Cottle, 2009:267). Being *in-situ* in the newsrooms also broadened my understanding of the nuances of news production process which is useful for investigating whether the presence of alternative media is impacting on newsroom practices.

Although newsroom observation proves to be a revealing method in going beyond what journalists say they do or are expected to do to unearthing what they *actually* do, it requires more than simply observing journalists ‘at work’ and taking field notes. During the period of my immersion in the four newsrooms, I made use of an observation diary to take notes of what I was observing the journalists do in the newsrooms. My observation diary, which is a notebook, was very important in taking notes of what I was observing in the newsrooms. I reverted to my notebook at the end of every observation to ‘flesh-

out' my notes and make sense of what I had seen and heard during the course of the day. There are also other hurdles that need to be crossed in conducting an ethnographic study of newsrooms (Cottle, 2009:270). The issue of access remains crucial in ethnographic studies as the researcher may never be able to conduct ethnography should access be denied. I had to be tactful in asking for access into the newsrooms because of security concerns in Nigeria. The April 2012 bombing of *This Day's* Abuja bureau confirmed the fears of journalists that they had also become a target for Boko Haram<sup>7</sup>. I started by reading articles from the websites of the four newspapers selected for this study and made a note of some of the names I found on the by-line for stories written during the 2011 elections. I then carried out an Internet search of who the editors were before I sent them introductory emails. It is worthy of note that not all the editors I sent emails to responded. This can be expected in research environments like Nigeria where perpetrators of Advance Fee Fraud (popularly known as 419<sup>8</sup> in Nigeria) can go to almost any length for unsuspecting victims to fall prey. It took several phone calls to the editors and follow-up emails for me to earn the trust that opened the newsroom doors to me. In the end, the managing editors of *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Tribune* and *Vanguard* granted access into the four newsrooms where this study was conducted.

### 3.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

It has been argued that language plays an important role in the meanings which media texts elicit. As such, in keeping with the theoretical underpinning of this research that news is socially constructed, a textual analysis of news texts is useful in that it allows the researcher to unpack the latent meanings inherent in a text. As Tuchman (2002:81) points out, analysing news texts can reveal the production processes that news undergoes. Of the various methods of doing textual analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) remains useful because it "offers a number of tools to reveal the ideas, values and opinions in texts and speeches that may not necessarily be obvious on first reading or hearing" (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 116). CDA seeks to unpack the hidden meanings in the way language is deployed and explores how such discourses mirror societal practices. It also "enables

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<sup>7</sup> Boko Haram interpreted to mean "Western education is forbidden" is the group that has severally claimed responsibility for bombings in many cities in the northern part of Nigeria and more recently for the kidnap of over 200 school girls in Chibok, Maiduguri state, Nigeria. According to the BBC, Boko Haram is the "al-Qaeda-aligned Boko Haram armed movement is conducting an insurrection in the mainly Muslim north" (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550>)

<sup>8</sup> 419 as Advance fee fraud is popularly called in Nigeria, takes its name from its position in the Nigerian Criminal code chapter 38 section 419, and is a law which prohibits fraud. More information on the law can be found here <http://www.nigeria-law.org/Criminal%20Code%20Act-Part%20VI%20to%20the%20end.htm>

us to focus not only on the actual uses of language as a form of social interaction... but on forms of representation in which different social categories are constructed” (Deacon et al 1999:146). In analysing media texts, the context and discursive practices within which the texts are produced must be brought into the picture in order to provide an accurate reading of the text (Richardson, 2008).

There are a number of approaches to CDA as a method of textual analysis. Wetherell and Potter advance a social psychological approach to CDA which examines ‘social psychological issues through studying the use of language’ (Antaki et al, 2003:2). There is also the social and cognitive approach to CDA with van Dijk being a key thinker of this perspective. He argues in favour of the ‘sociocognitive study of the reproduction of power abuse by discourse’ (discourse.org, 2009). In addition to these approaches, there is the discourse-historical approach also known as the Wodakian approach to CDA, credited to Wodak and her colleagues at the Vienna school. Although the Wodakian approach examines text at a meso-level, its focus on “discover[ing] new insights” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:19), particularly how discourses might have evolved over historical periods makes it less applicable to this study. For Fairclough, CDA’s approach to analysing text is three-pronged. He notes that ‘it is relational, it is dialectical and it is transdisciplinary’ (Fairclough, 2010:3). While these approaches to CDA provide useful contributions to unpacking texts, the motive for deploying CDA in this study is for closely examining how Nigerian print journalists appropriate content from alternative media into their reportage.

Notwithstanding the differences in these approaches to CDA, they all seem to be agreeing with the Foucauldian perspective that discourse is not an objective representation of reality but produced to reveal power structures and positions. Fairclough (2010:4) further explains that CDA is “*not* analysis of discourse ‘in itself’ ...but analysis of dialectical *relations between* discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the ‘internal relations’ of discourse”. In defining what CDA entails, Wodak and Meyer (2001:2) provide a succinct definition:

“CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequalities as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimised and so by language use (or in discourse).”

CDA has also been described as an ‘academic movement, a way of doing discourse analysis from a critical perspective, which often focuses on theoretical concepts such as power, ideology and domination’ (Baker et al, 2008:273). CDA differs from Discourse Analysis in that it not only describes the social processes involved in the phenomenon being studied, it also evaluates these processes in relation to the socio-cultural and historical contexts within which they are created while focusing on the relationship between language and society. In this vein, Richardson (2007:37) aptly describes what CDA is by explaining that it ‘approaches discourse as a circular process in which social practices influence texts...and in turn texts help influence society via shaping the viewpoints of those ...who consume them’. I adopt CDA as a lens through which to examine how power structures were both produced and maintained in the discourse of including alternative voices in Nigerian newspapers’ coverage of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of 2012. Deploying CDA also enables the researcher to interrogate how power structures are implicated and revealed in texts in the ways voices are privileged and marginalised. In texts, power is not usually unidirectional but mostly a social interaction where domination and resistance is evident. As Van Dijk (1989:21) reminds us, “power must be analysed in relation to various forms of counter-power or resistance by dominated groups”.

With roots in the Foucauldian thesis that language is a construct which seeks to condition how we understand the world (Foucault, 1972), CDA provides a practical framework for unpacking how language in use makes these social constructions possible. A major assumption in CDA is that language used in text, in form of discourse, seeks to position and represent certain actors in specific ways. CDA thus goes beyond the literal meanings in a text to unearth the latent and discursive meanings present in the text. CDA is concerned with how social as well as power structures are constructed and implicated in texts. Thus, in this present study, CDA presents itself as a veritable tool for examining how alternative media content was included and marginalised in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of 2012. Examining the news texts published in reporting these protests provides useful basis for investigating how Nigerian print journalists use language to acknowledge, appropriate, marginalise and define inclusions from alternative media. Although scholars, such as Bruns (2008) argue that the proliferation of new digital technologies is making everyone alongside professional journalists become ‘gatewatchers’, examining news texts produced by Nigerian journalists will be useful in

explaining if this is necessarily the case in Nigeria. Analysing how these inclusions are made in the news texts can also provide a reading of how and whether (or not) the appropriation of alternative media content ‘alternative’ media is necessarily democratising the Nigerian media space. As Cottle (2000a: 427) succinctly puts it,

“who gets “on” or “in” the news is important—very important indeed. Whose voices and viewpoints structure and inform news discourse goes to the heart of democratic views of, and radical concerns about, the news media”.

Guided by Fairclough’s approach to CDA this study analyses purposively sampled news texts published by *Punch* and *Vanguard* during the *Occupy Nigeria* protests. The aim of the analysis is to investigate how Nigerian mainstream journalists appropriated alternative media content and what these inclusions or exclusions reveal about how power relations are implicated in these texts. According to Richardson (2007:37) “Fairclough’s model of CDA ...provides a more accessible method of doing CDA than alternative theoretical approaches”. Taking forward the argument of what CDA does, Brookes (2008:180) tells us that it aims “to uncover how language works to construct and signify people, objects and events in the world in specific ways. CDA also provides an avenue for interrogating the assumption that the presence of digital journalism can make collaboration between professional journalists and ‘the-people-formerly-known-as-the-audience’ as advocated by networked journalism scholars is the case in Nigeria. Questions around how the use of passivization, repetition, connotative expressions, ‘othering’ among others are advanced in these texts would be scrutinized through the CDA lens.

### **3.3 Sampling Method and Selection**

Sampling for this study followed the ‘non-random’ technique that has been described as one of the characteristics of qualitative research (Deacon et al, 2007:52). In keeping with the broad aim of this research, the research design also informed the sample size and units. The population included all mainstream media organisations in Nigeria but national newspapers were purposively selected to be included in the frame. Of the over 100 newspapers published in Nigeria, this study’s focused on four newspapers, which though small, allows for “depth and detail...rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question” (Patton,1990:53-54).



As earlier mentioned in the introduction chapter, Nigeria has one of the largest presses in Africa (BBC News Africa, Nigeria profile, July 2012). While there are no trustworthy records of facts about newspaper circulation figures in Nigeria, Dare (2011:11) argues that “the combined circulation of the newspapers in Nigeria has been on a steady decline.” However, this observation remains speculative as there is no reference to any research into newspaper circulation figures in Nigeria supporting this claim. It is thus useful to be cautious in concluding that newspaper circulation is on the decline in Nigeria as a result of the appropriation of social media and mobile phones (Dare, 2011:12). This is partly because newspapers in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa are still viewed as records of truth (Olukotun, 2004a). Further, conclusions such as those made by Dare (2011) generalise trends elsewhere. The fact is that more newspapers are in fact joining the media scene in Nigeria as elsewhere, as media owners rework their business models (WAN-IFRA, 2014). For instance, the *New Telegraph*<sup>9</sup> recently joined the newspaper market in Nigeria, having both print and online presence, while another one *The Cable* has also recently been floated as an online only newspaper.

Consequently, it is useful to point out that Nigerian newspapers have, despite many challenges, remained “one of the most resilient and daring segments of Nigeria’s civil society” (Olukotun 2004a: 2) and have also been praised for “stand[ing] out [because of] its structure of ownership and editorial policies” (Ette, 2000:67). Rønning (2009:165) also observes that the Nigerian press, “through long years of military dictatorships [remains] one of Africa’s freest, bravest and most outspoken media”.

The four newspapers purposively sampled for this study are privately-owned national dailies, which are relatively popular among the Nigerian reading public. In deploying ethnography of newsrooms, it is important that the researcher spends “a sustained and intensive period in the field” (Cottle, 2009:261). While there is no agreed-on length of time that one should be immersed in the newsroom for, media scholars who adopt ethnography of newsrooms have varying periods of immersion in field. These periods range from over a decade (Tuchman, 1978), to a five year period of immersion at three newspapers (Ryfe, 2012), a period of about three years inside and outside Philadelphia

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<sup>9</sup>One of the senior editors I interviewed at *Punch*, who moved to the newly established *New Telegraph* informed me about the birth of this newspaper. It is also useful to note here that a number of publications are constantly springing up and mushrooming in Nigeria, sponsored by politicians or business executives who are keen on having a share of the Nigerian newspaper space.

newsrooms (Anderson, C.W, 2013) and a six-month ethnographic immersion in Zimbabwean print newsrooms (Mabweazara, 2010a; 2010b) to mention a few. For this study, data was collected in three newspaper organisations located in Lagos and one newspaper located in Ibadan, south-western Nigeria by means of a nine-week *in situ* ethnographic immersion comprising semi-structured interviews and newsroom observation between March and April 2012 and between February and April 2013. The south west of Nigeria, particularly, Lagos has the largest concentration of newspaper organisations in Nigeria and is often referred to as Nigeria's media headquarters (See Yusha'u, 2009). It should be noted here that there have been arguments that the concentration of most newspapers in the south western part of Nigeria continues to undermine the media democratisation project (for example, Yusha'u, 2009). Peter Enahoro, (cited in Olukotun, 2004a:77) a former managing director of *Daily Times*, Nigeria's oldest newspaper, argued that "many of today's so-called national newspapers emanating from the South-West are in fact regional publications whose loyalties are to the personalities and causes espoused by the apparent majority of the people of that area. It is tantamount to a monopoly of a vital resource with a crucial bearing on the democratic process".

While the focus of this study is not to interrogate whether the regional location of these newspapers impacted upon their reportage, my interest in choosing these four newspapers from the lot is ,in part, because these newspapers circulate widely across Nigeria and are regarded as having a country-wide reach. Also, the choice of confining my research to newspaper organisations in south-western Nigeria was also informed by the information obtained on the website of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the time of obtaining ethical approval for this research which advised against travel to many northern Nigerian states where I could have visited media organisations located there. The ethnography, which was carried out between April 2012 and April 2013 over a nine-week period as noted earlier, involved a combined total of about 125 journalists, who were included either by observation or through the in-depth semi-structured interviews. During this period, I conducted more than sixty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews with reporters, editors and managing editors and spent over four hundred hours as an observer in these newsrooms. Being immersed in these newsrooms was deemed useful for this study as it allowed me to capture the often taken-for-granted nuances that take place during the newsmaking process.

In addition to the ethnography of newsrooms, this study, as earlier noted, conducted an analysis of news texts published in reporting the Occupy Nigeria protests. As Singer (2009, 191) notes, “Such triangulation increases confidence in the interpretation of findings [and] it is particularly useful for exploring the “why” as well as the “what” of a subject”. The reliability and validity of a qualitative study is also further strengthened through a triangulation of methods (Golafshani, 2003:604). In defining triangulation, Creswell and Miller (2000:126) note that it is “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study.” For this study, I interviewed journalists across various beats and hierarchical positions within the newsroom structure. Participants were drawn from the managing editors to sports journalists, crime reporters, news editors, political journalists, health reporters and online journalists. Again, the process of gathering data from journalists working in four Nigerian print newsrooms run by different owners and management also serves as a means of triangulation (Cottle, 2009).

Snowball sampling was an important component of this study. The senior editors with whom I made initial contacts via emails and telephone calls were the first people I interviewed in these media houses. They then drafted in other senior editors and journalists whom I subsequently interviewed. During the course of the interviews, some of these journalists also directed me to their colleagues who were versed in using alternative media in their reports.

In justifying the suitability of snowball sampling in this study, I concur with Deacon et al (2007:55) who suggest that “snowball sampling is mainly used where no list or institution exists that could be used as a basis of sampling”. Accessing the list of all current print journalists in Nigeria is an almost impossible venture. This is because although print journalists in Nigeria are expected to be members of a number of associations such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the list of members with vital details about their current employers is not frequently updated. Transfer from one bureau to another, and journalists taking up political appointments as media assistants to politicians are some of the reasons that the NUJ list was not a feasible option in selecting participants for this study.

As such my ‘key contacts’ played important roles in during the selection process. In each of the newspaper organisations visited for this study, my first port of call was the office

of the editors whom I had exchanged correspondence with before my arrival in Nigeria for the fieldwork. All participants for this study also use new digital technologies accessed either through their newsrooms or via personal mobile or *BlackBerry* smartphone or a combination of both. This was a necessary criterion in ensuring that those who actively use digital technologies in carrying out their duties took part in the study.

The interviews were conducted at various locations including the newsrooms, editors' offices, online journalists' offices<sup>10</sup> and the staff refectories. Included among the semi-structured interviews were questions about whether alternative journalistic practices were impacting on the way journalists carry out their institutional routine, how reports from alternative media sites were judged newsworthy and included in reporting the key events, and whether they agreed with notions that alternative media should be networked into the mainstream media. The interviews were transcribed, analysed and coded into themes.

Observations for this study occurred primarily in daily-sections newsrooms of the four newspapers. Additional observation took place in the weekend newsroom of *Nigerian Tribune* and refectories of *Punch* and *Vanguard*. The refectories proved a useful space for asking the journalists questions about some of the things I had observed in the newsroom and it also meant that they could open up about some 'unconventional' practices that they might not want their desk editors to be aware of, such as including comments made on social media and tagging such as 'a source who refused to be named'. Evidence that "African journalists have not shied away from exploiting digital technology in sourcing news and information" (Mudhai 2011:681) was also gleaned from the observations as the mobile phone and particularly *Blackberry* (I discuss this substantially in Chapter 4) was an ubiquitous tool which the journalists used in news sourcing (See also Mabweazara 2011).

### **3.3.1 In search of newsrooms and journalists to include in the sample: my audit trail**

The audit trail is useful in qualitative research to show how the researcher *actually* carried out the research, in terms of the methods adopted and the processes along the way. Scholars have recommended the use of an audit trail in qualitative research (Akkerman et al, 2006; Heopfl, 1997; Koch, 2006; Rice and Ezzy, 2000; Thomson, 2014). As Thomson (2014) notes, "the audit trail consists of ... information about the actual data that you have generated ...[and] information about how you've analysed the data". Rice

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<sup>10</sup> The journalists in charge of the newspapers' websites at *Punch* and *Guardian* had their desks in separate offices from the newsroom. This I was told during one of the interviews, is to 'facilitate better concentration' in monitoring alternative media sites (*Online journalist, Guardian*).

and Ezzy (2000:36) observe that “maintaining and reporting an audit trail of methodological and analytic decisions allows others to assess the significance of the research”. For this study, I considered a number of alternatives in terms of deciding the size of the study as well as whether to speak to popular bloggers in Nigeria. While this would have been useful, it would have distracted from the aim of this research which is primarily focused on mainstream journalists. It was therefore important that I not only interviewed them but that I was physically present in the newsrooms to have a broader and fuller perspective of their everyday newsmaking practices. Although being *in situ* in these print newsrooms was useful in providing a deeper and richer understanding of the news production process, it is also important to point out that no matter how long one is immersed in the newsrooms, one cannot really fit into the dynamics of the newsroom. While I understand some of the nuances of news production having had a few years’ stint as a print and broadcast journalist in Nigeria, visiting the newsroom as a researcher meant that I was an outsider. Although the benefits of my being an ‘insider’ meant that, as Paterson and Zoellner (2011:98) I was familiar with the phenomenon being studied, they however warn that this familiarity could lead to “reconfiguring culture patterns in familiar situations, and interpreting meanings attached to events” (99). They therefore advise that the researcher “adapts an ‘artificial naiveté’ to distance [herself] from what [she is] observing”. Therefore, my oscillating between these two identities, as an ‘insider’ and ‘an outside’ makes this study a critical appraisal of contemporary newsmaking practices and cultures in Nigerian print newsrooms.

### **3.4 Researcher’s Reflexivity**

Since ethnography involves immersion in a social setting in order to understand the culture and ways of doing of a particular group, it is necessary that the researcher in constructing meanings from the data does so in consonant with the members of that community. Ethnography involves the researcher being *in situ* “‘in a social setting for an extended period of time observing behaviour, listening to what is said ... and asking questions’ (Bryman, 2004:539). As such, it is important that the researcher understands her/ his perception of the social world will to an extent, shape the interpretation of data collected. In the case of this study, my stint as a print journalist in Nigeria provided me with some form of understanding of what happens in print newsrooms. It also meant that I was familiar with certain specialist terminologies such as desk, beat, assignment, among others, which are mostly used in print newsrooms. In conducting ethnography however,

reflexivity demands that as a researcher, I continually ask how I understand the community I am studying so as to capture nuances that may be taken for granted.

### **3.4.1 In the field: The place of rapport and ‘*who you know*’ in studying Nigerian newsrooms**

Studying any field in Nigeria is almost as complex as the environment that births them. Scholars who have carried out fieldwork in Nigeria have reiterated the need to have ample information before venturing into studying any phenomenon that would require being physically present in Nigeria. Yusha’u (2009) in his study of corruption reporting in Nigerian newspapers wrote of some of the difficulties he encountered during his fieldwork such as appointments being called off at short notices or being cancelled. Yusha’u’s experience is however not new or strange. Agbese’s (2006) similar research story underscores the significance of the ‘*who you know*’ card, in conducting research within the Nigerian context. In her words:

When I contacted a participant on my own, the participant agreed to participate, made an appointment, but did not show up, twice. When my father called the participant and the participant learned that I was really Dan<sup>11</sup> Agbese’s daughter, we made another appointment and it was kept (Agbese, 2006:96).

Although my earlier stint as a journalist in Nigeria, as I mentioned earlier provided the necessary familiarity with the research environment and meant that I was fishing in familiar waters, I still had to make initial contacts with the journalists who would facilitate my entry into these newsrooms. Having done an internship at the *Nigerian Tribune* in 2006, I had to re-open communication with some of the journalists I worked with at that time, who had risen through the ranks to become senior editors. I also decided to get in contact with the editors of the other newspapers located in Lagos. This was the tough part and like getting entry into many big companies in Nigeria, particularly those that are at risk of being bombed, it usually boiled down to ‘*who you know*’. I sent several emails to many print journalists in Nigeria but these were neither acknowledged nor responded to. This is not strange in Nigeria as the fear of scam and phishing emails and calls, popularly known as *419* (I explained this in section 3.2.1 of this chapter) is becoming an everyday reality for many. It took days of searching the Internet to know what was currently happening to the editors I wished to contact before any useful feedback came my way.

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<sup>11</sup> Dan Agbese is a renowned Nigerian journalist, who along with Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu and Yakubu Mohammed, established in 1984 the *Newswatch*, a weekly news magazine that was popular at the time for its investigative reporting.

The issue of gaining access into newsrooms is one that resonates with other researchers who have attempted studying journalists *in situ* (Cottle, 2009). In gaining access into *Vanguard's* newsroom, I started reading the online editions of the newspaper to ascertain who the senior editors are with the hope that their email addresses would also be published. In doing this, I found the Managing Editor's email address and sent a couple of emails. I should also point out here that the mobile phone played an important role in securing access into these newsrooms. As the case of the managing editor at *Vanguard*, emails to the editors of the other newspaper houses had to be supported with phone calls. This was useful in creating rapport with my contacts and helped with becoming familiar.

Thus, after several emails and phone calls, I was able to establish contact which facilitated my meeting him in 2012. After my time at *Vanguard* in April 2012, I made sure I cultivated the relationship by keeping the email lines open. This made it a lot easier when I was to visit the newsroom again in 2013. This example highlights the centrality of building and maintaining relationships with research participants. As Metcalf (1998:326-327) rightly avers, "[e]thnographers pride themselves on the personal relationships they forge in the fieldwork... these relationships often provide much-needed emotional support to the insecure researcher and create a genuine bond with his or her host or informants". Indeed, this bond was to play a significant role during my immersion at *Vanguard's* newsroom in March 2013, as the editor literally took me by the hand into the newsroom and handed me over to the news editor. The significance of my being physically handed over to the news editor was to prove useful in encouraging the respondents, who were at first sceptical, to take part in the study.

Related to the above experience was my field experience at *Guardian*, where a Personal Assistant to the Editor-in-Chief almost refused me an appointment with his boss. Although I had visited *Guardian's* newsroom in 2012, this experience revealed the gains of not only securing access but keeping the relationship with informants in the field 'alive' particularly in a context like Nigeria where 'who you know' is an important access-card. The following extract from my fieldwork diary provides context:

After my immersion at *Punch*, my next port of call would be *Guardian*. After several appointments could not be kept because my contact, the Editor-in-Chief had many meetings to attend, he was finally able to schedule an appointment to formally introduce me to other senior journalists. This introduction was important to facilitate easy access to the other journalists in the newsroom. I arrived at *Guardian* as per my appointment with contact but his personal assistant insisted I could not see his boss today. All my attempts at explaining why I needed to see

his boss did not make him change his mind. But for the timely arrival of the Editor-in-Chief, who came to the reception area where I was still being interrogated, today's journey to *Guardian* would have been futile. After exchanging pleasantries, my contact took me to the newsrooms where he introduced me as his 'niece' to the news editor who also passed the information on to the other journalists I interviewed." (Field notes at *Guardian*, March 2013).

The encounters discussed above thus underscore the place of building relationships with research participants, especially when visiting a research context like Nigeria. As with getting access to many government officials in Nigeria, 'who you know' or rather, 'who knows you' can open many doors that would otherwise remain firmly shut.

### **3.5 Notes on Ethics**

In line with ethical approval sought and obtained from the University of Central Lancashire Research Ethics Committee, the identities of the journalists who participated in this study were anonymised. Since there are several senior editors, desk editors, journalists, reporters online editors, among others, anonymity is further granted and their identities protected by simply referring to their roles and positions. I adopted an abstraction strategy that only mentioned the roles of the journalists to give context and show their level of authority. This strategy of mentioning the official positions of journalists has been used in previous ethnographic news production studies (See Tuchman 1979; Singer, 2006; Mabweazara, 2010a) and it does not in any way distract from the research findings. The journalists who participated in this study were asked to sign informed consent forms before the start of the interviews and as such, they were aware that their responses would be used in my study. Consent was also requested before the interviews were tape-recorded and all but one agreed to have their interviews recorded. Where the respondent did not grant permission to take a tape recording, I used my notebook to take notes.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted a discussion of the research design used in gathering empirical data for this study. This study adopts a qualitative research approach in that it enables a deeper and richer exploration of the institutional practices of journalists in the newsmaking process. In gathering a rich data set, this study combines ethnography of Nigerian print newsrooms, which comprises in-depth semi structured interviews and newsrooms observations with a Critical Discourse Analysis of sample news texts. As



Cottle (2003:17) reminds us, to understand the field of media production, “news ‘text’ and production ‘context’ need to not be seen as separate analytical moments but rather as mutually constitutive and interpenetrating”. Therefore, the combination of these methods was deemed best suited for studying whether the institutional practices of Nigerian print journalists are necessarily changing with the proliferation of new alternative media. The chapter has also attempted to highlight the importance of understanding the research context.

The following chapters draw from the empirical data collected using the research design discussed in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### Alternative media and ‘new’ everyday practices in Nigerian print newsrooms

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines how Nigerian print journalists are appropriating alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices. The permeation of new digital technologies in mainstream media newsrooms and the proliferation of ‘alternative’ media raise questions for how the institutional routines and practices of journalists are understood. This chapter thus discusses newsroom practices in four Nigerian print newsrooms and role (or not) of alternative media tools in the everyday practices of these journalists. There are on-going debates which argue that as new alternative media proliferate, hierarchies are being levelled, with the journalistic authority is being eroded, making the news production process an interactive activity (Heinrich, 2013; Robinson, 2007). While these debates may describe the situation in Western mediaspheres, it is useful to examine what the presence of new information and communication technologies mean for journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms. As Nyamnjoh (1999:15) argues, it is “imperative to situate these emerging trends and practices within the context of African realities [rather than] in Western fantasies”.

Against this backdrop, this chapter draws from the ethnographic data collected in four Nigerian print newsrooms comprising observations of the news production process and in-depth semi-structured interviews with journalists. Although I gathered data and interacted with these journalists in other places outside the newsroom as I mentioned earlier in chapter 3, I draw mainly from observing these journalists during the newsmaking process. This chapter begins with a discussion of a day in the life of journalists in these newsrooms to illustrate how alternative media is incorporated into their everyday newsmaking practices. These discussions highlight the significance of the mobile phone, particularly the *Blackberry* in the news production process. It also provides an analysis of how the deployment of alternative media in these newsrooms raises ethical questions for journalism practices in Nigerian print newsrooms. In addition, this chapter interrogates whether the physical layout and the use of physical space in these newsrooms is affected by the way journalists appropriate new media in their everyday newsmaking

practices, and if so how. This is, in part, to explore the (dis)continuities and changing practices in these newsrooms with the ways alternative media are appropriated. This chapter goes beyond providing an inventory of the activities of journalists within these newsrooms to highlighting how the journalists themselves understand their appropriation of alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices. I attempt to understand not only what the *everyday* in these newsrooms entails but also how these alternative media are (or not) impacting on established institutional practices and routines in these newsrooms.

## **4.2 Every day is *not* typical in Nigerian print newsrooms**

It's 9.00am. I am now in the daily edition's newsroom at *Nigerian Tribune*. The room itself, a large space segmented by desks and computers, was almost empty except for a handful of journalists—two women and one man flipping through another national daily. I decide to move closer to observe these two women. By now, I realise that they are interns. One is surfing the Internet while the other frantically takes notes. As I glance over their shoulders, I notice they have several tabs opened on the computer screen. They kept going back and forth to these pages spending more time on *Facebook*. They seem engrossed with what they are doing and I decide not to disturb. I now turn to focus on other journalist who is still flipping through the pile of newspapers on his table. He looks up from his reading and I introduce myself. He tells me that he is a business reporter and explains that he skims through as many newspapers as he can every morning. I tell him about my research and he agrees to be interviewed.

It's 11.05am and more journalists arrive at the newsroom, and exchanging pleasantries with colleagues. The two women I was observing earlier now have another woman with them. As I move closer, I realise that they are interns and the woman who has now joined them is the editor for the Women's desk. She is not satisfied with the information they presented. I decide to listen closely. She announces that the information they had gathered online would not suffice. They need to also conduct a *vox pop*. The two ladies nod in agreement and return to their seats. The newsroom is now very busy and there are more journalists in the newsroom. Some of them are typing away on their laptops. I also observe some speaking on the mobile phone and there are others walking around the newsroom.

It's almost 2.00pm. Some of the journalists are gathering around a table right at the centre of the newsroom. As they converge, I notice that they are mostly heads of the various desks and I soon discover that they are having the daily editorial conference. I too take a seat nearby. They go through the day's edition and make comments on omissions and some grammatical errors. The discussions soon turn into arguments--- an alternative media site and another newspaper have published a story that was not in today's *Tribune*. The arguments soon die down. One of the journalists signals that he has a question for everyone. Soon after his question, I realise that he is the editor for the Education desk. He needs contacts for a story he is working on. The others chip in and he scribbles some notes and saves a few phone numbers on his mobile phone. The comments wind down. The meeting is over.

(Field Notes from newsroom observation at *Nigerian Tribune* 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2013)

The extract above gives a peek into a typical day at *Nigerian Tribune*'s newsroom. It illustrates the routinized patterns that the newsmaking process takes in these newsrooms. As can be gleaned from observing the two interns above, sourcing information online still does not replace the place of *physically* going out to get reactions from members of the public. Consequently, while alternative media may provide useful information for journalists to work with in the news production process, the ways in which they are appropriated calls for being measured in assessing their impact in the newsmaking process.

Again, the centrality of the notion of the gatekeeper is evident from the observation notes above, where senior journalists determine the shape and form that the news production process takes. For the interns on the Women's desk, for instance, the editor's decision in determining how information in writing their story would be gathered exemplifies the institutionalised practices that remain in the news production process. While the interns would much have preferred using the information they gleaned online, the Women's desk editor still felt attached to the normative practice of physically going out to get the reaction of members of the public in the form of *vox pop*. This is telling in illustrating how 'traditional' routines are still very much the practice. Although this has often been uncritically described as Nigerian journalists being "stuck in the mindset and production practices of pre-Internet newspapers" (Kperogi, 2012:451) it importantly draws attention to the fact that mainstream print journalists in Nigeria remain creative in their appropriation of alternative media. As such, debates which totalise experiences and

describes journalists as being “stuck” as Kperogi (2012) asserts need re-examining against current trends in these newsrooms.

A day in the life of journalists at *Punch*’s newsroom also revealed related patterns in the way journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms go about their everyday newsmaking practices. This time, the focus was on the daily editorial conference.

Most of the journalists in the newsroom this morning are concentrating on their computer screens. I stroll across the newsroom to catch a glimpse of what they are doing. As I move back towards the news editor’s desk, I notice more journalists are sitting around a long conference table close to where the news editor sits. They are seven of them. It dawned on me that the editorial conference is about to begin. It’s a few minutes past 11.00am and the editorial conference commences. They discuss some of the topical issues that appeared in today’s newspaper and point out some of the oversights and errors in today’s edition. They also discuss some story ideas. A particular story, on the way commercial banks in the country had developed the practice of deducting the monies of customers without warning, was reported in one of the other newspapers. As they discuss this story, one of the senior editors provides the example of someone who has also complained that they did not enjoy the services of their bank. The editor decides that the business desk should investigate this practice and do a story about it. They go on to discuss other story ideas that are being developed by reporters on the various desks. The meeting ended at about 12:50pm.

(Field notes from newsroom observation at *Punch* 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2013)

The extract above typifies how senior editors still perform the gatekeeping function in these newsrooms. It shows how stories developed at the desk level have to be discussed at the editorial meetings, following the guidance and instructions of other senior editors. These institutionalised practices find support in Fishman’s (1980:140) that the news production process is a practical organisational accomplishment [where]... newswriters heavily rely on the bureaucratic definition of the phenomena they report”. As such, the definition of what becomes news is defined and determined by the desk editors and the senior editors who discuss these ideas at the editorial conferences. News is also importantly a negotiation between reporters at the various desk levels and their editors who attend the editorial meetings as evidenced in the observation above.

At *Vanguard*, a typical day also had similarities with what obtained at the other newsrooms visited. I refer to excerpts from my observation field notes.

As at 9 a.m., the newsroom is still sparsely populated. Only about five journalists are in the newsroom. The editor and the deputy editors are at their desks; sat next to each other flipping through the day's newspapers. They have about eight different newspapers produced by other media houses on their desks and they are reading through the stories, passing comments about the stories covered in these newspapers. I move towards the Education desk which is just few seats away from the news editor's desk. With her mobile phone secured with her shoulders, she is writing away on her note pad. I was soon able to gather from listening to her conversation that she is conducting an interview with a government official on whether some scholarships should be withdrawn. She glances up at me and continues with conversation over the phone. My presence seems to disturb her, so I move back to my seat close to the deputy news editor.

By this time, some more journalists have arrived. The deputy editor is now reading through the special reports for the inside pages for tomorrow's edition. He tells me it's easier to plan those pages early especially when the newsroom "tension hasn't started rising. It starts when the reporters come back from the field and when the out station reporters are ready to file in their stories". And that tension soon hit the newsroom. As the clock strikes 4pm, it's no longer the friendly exchange of pleasantries but shouting from one end of the newsroom to the other. The news editor is monitoring his mailbox. He is expecting some stories from some out-station reporters. When that isn't forthcoming, he continues refreshing the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN<sup>12</sup>) mailbox. He soon instructs one of the reporters to get the document he sent to the printer. He tells me that when out-station reporters do not send stories in time, reports gleaned from NAN's inbox form a key part of the news stories published in the next day's edition.

(Field notes from newsroom observation at *Vanguard* 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2013)

The foregoing scenario exemplifies some of the news production processes that take place daily in the newsrooms; precisely that news work is routinized and follows identical practices across newsrooms. Although these practices are routinized, the extract above

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<sup>12</sup> News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) is a government-owned news agency in Nigeria. Most media houses in Nigeria subscribe, at a fee, to NAN as it usually has more news stories which other media organisations may not be privy to.

highlights that the gatekeeping process remains fairly traditional in these newsrooms. While the journalists source news from a variety of sources, it is still the prerogative of the editor in determining what passes as news.

While Bruns (2011:134) notes that the gatekeeping strategies which media organisations employ may birth one ‘first draft of history’, these senior journalists’ strategy of planning what stories to publish and how the sources would be incorporated suggests that they seek to make their versions of reality not just a draft but the actual record of history. The editorial conferences further exemplify how the institutional structures are normalised and the borders of traditional journalism emphasised despite the proliferation of alternative media.

The following extract from my observation at *Punch* again further provides context on the daily newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms.

The time is 12:45pm and the senior editors start arriving for today’s editorial conference. The population of the newsroom stands at about 10 and there is not very much going on except the journalists on the business desk who are writing their weekly columns.

As evening arrives, the newsroom is now filled with a buzz of activities. It is 5:30pm and the newsroom is filled to capacity as the news editor reads through news stories already sent and verifies reports. I have just been told that yesterday, the news editor had to stay in the newsroom until about 1:30am this morning, waiting to verify a story on presidential pardon for some ex-convicts. Only *Punch* and one other newspaper have the story in today’s edition. The excitement is obvious as many journalists stop by the News editor’s desk to congratulate him for making sure that the story made it to the press.

By 6:00pm, I notice that many of the junior reporters who had been in the field earlier in the day have returned to the newsroom to write and hand in their stories. The atmosphere in the newsroom is no longer one of order and tranquillity but almost of chaos as desk editors make final corrections to news stories sent in by journalists from out stations and those who have just returned from the field. I also notice journalists hanging around the sub-desk to check that their stories have been assigned pages and are planned to run. Today, the new Pope is expected to be announced at the

Vatican. Some of the journalists gather around the centre of the newsroom where a large television screen is conspicuously located. The television channels are constantly being changed between the *BBC*, *CNN* and *Sky News* to monitor what speculations are being made about who the likely candidate would be. As the clock strikes 8pm, there is no sign of any of the journalists monitoring the television channels retiring for the day. The new Pope still has not been announced and so they cannot leave. They have to be present to write various parts of the story for it to be published in tomorrow's copy.

(Field notes, *Punch* newsroom, 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2013)

The excerpts above about the Presidential pardon for ex-convicts is instructive in revealing ways in which mainstream journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms take information verification seriously in reporting breaking news. The observation above also illustrates how gatekeeping remains an institutionalised practice in this newsroom. This is perhaps what distinguishes them from their alternative media counterparts. They would rather much delay and verify a story before going ahead to publish such. The fact that the news editor had to wait back in the newsrooms until 1.00am the following day suggests that the notion of trustworthiness and veracity is still part of the newsmaking practices in these newsrooms.

The observation excerpt above about the Papal announcement is also illustrative of how global media channels are 'reliable' news sources which are monitored in these newsrooms. In other words, when it comes to stories of national and international significance, such as the papal announcement in the extract above, mainstream print journalists in Nigeria rely on well-known traditional media outlets that they deem trustworthy such as *Sky News*, *BBC* and *CNN*. This finding also finds support in Olukotun's observation that global media channels such as "[t]he *BBC*, the *VOA* and *CNN* are quite popular and have a high credibility rating [among Nigerian journalists]. They, in fact, increasingly shape the content of Nigeria media"(2004a:77). As such, in spite of the proliferation of alternative media and the fact that there would have been relevant tweets about the papal announcement, *Punch* preferred instead to stick with the traditional mainstream media as news sources.

Further, the observation extract above also shows that while mainstream print journalists in Nigerian newsrooms rely on a variety of technologies and indeed a variety of news sources in the news production process, they are mostly appropriated to complement the



traditional news production routine where the journalists determine what ends up as news. The observation extract above again draws attention to how monitoring global television channels, particularly in reporting events of international relevance, remains an important part of journalists' routine in the news production process. While the foregoing observation data illustrates the centrality of gatekeeping in these newsrooms, the journalists also confirmed that they would much rather incorporate information from these 'trusted' sources in their reportage. As a senior editor at *Punch* explained, "even when the same information is available on alternative media sites, we are always trying to be careful with the information we choose from them. We don't become tools in the hands of rumour peddlers". Another journalist at *Vanguard* stated: "I don't think you can be a modern day journalist without using the Internet and getting stories from alternative media. But you just have to be careful with the way you use their reports". This reveals that the potential of alternative media for media democratisation in Nigeria has yet to be achieved. Being a country where many subtle interests are likely to be parts of the agenda of alternative media practitioners, mainstream journalists still would rather appropriate content from the 'trusted' global media channels, particularly in reporting stories such as the papal announcement.

#### **4.3 Mobile Phones, Blackberry Messenger: The 'new' ubiquitous news gathering tools in Nigerian newsrooms**

It's 5:10pm. A scoop about explosives found buried in the house of a politician in Kaduna state (a northern Nigerian state) has just come through via a *Blackberry* message. The deputy editor puts a call through from the Lagos headquarters to the mobile phone of the correspondent in Kaduna state asking him to verify the story and to send photographs of the site. The Kaduna correspondent had not heard about the story before the call from the deputy editor and promises to investigate. The newsroom becomes very rowdy and noisy as reporters who have gone out on assignments return to hand in their stories. The sub-desk reporters continue planning other pages, while the cover and page 3 await findings about the explosives. Other editors too make frantic calls to out-station correspondents to send in their stories so they can be approved and the pages planned. The news editor too continues refreshing the newsroom's email inbox to check if the story about the explosives in Kaduna has been sent by the News Agency of Nigeria

(who they subscribe to at a fee). Another senior editor also announces, almost shouting, that the editorial page for the next edition has not been approved by the editor. In the midst of this chaos, the deputy news editor remains on the phone to the correspondent in Kaduna and is monitoring other newspaper websites to see if they had posted any information about the explosives. The online editor is not permitted to share it as breaking news on the website yet. And the scoop paid off, only *Vanguard* had the story on its front page the following day.

*(Notes from newsroom observation at Vanguard 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013).*

The observation above is illustrative of the centrality of the mobile phone in the everyday newsmaking practices of journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms. While the mobile phone and the email are becoming central in the news gathering process they also function alongside other traditional sources. As can be gleaned from the extract above, although the story came in first via the mobile phone, it had to be confirmed via the ‘journalist on the ground’ in Kaduna. While this correspondent promised to investigate and might indeed have contacted a variety of sources including alternative media sites, it is instructive to note that these tools are still very much appropriated in the traditional sense. Another finding from the extract above is that the newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms revolve around the traditional structures. As echoed by earlier newsroom studies, senior journalists define the parameters of the news production process. It is precisely that news is socially-constructed (Tuchman, 1978). The ‘delay tactics’ deployed in deciding that the scoop in the extract above is not shared on the website before it appears in print, reinforces the fact that the printed newspaper is the flagship product of many newspaper organisations in Nigeria. As such, they would rather have the scoop in the print, possibly to create a unique selling proposition for the newspaper, than have it distributed online where other media organisations can poach easily.

Further, the observation extract above highlights that the mobile phone and the Internet, which provides access to mailboxes of news agencies and other sources, are deployed to aid veracity in the news production process. Thus, these alternative media tools are exploited and used in fairly traditional ways. This finding thus reiterates the fact that Nigerian print journalists “have not shied away from exploiting digital technology in sourcing news and information” (Mudhai, 2011:681). They have rather continued to creatively appropriate these technologies to form part of the everyday newsmaking practices.

#### 4.3.1 Mobile phones as ‘note-pads’ and journalists’ ‘extended arms’

The appropriation of these alternative media tools in the everyday news production process is also corroborated by journalists in these newsrooms. Excerpts from interviews with some of the journalists sampled in this study are reproduced below.

According to a reporter on the *i-punch*<sup>13</sup> desk:

My phone is now my note pad, it is very important for my job. Now, you can give your editor your story via BBM. Because I really don’t enjoy taking note when I go for an assignment and because I don’t want to put myself under pressure having piled up work, I start writing my story on my BBM and I send them as chat messages to my editor. Unlike before when you will most likely write it on a note pad and get to the office to start making sense of it, my *Blackberry* phone serves as my note pad. If I get stuck in traffic on my way back to the newsroom, I know that my story would have more chances of making the deadline than if I decide to be there physically to hand-in my story. I also have some contacts on my BBM who serve as sources when I am planning a feature story or give me more story angles to work with. I can send my story idea to the contacts in a BBM group as a broadcast message. If I send it to the members of the group and six out of fifteen respond, then of course I have what I need for my story. At times, when you’re unable to meet someone in person in Nigeria and you need their view on an issue, let’s say an activist for instance, you can send the person a message on Facebook and you’ll be surprised that they will respond.

The interview excerpt above demonstrates how the mobile phone is being adapted into the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists. According to the reporter in this excerpt, the mobile phone is now regarded more or less as a ‘note pad’, replacing for him the reporter’s notebook and pen. While the *BlackBerry*’s messaging application not only provides a platform on which to take notes it is also used to overcome the limitations of time in shortening or completely circumventing the wait for the stories to arrive at the news editor’s desk. This finding thus establishes the fact that the mobile phone is an important ‘talking drum’ (de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman 2009) which resonates in the newsmaking cultures in Nigerian print newsrooms.

Another finding that can be gathered from the interview extract above is that the mobile phone is an important news sourcing tool. While the veracity of the information gathered

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<sup>13</sup> During my fieldwork at *Punch*, the organisation had six weeks earlier launched a new page in its print edition called *i-punch* as a way of honing in on the information available on various alternative media sites. This page featured latest trends on social media as well as the reactions of some Nigerians living in Nigeria and in the diaspora to some of the topics discussed.

is indeed another dimension to the discussion, the fact that this reporter noted that he can send his “story idea to the contacts in a BBM group as a broadcast message” nonetheless points to the permeation of the mobile phone in Nigerian print newsrooms.

A crime reporter at *Vanguard* also shared similar sentiments about the centrality of the mobile phone, and particularly her *Blackberry* smart phone, in news gathering:

I’m not sure I can survive on this job without my BB! It fastens information gathering and you can easily get across to someone who becomes your eyes in the field. I’ll give you an example. There was a case of a female banker who was alleged to have killed a LASTMA<sup>14</sup> official. By the time I got to the scene, there was no evidence I could use in writing my story but I wrote a skeletal report and posted a request on BBM for anyone with useful information on the incident to get in touch with me. You needed to have seen the responses I received; some people who were there at the time of the incident took pictures and some even had video footage of what happened. This helped my investigation more and I was able to write new angles to this story.

The comments made by the crime reporter above, highlights how the mobile phone is increasingly occupying a central position in the news gathering process for journalists. The excerpt also reinforces how the mobile phone’s ubiquity serves as information reservoir which these journalists can ‘access’ when the need arises. This finding thus corroborates Nyamnjoh’s (2005b:209) observation that the mobile phone “has become like the long arm ...capable of reaching even the most distant ‘sons and daughters of the soil’” and serving as journalists’ ‘eyes’ in gathering newsworthy information.

Another senior editor at *Guardian* also pointed out that:

If there’s a story I want to confirm, I can immediately put a call through to the appropriate quarters. They can say ‘hold on, I will do you an email’. That way, you don’t only have the information but you also have it as a record. They can’t deny it in future.

In an attempt to avoid publishing stories that have not been verified, journalists make quick calls to the ‘appropriate’ official sources to confirm the story. When these news sources decline these calls or even refuse to comment, that also becomes part of the story

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<sup>14</sup> LASTMA is the acronym for Lagos State Traffic Management Authority, set up by the Lagos State government to control traffic congestion in the state. By virtue of their job of controlling traffic and issuing fine to offenders, LASTMA officials are not necessarily the favourite guests of many commuters in Lagos and they have been attacked on occasions <http://www.punchng.com/metro-plus/thugs-motorists-attack-lastma-officials-in-lagos/> More on LASTMA here: <http://www.lastma.gov.ng/>

as another crime reporter at *Punch* explained: “if they (official sources) don’t pick your calls, you simply include it in the report that ‘at the time of filing this report, the Police Public Relations Officer had not returned our earlier calls”.

Thus, the mobile phone not only occupies a defining position of the mobile phone in the news production process in these newsrooms, it also opens up to other alternative media tools such as the email, in providing access to newsworthy information.

Consequently, while there are other ‘talking drums’ in Nigerian print newsrooms, the findings from the excerpts above provide evidence that the mobile phone is indeed one of the new talking drums of everyday newmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms. However, some of these journalists were ambivalent towards the deploying the mobile phone in the news production process. A senior editor at *Punch* explains:

Sometimes we get a tip-off through a text message that an important government official has been flown abroad for medical attention. Even though we feel it is our duty to keep people informed, we still have to investigate and place phone calls to those involved... There have been cases where we have to choose top editors to look into the details of a story we get via text message before it can be published. It’s just because some people may just want to blackmail these officials and we don’t want to be the tools that would be used to do that.

A news reporter at *Vanguard* also points out:

There are times though when this BB can land you in serious trouble if you don’t verify the information you receive. Recently someone posted on BBM that there was an explosion. I had to visit the scene only to discover that it was a lie. There are instances when people mislead you with the information they send to your BBM ...people are always trying to cover up something or blow other things out of proportion.

The comments above highlight how the mobile phone is also gaining reputation as a tool for spreading rumours and untruths in Nigeria. This reputation is not unique to Nigeria but it has also been observed in Cameroon (Nyamnjoh, 2005b) and Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2009). As such, these journalists still resort to fact-checking and verification even when they get tip-offs through their mobile phones. As such, while the mobile phone may be ubiquitous, it is adopted and very much used in the traditional sense. Stories or tip-offs received via the mobile phone are still subjected to the rigorous gatekeeping process, moving through the established hierarchies before it is ‘allowed’ a space in the newspaper.

Thus, the sense in which the mobile phone is deployed by journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms is such that while it is used to follow-up stories, its content is also checked to measure the veracity of such information. This finding was also evidenced in my observation at these newsrooms and finds expression in the following extract:

It's 4:30pm. Production for the next edition is process and the news editor quickly moves to his desk and starts reading stories that have been submitted into a file marked '9pm deadline'. I turn my attention to a senior journalist sitting few metres away from the news editor. He portrays a clear picture of how new alternative media is negotiating spaces within mainstream journalism: Left hand on the scrolling panel of his laptop, scrolling through a Facebook page, right hand goes on his *Blackberry* phone, checking through *BBM* messages and a news bulletin on the same hand. I quickly glance over his shoulder to catch a glimpse of the Facebook page he is looking at. It is *Sahara Reporters*'<sup>15</sup> page and he jots something down on the A4 news print-out he is holding. Another desk editor is on his mobile phone to one of his reporters, and he is requesting that the summary of an assignment he has been attending be sent by text. There is a lot of shouting over the phone and tension mounts. With only two hours before the 9:00pm deadline, the ambience in the newsroom becomes chaotic. The reporters whose stories have been given a tick by the news editor make frantic visits to the computer typesetters section to check that the A3 versions of their reports have been laid out accordingly. Other journalists loiter around the news editor's desk awaiting the final 'ok' for their stories.

(Observation notes, *Punch* newsroom, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2013)

The extract above typifies how the adoption of alternative media in Nigerian newsrooms is used to develop new cultures of news writing and sourcing. As can be evidenced from the observation notes above, practices such as casually taking notes from alternative media sites, following up stories on the mobile phone, is becoming enmeshed in the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists. This finding also establishes that while the mobile phone is a ubiquitous news gathering tool for journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms, it

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<sup>15</sup> Sahara Reporters is an alternative diasporic online media run and maintained by Omoyele Sowore and his team in New York. Founded in 2005, Sahara Reporters describes itself as "online community of international reporters and social advocates dedicated to bringing you commentaries, features, news reports from a Nigerian-African perspective". For more on the activities of *Sahara Reporters* and its crowdsourcing approach to news gathering, see <http://saharareporters.com/about> ; <http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/omidyar-network-partner-zone/omoyele-sowore-sahara-citizen-reporting>

Accessed April 20, 2014

is a choice tool used by most of these journalists in contacting not only news sources but also for filing reports from the field in an attempt to overcome the pressures of deadline.

#### 4.3.2 'No off-duty'

Beyond being used to confirm stories, the mobile phone is also seen as pervading the 'off-duty' hours of journalists. A senior journalist at *Punch* explained that monitoring various channels and sources of information was a round-the-clock-routine:

“Even in the middle of the night, if I pick a story on my *BBM* I forward it to the reporter whom I feel can work in the story. I also send it to one of the online journalists to see if they have picked that story”.

For these journalists, the mobile phone occupies a central position in the newsmaking process and permeates their personal lives to the extent that they have no “off-days” or “off-duty hours”. They argued that they felt the need to always be at the forefront of the information market. As a journalist at *Tribune* noted:

“You always want to make sure that your newspaper breaks the news before other media organisations *so you make sure that you keep up-to-date even when you're not in the office.*”

The comments thus underscores how the permeation of the mobile phone is not only developing new cultures of news sourcing within the newsrooms but also redefining the working hours of these journalists. This is to the extent, as these interview excerpts reveal, that outside the newsroom, Nigerian print journalists continue working because of the presence of the mobile phone.

However, these journalists explain why the mobile phone may not necessarily be ubiquitous in their everyday newsmaking practices. A senior editor at *Tribune* remarked:

Mobile phones have become indispensable tools in this profession. Many of us come to work with our mobile phone chargers because there is no electricity supply at home. *As such, one cannot follow stories that might have been trending throughout the night.* We know we have to do this because when you don't charge your tools, how do you know what is happening?” (Emphasis added)

The comment above speaks to the epileptic supply of government-powered electricity in Nigeria. As the journalist above explained, erratic power supply means that when not in the newsroom, journalists are sometimes disconnected from keeping up with what is happening through their mobile phones. It is however instructive from the excerpt above that in spite of this challenge, these journalists find ways of ensuring that they charge their mobile phones such as 'coming to work with the mobile phone chargers'. This finding thus underscores the importance that these journalists have attached to their mobile

phones. It further shows the resilience that marks the adoption of these tools. When everyday living stand in the way of exploiting these tools, these journalists have found ways, including going to the newsroom with their chargers and rechargeable lanterns, where they can be sure of electricity supply, in keeping up with trends and newsworthy events.

This section has drawn from the ethnographic data collected in Nigerian print newsrooms to discuss how the mobile phone (and particularly *Blackberry*) is an evident and ubiquitous tool that permeates the newsmaking practices of these journalists. The manner in which the mobile phone is deployed in these newsrooms is also reflective of the permeation of the mobile phone in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa. In Nigeria, subscription figures are said to have risen from 266,461 subscribers in 2001 to about 145million subscribers as at April 2013 (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2013). While I cannot confirm the validity of these figures, it nevertheless speaks to the adoption of the mobile phone in Nigeria. This on the other hand is illustrative of why it has become a significant tool in the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists.

The significance of the mobile phone in the newsmaking process in Nigerian print newsrooms is telling. The excerpts from the journalists in these newsrooms further suggest that they are creatively innovating ways of using the mobile phone in ways that in fact challenge scholarship on how Africans use mobile phones.

Although journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms creatively appropriate the mobile phone in their everyday newsmaking practices, with many connecting to the Internet via their mobile phones, it is pertinent to point out that while many of these journalists bear the cost of making these connections. At *Tribune*, most of the journalists interviewed explained that they are mostly responsible for paying to connect to the Internet outside the office. In the words of the online editor at *Tribune*:

“All units at *Tribune* have access to the Internet but outside the office everyone goes about with their Internet-enabled mobile phones. As journalists we work to deadlines and if you’re not in the company and you need to use the Internet, for your own sake, you just use your personal Internet. The Internet in the office is not on your mobile so you have to do what you must to get your story in.”



Also sharing similar sentiments, a senior editor at *Guardian* remarked that “these are some of the issues we are still trying to agitate for. The office does not provide or pay for your Internet services outside the newsroom and that’s why I try to do all my work while I’m in the newsroom. It costs about ₦1000 [approximately £3.5] to subscribe for BIS<sup>16</sup> [Blackberry Internet Service] every month.”

At *Vanguard* however, the story is different. Many of the journalists highlighted that the company encourages them to be technology-savvy and use the Internet as much as possible in their newsmaking practices. According to one journalist at *Vanguard*:

“The company gives us ₦3000 (approximately £10) worth of recharge cards every month for Internet subscription and for making calls but it’s not always enough. There is also Internet in the newsroom that we can use but you find that one uses far more than what the office provides to contact news sources”.

Also commenting on the cost of connecting to the Internet, a senior editor at *Punch* argued that although the company does not pay for most of the journalists to connect to the Internet, “the cost is very negligible. I think most of the journalists here at *Punch* who use smartphones can afford to pay for their Internet. You can easily take that money from your travel allowance or something. It costs only about ₦1500 (approximately £4) to subscribe for Internet monthly and I think many can afford to do that. The point is many people who are not journalists pay for it anyway and I don’t think that’s too expensive. There is Internet in the office that we all use but outside the office, I get about ₦20000 (about £65) worth of recharge cards monthly as an editor. It’s not just for connecting to the Internet but also for making calls.”

The extracts above thus highlight that in spite of the limited access to the Internet outside the newsrooms, many of these journalists still creatively seek out ways of “denying exclusion its smile of triumph” (Nyamnjoh, 2005:209).

#### **4.4 Journalism-on-the-go: ‘Healthy news’ at ‘fast food’ speed**

Things are a lot more dynamic now and the presence of alternative media is really putting us on our toes in that we too want to be the first to break news. Sometimes we change our cover story up to four times before going to press because we want

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<sup>16</sup> All telecommunications service providers in Nigeria provide BlackBerry Internet Services, which provides access to email and other Internet services for BlackBerry mobile phone users, charging between approximately £3 and £4 for monthly subscription.

to be sure that we beat all our competitors to it. One of the greatest challenges facing us as journalists is that our profession is becoming ‘journalism-on-the-go’; producing restaurant-style food at the speed of flipping burgers at a fast-food joint. It’s like a structure that is built and set up to provide buffets, now having to perform at the speed at which fast-food chains operate. It’s like talking about a 7-course meal that would ordinarily take all the time but doing it at the rate of flipping burger. And then you have to do it ensuring that the menu doesn’t change in terms of the quality. We are still serving the same menu but the timing is now very different if we are to remain relevant in these times. You can run a reaction to what has been trending on social media. The challenges that reporters grapple with are now much more complex than they used to be before. We no longer have the 24-hour luxury [sic] to respond to stories but we are now expected to respond almost immediately yet with the thoroughness [sic] of mainstream journalism. It is a lot of pressure.

(Interview with senior editor, *Punch*)

The excerpt above establishes the fact that for journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms, what is being said on alternative news media cannot be ignored. As such, one finds that the agenda-setting role of the media is increasingly responding to what is ‘trending’ on alternative media sites. This has consequently seen the meanings of deadline and production time changing drastically in these newsrooms. This is, in part, because the proliferation of alternative media sites, particularly UGC, just clicks away, means that the present is the deadline. Rather than the traditional freedom of waiting twenty-four hours before a story is updated, mainstream journalists in Nigeria increasingly find themselves struggling to keep up with immediacy. It can also be deduced from the interview excerpt the proliferation of alternative media also means added pressure for these journalists. The analogy used in comparing the speed at which news is now produced in these newsrooms to the speed of ‘flipping burgers’ tells us that pressures of deadline is further reinforced in these newsrooms. It also reveals that with the proliferation of alternative media in these newsrooms, the demand for ‘instant news’ also increases. This finding finds expression in McNair’s (2013:78) observation that with the permeation of the Internet and other alternative journalism practices, “[j]ournalists are under unprecedented time pressure to deliver exclusives, scoops and fresh angles”. Another reporter at *Punch* also commented on how proliferation of blogs and other alternative media practices is increasing the pressure for mainstream journalists in Nigeria to remain relevant as society’s storytellers:

I'm able to do my work easily and better. There are a whole lot of social media tools that a journalist can use like *Storify* and all. Alternative media is enlarging the space for us to operate. Though, it has negative impact too. If a story breaks at 12 noon, before 4pm it's everywhere so it puts a lot of pressure on the editor to look for fresh angles to sell the paper the following morning because it's no longer story. If a prominent figure dies at 12noon, everyone knows the person is dead, so you have to scratch and look for something to sell the paper because people still want to read about this prominent figure but they don't want the news of her death anymore. They want something new.

A senior editor at *Vanguard* also explained "traditional structures are still there and we have to dig deeper, we have to nourish [sic] our readers. We now have to develop content, not just news, which will be attractive [sic] to our customers." These excerpts again speak to the pressures that these journalists have to contend with, with the presence of alternative media. While there is reference to the need to report 'healthy news' as the journalist at *Vanguard* explained, the sense in which these tools are used suggests that they are creatively appropriating them to suit their purposes. As a reporter at *Punch* noted, "because there is too much information online [...] so you have to zero in from a particular point."

Another senior reporter at *Punch* also expressed similar sentiments about how the present is now the deadline:

What used to be the norm was that we would publish our reports first in the print newspaper before we put it on our website. But because of the competition and speed with which these other guys (alternative media practitioners) post information on their websites, we put certain details on our website and publish the full details of some exclusive stories in our print edition. We know we can't just pretend that we are not aware of an event breaking so we upload certain details first as breaking news. The practice before, was to save our stories and post it online from around midnight because we used such stories to sell our paper the following day. Now, we really can't afford to delay posting online, else we would be left behind.

The interview extract above also substantiates the point that the practices of mainstream journalists in Nigeria are being reshaped by the presence of various alternative media outlets and other competitors. Rather than controlling when and how they inform their

audience about breaking news, they increasingly have to adjust to posting such information online so that they too can claim ownership of being part of the first to break news. This finding thus highlights how the notion of the media as agenda-setters is being rethought and reshaped in these newsrooms. This practice of publishing breaking news on their newspaper's website is however not unique to *Punch*. Although done slightly different in *Vanguard*, a senior editor explains:

When we have any breaking news, we post it on our website immediately. But if it is exclusive to us, we delay posting it until late in the night when we think other papers have gone to bed but we would have included it in the print edition for the next day so that when the readers buy *Vanguard* in the morning, they will have something different from what is in other papers.

The extracts above further establish the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to define news only from within the newsroom structure. It highlights how other factors, not necessarily within the control of these newsrooms are impacting upon and reshaping newsroom cultures. The finding nonetheless reveals how Nigerian newspapers are creatively devising ways of remaining competitive at a time when information and breaking news is becoming fluid and difficult to control.

#### **4.6 Negotiating authority: Physical space in Nigerian print newsrooms**

Beyond the binaries of whether the presence of new 'alternative media is 'negatively' or 'positively' impacting on mainstream journalistic practices, a number of complex nuances are at play in these newsrooms which inform the routines that take place in the news production process. One of these usually taken-for-granted nuances, broadly ignored in many newsroom studies, is the newsroom space. As Zaman (2013:824) puts it, "[t]he newsroom is at the same time a material and a symbolic space epitomising complex interactions among different individuals and groups in news media". Thus, I decided to examine what the spatial and seating arrangements of journalists in these newsrooms might reveal about changing newsroom practices.

##### *Physical description of the newsrooms*

The main editorial newsrooms at *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Tribune* and *Guardian* are located on the ground floor of the buildings housing these newspapers. At *Punch*, as one enters the large room, to the left and right, there are desks with computers and a walk further down reveals a large conference table. This table is significantly different from the others and it is here that the editorial conferences take place every day. Just ahead of this table is a

large television screen which monitors one global media channel and can be changed by any journalists interested in monitoring a different channel. The same is true for the other newsrooms. At *Vanguard*, *Tribune* and *Guardian* the spatial arrangements are similar with the newsrooms centrally located as the nucleus of news production. While three of these newsrooms had desktop computers on nearly all the tables, it was different at *Tribune*. Most of the computers in this newsroom were personal laptops of the journalists working there while most of the tables were bare. Not much had changed from the last time I worked there in 2006. I thought it useful to provide a brief physical description of these newsrooms in order to highlight how the use of space in these newsrooms reinforces hierarchies among these journalists.

According to Zaman (2013:824) “the newsroom is a physical place, a social category as well as a symbolic construct with which to relate to the rest of the journalistic reality”. As such, the allocation of spaces to journalists in these newsrooms is indicative of how different levels of authority are maintained and reinforced. While academics, such as Pavlik (2000:234), have argued that the proliferation of new digital technologies is on leading to the flattening of hierarchies in mainstream journalism newsrooms, these Nigerian print newsrooms reveal a stark contrast.

In these newsrooms, the location of editorial staff members is separate from other departments located within the same building. At *Punch*, the newsroom is located on the ground floor and it is here that most of the journalists sit. The room itself is a large open-plan space where journalists occupy spaces according to the desks and news beats they cover. While the editors for the weekend titles sit in separate offices from the newsroom, the news editor and the heads of the various desks sit in the newsroom with the News editor’s desk located in the centre of the newsroom. At *Vanguard*, like the other three newspapers’ offices visited for this study, the journalists are located on the ground floor of the building, separate from other departments such as the marketing, circulation and adverts department. There are several tables with desktop computers and proof prints scattered around the table. Somewhere around the centre of the newsroom is the most visited desk, particularly during production rush hours and is home to the news desk editor and the deputy news desk editor. The settings in these newsrooms are symbolic in that they create an atmosphere of ‘openness’ without physical demarcations or cubicles. It is however useful to point out here that while these journalists sit according to the desks or beats they cover, they still mingle, interact and share a joke or two.

However, not all these journalists sit in the main newsroom. At the four newspaper organisations, the editors for the different titles; daily, Saturday and Sunday, occupy different offices outside the main newsrooms but within the building. The offices /spatial allocations of the online journalists in these newsrooms are also significant. At *Guardian*, the online journalists, during my ethnographic immersion there, occupy an office outside of the main editorial newsroom but are co-located on the same floor as the editorial newsroom. The online editor at *Guardian* explained that occupying a separate office located away from the main editorial newsroom, is to “...facilitate better concentration. There are a lot of blogs and websites that I monitor. I also follow people on Twitter but we need to be careful and make sure we verify these tweets before posting them”.

It is however different at *Punch*. The online journalists sit in a separate office on another floor of the office complex. While this separation may seem to suggest that the online department is independent of the print editorial newsroom, it in fact speaks to the evolving nature of the position of the online journalist within Nigeria’s mainstream media landscape. This is, in part, because the journalists who are referred to as online journalists and online editors were not originally employed to fill that role. Rather, they are in fact editorial staffers deployed to the newspapers’ website team. During my time at *Punch*, the online editor had recently been deployed from the education desk to work on the newspaper’s website. As such, while there appears to be a differentiation in the role of those in the main newsroom (on the ground floor as in *Punch*) and those who manage the newspaper’s website, who occupy the first floor of *Punch*’s office complex, the separation furthers an illusion of difference when they are one and the same. This observation is further substantiated in the comments by a senior editor at *Punch* in explaining to me that institutional practices remain in appropriating alternative media content: “...the traditional gates are still there and our online editor is a trained journalist who was the head of a desk for a while. Everything sent to her is edited and if the story is sensitive, she would edit them”. This comment captures the negotiations taking place in Nigerian print newsrooms where the online presence of mainstream media houses are by and large extensions of the print and are still subject to institutional news production routines.

In all the newsrooms visited for this study but *Tribune*, the online journalists are separated from the newsrooms. At *Tribune*, the online journalists sit together with other journalists in the open newsroom but are demarcated by positioning their desks on the far right corner of the newsroom. At *Vanguard*, the online journalists too sit in a different office but frequently visit the main newsroom.

Again, the space occupied during the daily editorial meetings at the four newsrooms, usually attended by senior journalists, some of whom have their offices in separate rooms from the newsroom, is symbolic of power structures and dominance. Despite situating the daily editorial meetings at the centre of the newsrooms, where other junior reporters who do not attend these meetings can observe and even listen-in into some of the deliberations, the supposed 'openness' of having these meetings in these spaces further alludes to exclusion and closure. Holding these meetings in the newsrooms is indicative of the hierarchical power exercised by the senior journalists who attend these meetings. This is because having the meetings in an open space does not engender an open flow of ideas but it in fact further reinforces the hierarchies present in the newsrooms. While these power structures and contestations do not immediately appear obvious in these newsrooms, journalists working within these spaces experience different degrees of responsibilities and pressures. For the news reporters all gravitate towards this space as production reaches top gear. Hierarchical structures are further reinforced and maintained in this space as it is only the senior journalists who participate in these meetings who have the authority to speak and decide what issues are to be discussed. Even during the meetings, the final decision as to what would be published and what angles certain stories, especially those with controversial undertones, rests with the editor.

Consequently, the demarcation of online journalists from print journalists in these newsrooms in itself suggests that the institutional place of the print is still highly regarded. Though the presence of alternative media is shaping newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms, it is only to a certain degree as many traditional practices, such as who is allowed the title of a journalist remains fairly stable. This is because, in spite of occupying separate offices, online journalists, or rather those assigned to monitor and update the newspapers' website, do not necessarily 'manufacture' news independent of what senior editors who sit in the main editorial newsroom categorise as news in Nigerian print newsrooms. While it is true as Singer (1998) observes that mainstream journalists are constantly finding ways of "evolving and adapting" their gatekeeping functions, what is also true of Nigerian print newsrooms is that the online platforms tend to be complimentary to the print versions of the newspapers which remains the flagships of these media organisations. Another reason, perhaps, that the print versions lead the online versions of these newspapers, and is thus reflected in the space allocated to online journalists, might be the centrality of advertisements to the survival of these newspapers. The comments by a senior editor at *Vanguard*, which was echoed by senior journalists in

other newsrooms that “we sometimes delay exclusive scoops and publish them first in print so that we have something attractive to sell the paper” is instructive. This might, again partly explain why newspaper circulation and sales figures tend to be exaggerated in Nigeria.

Thus, the use of physical spaces in these newsrooms, in particular the separation of the online from the print importantly emphasises that the point that Nigerian print newsrooms put their print versions before the online versions.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the everyday newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms. The findings discussed in this chapter highlight how local context factors shape and constrain how alternative media are appropriated in these newsrooms. The way in which alternative media are being appropriated in these newsrooms reinforce the fact that the agenda setting role of the media is increasingly responding to as well as being reshaped and rethought by what is happening on various alternative media sites. Alternative media in these newsrooms are becoming important news sources for journalists in these newsrooms. While news is no longer solely defined by the structures within the newsrooms, the sense in which alternative media is appropriated is marked by a number of structures which veto and define how those appropriations are made.

The ubiquity and centrality of the mobile phone (particularly *Blackberry*) in the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists has also been discussed in this chapter. The ethnographic data analysed in this chapter has shown how the mobile phone is used not only in sourcing information but also how it pervades the working hours of these journalists. It has also become an important part of the newsmaking process, serving as a conduit pipe between journalists and the newsrooms. Some of these journalists also highlighted how the mobile phone is used to shorten the wait between attending an assignment and filing the report back at the newsroom as snippets of information can be sent via the mobile phone to the editor in real time. The BlackBerry messenger service is particularly used both as an information gathering tool whereby journalists can ‘broadcast’ their request for information to a large number of people and as an information processing tool. The ubiquity of the mobile phone in these newsrooms also makes it easy for journalists to follow up stories and for cross-checking facts from news sources. The chapter also highlighted how the idea of the deadline in these newsrooms has changed drastically; the presence and dictates of alternative media content are to the



extent that the present is the deadline. It has also discussed how the use of physical space in these newsrooms speaks to the hierarchies that mark the newsmaking practices of these journalists.

## CHAPTER 5

### **“They are putting us on our toes”: Dilemmas of Nigerian print journalists in appropriating alternative media, emerging patterns and ethical implications for the profession.**

#### **Introduction**

*“New media is putting us on our toes more than anything because by the time our newspaper has gone to bed, there might be major breaking news”<sup>17</sup>*

The proliferation of alternative media in the newsmaking practices of journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms is regarded as bridging important access to information gap by most of the respondents. But for others, it is another form of pressure that has arrived in the newsroom with senior journalists increasingly struggling to keep up with latest information. According to some of the interviewees in the newsrooms visited, the mobile phone serves as ‘notepads’ and accelerates the process of filing stories from the field to the news editor, as a reporter at *Punch* explained in the previous chapter. But for a senior editor at *Punch*, the presence of alternative media is posing various challenges in the newsmaking process: “these websites are putting us on our toes and we cannot ignore what they say, it is difficult for us to keep up because we still have to verify our reports.”

Against the foregoing backdrop, this chapter looks at some of the pressures, dilemmas and fears that these journalists highlight with regards their appropriation of alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices. As in the previous chapter, this too draws from the ethnographic data in examining what the presence of alternative media might mean for the practices of these journalists. Following on the broad aim of this thesis, this chapter also asks: how and to what extent are journalistic practices being reshaped in these newsrooms? How are the alternative media sources appropriated in the news discourse determined? While various external factors shape and constrain how journalists construct what ‘news’ is, I also argue, following Schudson (2003:18) that “there is no question that members of the media have some autonomy and authority to depict the world according to their own ideas”. This chapter therefore seeks to understand how these journalists confront the presence of alternative media in their newsmaking process and what these might reveal about emerging newsmaking cultures in these newsrooms. It concludes that while the presence of alternative media in these newsrooms

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with senior editor at *Vanguard*

signals pressures of deadline for these journalists, the notion of trustworthiness constrains and shapes how content from alternative media is deployed in the newsmaking process.

### **5.1 Alternative media appropriations in the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists: Of emerging ‘new’ news beats and ethical transgressions**

This section focuses on the appropriation of alternative media in the four print newsrooms visited. It discusses how the appropriation of alternative media in the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists is both shaped and constrained by various factors such as pressures of deadline, emerging news sourcing routines, strict competitive media enabled by the proliferation of new information and communication technologies, and how these appropriations raise journalistic ethical questions. It also examines other wider contextual factors that shape the adoption and appropriation of alternative media in the newsmaking process. While the structure of news gathering is widening in these newsrooms to accommodate and incorporate reports from alternative media sites, other wider contextual factors also continue to inhibit how Nigerian print journalists appropriate alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices. Observations at the newsrooms again revealed some emerging trends in the way Nigerian journalists practice their trade. Whereas traditionally journalists would go to their beats, follow up stories and in some cases contact the officials sources relevant to the story via fixed lines or more recently via mobile phones (either through phone calls or text messages), the presence of alternative media sites has added another dimension to the news beats which Nigerian journalists visit as part of their daily routine. According to a senior editor at *Guardian*:

When I get to the newsroom every day, I have a list of about five alternative media outlets whose websites I visit first thing in the morning as soon as I resume for the day to see what the buzz is. I check Sahara reporters, Premium times Nigeria, Huhuonline, Pointblank news and Elendu reports to see some of the stories they are following. These alternative media sites usually have scoops which I can then assign a reporter to work on during the day.”

Similarly, a senior editor at *Punch* explained how monitoring alternative media is becoming part of his everyday routine:

It has broadened the scope of journalism and made the practice of journalism more well-defined. Every morning when I turn on my iPad, I check for updates on

Facebook and Twitter, I try to come up to speed with things that might have happened while I have been off cyberspace and we can discuss some of these issues at the [editorial] meeting to see what stories we can pursue. This has also meant that we can connect with news subjects in different ways.

Also at *Punch*, another senior editor provides insights into how alternative media is becoming ‘new’ news beats:

[...] it is a lot of dilemma when we cannot verify certain stories and they are trending on various online news sites. It makes it challenging for us. But these online news sites have made us realise that we need to be alert. Let me give you an example. When former President Yar’Adua was to return to the country<sup>18</sup>, we got the information from *Sahara Reporters’* website. They had the flight number and all the information we needed and so we were able to send journalists to the airport to take pictures and cover his arrival. The office of the Presidency did not provide journalists with this information and if we did not go with what *Sahara Reporters* posted on their website, we would have missed that major story. So you see, they are useful for us but they are really putting us on our toes and it is sometimes difficult to keep up because we still have to verify our reports.

The interview excerpts above show how the routinized practices in these newsrooms are expanding to accommodate alternative media as useful news sources. The comments thus point to the fact that journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are responding to the reshaping of their agenda-setting function by monitoring these alternative media sites. The excerpts also reveal that the traditional journalistic practice of confirming the veracity of newsworthy information remains enmeshed in the everyday practices of these journalists even when they appropriate alternative media. This thus presents a significant finding that while newsworthy information may break first on alternative media, these journalists find themselves serving as gatekeepers who sift through the information before reporting it. As such, while the presence of alternative media serves as a bridge in bringing them closer to information that may be withheld as a result of the working environment

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<sup>18</sup> Former President Umaru Yar’Adua’s left Nigeria on 23 November 2009 to seek medical attention abroad and did not return until 24 February 2010. This generated public outcry and a lot of heat in the media as many people wanted to know where the President was. There were many versions of what had happened to him and if indeed he was still alive. As such, his return to the country was hard news for the Nigerian press.

within which these journalists operate, the traditional institutional practices of selecting and framing information in a certain way are still prevalent in these newsrooms. This finding also echoes the findings elsewhere that news work is routinized and follows a set of activities which journalists adhere to in the news production process (Deuze, 2008a; Tuchman, 1978). These extracts also provide a glimpse of how the working routines of mainstream journalists are being reshaped by the presence of alternative media. Journalists now, not only have to attend to their various news beats, but also have to monitor alternative media sites as both competitors and news-lead-providers, in a bid to produce newsworthy content as well as report what is happening offline and online. In discussing the routinized journalistic practices in newsrooms, Deuze (2008a:18) explains that newsmaking practices among journalists are hinged on “operational closure” which is the

internalization of the way things work and change over time within a newsroom or at a particular outlet. Outside forces are kept at bay primarily by the rather self-referential nature of newswork, as expressed through the tendency among journalists to privilege whatever colleagues think of their work over criteria such as viewer ratings, hit counts or sales figures.

As such, one finds that this ‘operational closure’ of news work remains even when such information might have been sourced from ‘unconventional’ news beats.

Observations also showed that sports journalists gleaned more information from social networking sites, which have become new news beats, in writing their stories than journalists on other desks. From following sportsmen and women on Twitter to gleaning reports from other mainstream sports website, a sports’ reporter at *Punch* explained:

I depend on social media a lot in writing my stories and we have the advantage of packaging and making stories fuller. I follow most footballers on Twitter and set up Google alerts to monitor what the sportsmen especially footballers are saying. . During major football tournaments like African Nations Cup and the like, it’s easy for them to tweet and then I can develop it into a story of 600 words. For me, it helps a lot. For instance, in covering the [Peter] Odemwingie’s saga at West Bromwich football club, I monitored his tweets to get his reactions. Again when he (Odemwingie) was dropped from the national team, all his reaction was via Twitter, he didn’t do any press release, it was just his reaction to the story and for me that made a good story. He was just posting on Twitter the way he was feeling.

I made a good story out of it and then I used it. At least it can be verified that he made those comments on Twitter. Sometimes these guys tweet but I also confirm from official websites. Most times, these footballers tweet what they think of the next game or why they didn't win a game *as such not being at my Twitter beat will mean missing a big story* (emphasis added).

This extract reveals how social media sites such as Facebook and especially Twitter have become important news beats alongside mainstream beats that they visit to glean newsworthy information. Using comments made on Twitter in news reports also allow the journalists to overcome physical and bureaucratic distances which is usually typical of these 'celebrities' in Nigeria. The narrative above again reveals how new alternative media sites, such as blogs dedicated to analysing sports, sports websites, Twitter, among others, are impacting on the practices of sports journalists, especially in enabling them to report more on the human-angle perspectives of sports rather than focusing only on mainstream sports.

This finding also corroborates the findings in the scholarship on how alternative media, and Twitter in particular, is altering the journalistic practices of sports journalists. Among these studies is the one carried out by Matthews and Anwar, who in their study of how the rise of Twitter is affecting sports journalism concluded that "Twitter has even more uses for sports journalists including audience interaction to inform and feedback on work,...and, of course, finding news and stories" (2013:304). Hall, Farrington and Price (2013:186) too take this argument further by noting that "Twitter could appear to present the possibility of another revolution in the relationships between journalists, sources and the audience". While the idea of a twitter revolution in sports journalists' relationship with their sources and audiences might be simplistic, what is note-worthy is that the permeation of new digital technologies is in fact engendering wider access for journalists.

Thus, the use of alternative media in the newsmaking practices of these journalists again importantly reveals a trend where they do not necessarily have to physically interview news sources but can glean comments made on their social network pages and pass such on as news. Connecting with sources on alternative media sites plays a dual role as it grants access which may otherwise be delayed and in the process provides a wider pool of information. A journalist on *the Information and Technology* desk at *Punch* also corroborated this by stating that:

With these social media the mode of gathering news is changing, it has not totally changed. While a typical journalists will still depend on the traditional mode like attending events, fixing interviews and the like, there are other emerging means of gathering news that alternative media offers. For instance, you can depend on Twitter to gather news. More often than not, a lot of news has been broken by getting tipoff from Twitterers. I cover IT and I have a lot of IT operators as friends on Facebook and at times they drop hints that you can follow up and before you know it, you can get something big. These are not traditional news gathering methods but they are methods being forced upon us by social media and it is either we take it or allow time to leave us behind. So in that sense it is affecting institutional practices.

thus re-echoing how the presence of alternative media is reshaping traditional journalistic practices (Heinrich, 2013:90; Bird, 2009:295). This again reinforces Russell's (2011:44) argument that the presence of new digital technologies is opening up boundaries yet remains that journalists are deploying new methods to getting the same stories from the old traditional sources. Russell (Ibid.) explains that "professional journalists now use social networking technologies...which have drawn millions of everyday users, to connect with the public, find story ideas and contact sources." While this practice may bridge the gap of access to some news sources, it might make journalists susceptible to publishing falsehood in instances where the source's online account has been hacked.

After my time at *Punch*, I also witnessed an almost similar scenario at *Guardian's* newsroom, while observing a sports journalist:

It's almost mid-day and after taking a casual stroll around the newsroom trying to decide what desk to observe, I notice a journalist on the sports' desk glued to his computer screen. I decided to take the seat next to him to see what he is doing. I greeted him and on seeing my visitor's tag, he must have taken me for an intern. He was surfing the Internet and moving between *goal.com* and *supersports'* website. He had a Microsoft Office page open on his computer and I saw him copy and paste some lines from the two websites. As he did this, he glanced sideways and noticed that I had been watching him. I took that opportunity to ask him to explain how he knew what stories to copy. He explained: "You see, I look at the time the story was updated to ascertain that no other newspaper has published that story in today's newspaper. If it says it was updated at 3:00am

(GMT) like this one I am working on (he points to his computer monitor), then I know it is still fresh [sic]. I simply change a few words, like ‘yesterday’ to ‘Tuesday’, I move a few things around and the job is done”. He continued working on the story and when he was satisfied with the content, he picked the headline from one of the websites. He however modified this headline by changing the positions of some of the words in the headline. He looked satisfied and sent the job to the printer. He got up to retrieve the proof copy and then handed it to the sports editor. He came back to his seat to carry on with making a sketch of where the story would fit on a dummy sheet. His job was done. When I probed him on whether it was okay to copy and paste those stories, he told me that was the “easiest way” of getting reports about international football teams. (*Field notes, Guardian newsroom 20<sup>th</sup> March 2013*)

While the empirical extract above points to how sports journalists in Nigerian newsrooms are harnessing alternative media as news sources, it also contrasts the narrative that these technologies are revolutionising the relationship between journalists and their sources as Hall, Farrington and Price (2013) claim. This is , in part because the journalist still ‘doctors’ the content retrieved online and adopts it in very in the much traditional news production process. As can be gleaned from the extract above, this journalist still exercised his journalistic agency in that he changed a few things around in the text before the proof copy of the news text was handed over to the sports editor who has the prerogative in deciding whether the story will be published, how it will be published and the position it will occupy in the newspaper. It is therefore important to note that though the reporter in the extract above copied most of the information he used in the news story from an alternative media source, he still had to determine how the information would be used and what needed changing before passing it off as his own version of reality. One thus finds that the journalistic agency and institutional news production practices and routines, are not necessarily being eroded with the presence of alternative media as news sources in these newsrooms.

Further , the observation narrative above typifies how the presence of new information and communication technologies in these print newsrooms was not only creating ‘new’ beats for these journalists to visit but also raises important ethical questions about their practices. As Paterson (2014:260) rightly avers, while impact of alternative media sites is almost negligible in African newsrooms, it is “sometimes troubling in its ethical



implications”. It is hardly surprising that the sports journalist in the narrative above could not be bothered whether he was found out or not because as Chari (2009: 22) observes, the permeation of new digital technologies is leading to a trend, among journalists, where “plagiarism becomes more sophisticated so that even the most alert editor would not know who was plagiarising what”.

Although the availability of these stories from various non-mainstream platforms afforded journalists in the newsrooms studied the opportunity to overcome practical issues around bureaucracy and scarcity of some news sources, it may indeed be contributing to lower standards in these newsrooms. What is even more worrying is the fact that the journalist I observed in the extract above did not, attribute the source of that story as being from the Internet. This may be, as Yushau (2013) observes, because “there is still scepticism about the quality of journalism produced on the Internet [among Nigerian journalists]. That scepticism could partially explain the resistance of the traditional media to acknowledge stories they source from the Internet”. Again, it can be gleaned from the extract above that in spite of the presence of new digital technologies in Nigerian newsrooms, particularly the fact that the sport journalist in the extract above got his ‘story’ from the Internet using a computer right on his table, he still went through the longhand production process of manually planning the positions stories will occupy on the dummy sheet. Thus, even when new technologies are present in these newsrooms, some of the journalists have yet to come up to speed on how to use these technologies (Olukotun, 2000).

Further, the practice of ‘copying’ and ‘pasting’ stories which the sports reporter at *Guardian* adopted in the empirical narrative above, further affirms the arguments in some quarters that professional journalists are being reduced to ‘robohacks’ (Hargreaves, 2003) who practice ‘churnalism’ (Davies, 2008) with the proliferation of new information and communication technologies. It also chimes with Obijiofor’s (2009) finding that journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are susceptible to publishing information off the Internet without necessarily verifying such content. It further raises questions around media ethics and how the disregard for copyright is becoming the trend in these newsrooms with the permeation of new digital technologies. As Pavlik (2005:245) avers, as mainstream journalists have access to new information and communication technologies, “new ethical problems are arising or old ethical concerns take on new meaning”.

The debate on ethics in journalism in Africa and particularly in Nigeria has received substantial attention from scholars writing about the media ethics among African

journalists (See Adebani, 2008; Kasoma, 1996; Mabweazara, 2010a; Nwabueze, 2010; Omenugha and Oji, 2008; Skjerdal, 2010). Scholars have written about the tussles between and among media owners and their journalists as well as the effect that this has on having a common front. In spite of the deregulation of the media sector in many African countries in the 1990s (as I discussed in Chapter 2), Mudhai (2007a:30) argues that “various extraneous factors have affected the democratic role of the media in Africa”. While there are external factors militating against journalists observing the code of ethics of their profession, there has been significant progress with the establishment of professional journalists’ associations across print and broadcast media with a view to monitoring journalists’ practices. In Nigeria, The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), one of the umbrella professional bodies for Nigerian journalists, for instance, encourages its members to “observe the highest professional and ethical standards” (Nigeria Union of Journalists, 2009, mission statement). This guideline, among other measures put in place to keep journalists in check, has not necessarily “led to a satisfactory knowledge of the basics of journalism and ethics” (Nyamnjoh, 2005b:84). The presence of ‘brown envelope’ journalism or the ‘brown envelope syndrome’ (Skjerdal, 2010: 371) is still prevalent among journalists in Nigeria (Ojebode, 2011; Oso, 2013). This is used to describe the practice of journalists who receive gratification, mostly monetary in return for writing a ‘good’ story and indeed where, as Rønning (2009: 168) puts it, journalists and editors receive envelopes containing not press releases, but remuneration for services rendered”. Adeyemi (2013:215, 218), in his study of ethical values among Nigerian journalists, concludes that “the Nigerian media industry [is plagued with] serious ethical problem[s]” because “despite the existence of a code of ethics for the journalism profession in Nigeria,... the majority of journalists are not living [sic.] in accordance with the standards set for the profession”. The existence of the code itself and the fact that most African journalists rarely adhere to these codes, is also reflective of other wider context-related issues, in part, the resistance and non-compliance on the part of the journalists themselves to these ethical guidelines. Although Nyamnjoh(2005:87) observes that “[m]ost codes of ethics and professional values adopted in the continent are heavily inspired by Western codes or Western-driven international codes, and dwell on ethical issues of relevance to Western concerns”, African journalists are still “largely to blame for their highly unprofessional and unethical journalism” (Nyamnjoh, 2005:27). In other words, in many African countries, “journalism practice that upholds strong ethical standards” (Rønning, 2009, 163) remains almost a mirage. Even when journalists attempt investigative reporting for instance in uncovering corruption cases, journalism ethical

standards are at best thrown to the winds as Rønning (2009:166) observes that “[m]any stories that appear in the African press attributed to investigative journalism do not adhere to proper standards of journalistic practice”. While mainstream journalists in Africa as elsewhere, are often able to reveal corrupt and unethical practices about others when they engage in investigative journalism, for instance, they are mostly slow to self-criticize and indeed rarely ever criticise themselves for breaching ethical practices (Rønning, 2009:167-168; See also, Bingham, 2014).

Another issue close to the heart of analysts who write on the external factors impacting on ethical practices among African journalists, is that alongside the ‘brown envelope’ syndrome<sup>19</sup>, poor working conditions (Kupe, 2004) and low income have also led to “prostitution by journalists or ...a hand-to-mouth journalism... a journalism of misery” (Nyamnjoh, 1999:50; See also, Rønning, 2009), and indeed, as Mabweazara (2010c:431), in his study of Zimbabwean mainstream print journalists, aptly puts it, a situation where journalists’ “take home can hardly take them home”. Lilian Ndangam’s study of the Cameroonian media landscape also echoes this finding where the socio-economic hardship faced by journalists has seen many of them chorusing “all of us have taken gombo”(2009:819). Ndangam’s (2009) study also found that journalists in Cameroon take gombo, “a popular metaphor for various payments, freebies and rewards solicited by journalists and provided by different news actors to journalists” (819) as a form of ‘appreciation’ and a means of surviving in a clime where their ‘take home cannot take them home’ (Ndangam, 2009:833).

Similarly, Jennifer Hasty’s (2005) study of Ghanaian journalists reveals similar trends where journalists receive ‘*sol*i’ (short for solidarity) from government officials in order to frame stories about government actions in a favourable manner (Rønning, 2009:168). This has led to a major ethical challenge where journalists

“[play] to the gallery of the political parties as they engage in one political character assassination after another in their jostling for political power. Serious allegations, many of them based on unnamed and dubious sources, are published without the journalists who write them making concerted efforts to establish the truth of the allegations. Consequently, the people defamed are left permanently injured with little or no meaningful redress” (Kasoma, 1991:101).

Furthermore, the governments in many African countries have also contributed to the ethical pressures faced by journalists on the continent. In Kenya for instance, a March

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<sup>19</sup> Skjerdal (2010:371) observes that the term ‘brown envelope syndrome’ is used mostly by Nigerian media commentators to underscore this practice as a ‘societal malaise in need of medical attention’

2006 raid on the Standard Group Limited and Kenya Television Network (KTN) resulted in the Security Minister stating that “if you rattle a snake, you must expect to be bitten by it” (Mudhai, 2007b:537; Ogola, 2010, 2011). This has seen African journalists resilient in seeking avenues for ensuring that their investigative reports reach the public. Mudhai (2007b:539) explains that one of such practices is “selling --- or even giving --- to foreign media houses their ‘hot’ stories, some of which then get picked up by the local media but with diminished danger to local journalists”. Journalism ethics, as Ward (2008) argues is mostly reflective of the symbiotic relationship between society and journalists. This comment also mirrors the view elsewhere in a study conducted with mainstream journalists in Malaysia, where Volkmer and Firdaus (2013:108) found that “a major theme in journalistic incorporation of user-generated content is credibility or the perceived difficulty of establishing credibility of layperson sources when compared to ‘authority’ sources”.

Again, media scholars have argued that with the proliferation of new media technologies, one negative impact on the journalistic profession is that standards are slipping in many African newsrooms reducing journalists there to ‘armchair’ professionals who do not necessarily have to leave their seats before writing their stories (Chari, 2013:122). As Kasoma (1996:95) observes:

“[T]he information superhighway has made journalists practise their profession in a hurry as they strive to satisfy the world’s craving for more and quicker news and other information, the humaneness of journalism has increasingly been giving way to the expediencies of cut-throat financial or political competition.”

Writing from the perspective of the media in Zimbabwe, Chari (2009:46) also concurs that the presence of the Internet has meant that “[j]ournalists no longer feel compelled to adhere to the ethical canons of their profession”. He further avers that the presence of the Internet, has made plagiarism an ethical dilemma in many Zimbabwean newsrooms: “The anonymity of the Internet makes it difficult to gauge the magnitude of the problem of plagiarism in Zimbabwe. A close analysis of the newspapers reveals a striking identity of stories in different publications which might suggest the prevalence of plagiarism”(Chari, 2009:66).

Thus, while the appropriation of content from various alternative media channels by mainstream journalists in Nigeria may be bridging the access to information gap, it may,

at the same time be burning the credibility bridge which makes the audience connect to their stories. A senior editor at *Tribune* noted that:

“There are too many libellous materials online and some journalists have been reckless enough to fly [sic] with such stories. Some of the reports on these alternative media sites are there to malign some people and even blackmail them. This is why it is very important for journalists to adhere to the ethics of the profession ... you [sic] hear about journalists’ assassinations and all that. Some of these might not be unconnected to some stories that these journalists didn’t verify before they published”.

This comment suggests that these journalists are aware about the ethical concerns around appropriating content from alternative media sites. However, in observing these journalists at work, I found that majority of journalists in these newsrooms had visiting (and sometimes copying stories from) alternative media sites enmeshed into their daily routines and practices. When asked whether they thought the presence of alternative media was challenging their news sourcing routines and practices, they simply described it as “closing the gap”, “providing a wider platform” and “making our website financially viable”. The extracts below from the online editor at *Tribune* and from a senior news reporter at *Vanguard* provide insights into how the presence of new information and communication technologies is (re)shaping journalistic practices in these newsrooms.

“I think it is a good thing that has happened to our profession because it used to be tedious to get information. That is why we advised journalists to sign up for Twitter accounts, Facebook accounts and follow some of these [sic] popular blogs around. Although you find that some journalists fall prey of false information, they still have to check different online sites to be aware of what’s happening around. For instance, I have to surf the net at various times throughout my shift to see what is being reported about Nigeria. Many times, there are stories which may not make it into the next day’s edition because the news editor might feel that more investigations need to be done, I post it on our website as breaking news. I just do [sic] two paragraphs and say ‘details later’. Then I post that link on our Facebook page and then you see the page views increasing throughout the day. The Internet has closed the gap and has made it easy to reach other people. Although we still have to verify whatever information we find, it has at least given provided alternative sources of income for the company and created this desk that I am now in charge of”.

(Interview with Online editor, *Tribune*).

For us to be on top[sic] of breaking news, I keep checking social media many times throughout the day. It has become a serious necessity for getting a balanced story. When I go out for assignments sometimes, the officials who should give you information usually have something to hide and it is from these alternative sites that one can get a picture of the whole story. I don't joke with my Facebook account or my *BBM* at all. They have become part of my daily newsgathering routine.

(Interview with news reporter at *Vanguard*)

However, beyond gleaning reports from alternative media sites, the hierarchical relationship between reporters and their desk editors was evident as all the reports, be they copied from alternative websites or from assignments where journalists were physically present, still had to be ratified by the editors. This finds confirmation in earlier newsroom studies, particularly one of Tuchman's (1978) findings that what qualifies as news remains a negotiation between reporters and editors across newsrooms. In most cases during my observation at these newsrooms, the editors determined which stories would eventually make into print while the junior reporters simply accepted the "hierarchical pecking-orders" (Louw, 2001:165) that obtains in the newsrooms.

Particularly common to all the journalists interviewed and observed is their adoption of and indeed signing up for as many social media sites as they can manage. They use these platforms to 'test the waters' of what their audiences and readers might be following during the day. One senior editor at *Punch* said "...because of the alternative media, what we do here at the *Punch* is to go the extra mile in the coverage of our reports. You don't want to report what people must have placed on their blogs or read online. We have to go the extra mile to package report in a special way." This allusion to packaging reports 'in a special way' reveals some of the ways in which these mainstream journalists attempt to retain some traditional journalistic practices even when they appropriate alternative media content in their reports.

## 5.2 Confronting the conundrums of collaborative journalism and interactivity in Nigerian print newsrooms

The presence of alternative media as challengers of the hegemonic position of mainstream journalists to inform the audience was evidenced in all the newsrooms studied. Majority of the journalists saw alternative media as added pressure and eroding their capabilities to break news. As one senior editor at *Vanguard* puts it,

[...] It is the in-thing and everyone seems to be catching up with it. This is impacting on our journalistic practices especially in the way we report because we can't afford to report a story that has already flooded Facebook, Blackberry messenger as breaking news. New media is putting us on our toes more than anything because by the time our newspaper has gone to bed, there might be major breaking news.

This response typifies the pressures that mainstream journalists say they experience with the presence of alternative journalism, particularly those made possible by new information and communication technologies. These pressures have become sources of concern for these journalists as the journalistic practice of verifying reports before they are published is increasingly being threatened.

This comment paints a picture of how the presence of alternative media, particularly those run and maintained by Nigerians in the diaspora, with their non-conventional and sometimes “guerrilla” journalism approach, are impacting as Kperogi argues, (2008, 72) on the “form and content of journalistic practices in Nigeria”.

However, most of these journalists regard the proliferation of various non-mainstream alternative media sites based in Nigeria and in the diaspora as being both a positive and negative impact on their profession. Another senior journalist at *Vanguard* explained:

Alternative media has brought a lot of quacks into the profession because many people just feel they can write anything they like, regardless of whether it is falsehood. But they have also put us on our toes, because a lot of issues that are reported on these alternative media platforms are true. In this country, there is usually no smoke without a fire. They alert us especially when things happen. But the problem is that most of these alternative media practitioners don't even know what news is. Sometimes they just post details about someone's personal life and

that can be damaging for the person's reputation. So we can't just take stories from them like we do with AP or Reuters.

The extract above also shows how professional journalists in Nigeria attempt to contest a shift in balance of power between them as traditional news suppliers and their publics as users by claiming that they need to 'verify reports'. This need to verify stories, even when they may be true, finds support in Singer and Ashman's (2009:6) observation that with the presence of new information and communication technologies, "journalistic autonomy is [not] necessarily contested". The extract above again speaks to how Nigerian journalists regard news from international news agencies as factual and not necessarily needing further verification because they are trusted names.

The majority of the journalists also highlighted concerns about maintaining newsworthiness and balance in their reports as they stated that there is usually enormous pressure to break news and have live updates on their websites throughout the day. The following comments by an online journalist at *Vanguard* offer useful insights:

"There is a lot of rumour mongering online. But because there is no smoke without a fire, there are some stories that we don't ignore completely. If it is of national importance, we post it on our website, attribute it to new media if we cannot verify from official sources and put the caveat 'more details later'. It is difficult most times to confirm if certain stories are true."

The reference to 'no smoke without a fire' by these two journalists at *Vanguard* again speaks to the political environment in which Nigerian journalists work. It also further highlights some of the dilemmas journalists in Nigerian newsrooms face when official news sources sometimes do not confirm tip-offs and where simply running with these 'smokes' online could have serious consequences. Thus corroborating Eti's (2012: 24) observation that Nigerian journalists are forced to report events from the "perspective of government sources, who are constantly seeking to control information flow for the benefit of the ruling elites."

Although the journalist in the interview extract above claimed that he might still go ahead to put such information on their website even when it has not been confirmed, a political journalist at *Tribune* perceived using such reports differently:

"We've been warned severally not to just post whatever we find on these alternative websites. Most of the stories we gather from them are fake and there are many frivolous reports. They are sometimes written by those supporting one



politician or the other and one needs to be careful so that you [sic] don't end up being a puppet".

A senior journalist at *Punch* also expressed a similar view:

Most of the stories these alternative journalists post are simply information and gist and not news. We are trained journalists and we know that a story should have the 5Ws and H. We also know that we must be responsible in our reportage and not publish stories that would impact on national security".

The excerpts above reflects how these journalists still draw from their journalistic agencies in determining what stories from these alternative media sites are credible or not. However, this might also be a strategy used to avoid publishing reports, which may be true, but are not in rhythm with the political and economic interests of their newspapers.

Nonetheless, the proliferation of alternative media sites has, according to an online editor at *Vanguard* "forced us to make our website interactive. There is always a comments box at the end of every report on our website. It allows our readers to engage with the story and it also drives traffic to our website". The comments of this editor again show how Nigerian print newsrooms are harnessing their online presence to maximise profit and using the interactivity on their websites as an alternative business model. This is partly because the traditional attachment to newspapers in Nigeria means that advertisers are still fairly attracted to the print medium than the websites of these newspapers. As such, advertisers need to be assured of consistent 'traffic' on these newspapers websites for them to advertise. Thus, there is a sense in which these newspapers are creatively seeking ways of driving traffic to their websites so as to 'boost' the quality of traffic that their websites receive and make it attractive to advertisers. Of all the newspapers in Nigeria, *Vanguard* is particularly the most successful in this regard as it is the highest ranking mainstream media website in Nigeria, at the 13<sup>th</sup> position according to Alexa<sup>20</sup>.com while

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<sup>20</sup> [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com) analyses and ranks websites according to the traffic they receive. The ranking figures presented above was retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014 at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/0/NG>.

Punch ranks second in the 15<sup>th</sup> position with Tribune and Guardian on the 86<sup>th</sup> and 125<sup>th</sup> position respectively.

Apart from making their websites more financially viable, most of the journalists also acknowledged that the presence of ‘alternative’ journalism practices was opening up news gathering spaces. A crime reporter at *Punch* noted that

“[...] it makes things easier for us because Nigeria is a closed [sic] society. Some people will simply not divulge information until they get something in return. As a crime reporter, I can ‘connect’ with a rape victim on Facebook and promise to meet her for a chat privately. Most times, these victims are too ashamed to speak for themselves. This helps me get another side to the story rather than the one the Police sometimes want us to take as the truth...with alternative media, the mode of gathering news is changing... there are a lot of social media tools that make the job easier”.

The narratives above point to some of the struggles and dilemmas journalists grapple with in sourcing information from official sources and why appropriating information from alternative media is mostly approached with caution. There are again other factors that underpin how journalists in these newsrooms incorporate alternative media into their coverage of events. A senior journalist at *Punch* proffers some insights:

“It will be a grave error to sideline the official traditional sources because the people reading the newspaper are still traditional people. There’s so much frenzy with this new media and if you get yourself lost in it, you’re in trouble. You cannot afford to get lost in it. The people who buy the print newspaper still want their things the traditional way and that’s why they are still buying your newspaper. If they are really into the new media, they could leave you and go online and you don’t want to give an impression that you are abandoning them.

Although alternative media provide us with leads to some stories, we still go out to interview our official sources. We do not want to be sued for publishing libel... people need to understand that we are here to make money. I’ll give you an example. During the [Occupy Nigeria] protests, we still went out to talk to people, we still went out to the streets to take our pictures and at the same time, we were collating feedback from Facebook and Twitter. So when we get back to the newsroom, we try to draw similarities, say “Oh we spoke to someone at Ojota,

and another person said this on Facebook”, so we use both. It’s about giving our audience a sense of belonging.

**Interviewer:** “So it’s not because you want to include them but to give them this ‘sense of belonging?’”.

**Senior Editor:** Yes, yes, because you see, we take sensitivities and sensibilities into consideration a lot. I mean when I say we want to give them a sense of belonging, we have people who have been buying us for thirty years. You don’t just leave them. When people are loyal to you, you want to be loyal to them too. It’s business. The reason we are in existence is because we are selling. At the end of the day, people get so emotional about these things but it is business. At the end of the day, we have to sell. The reason you are speaking with me now is because this company is employing me and that’s why we have met. We have to sell. It’s business. I know it sounds harsh but it is the reality”.

The theme of wanting to make the newspaper financially viable also resonated with journalists in other newsrooms. A senior editor at *Guardian* noted that with the proliferation of new digital technologies, they now have to carry out more interpretive journalism. He noted that:

We now have to get the news behind the news. As such, we are forced to do more investigation, journalism is being forced more than ever to go beyond what happened to how it happened and why it happened because that is the only new thing you’ll be telling anybody. As I said earlier, the key thing is to sell the paper. So, if you want someone to patronise your newspaper, you ought to have something new and fresh. The way many people are using these new technologies has called for more investment in multimedia platforms but beyond that, it has forced us as journalists to go behind the news and find out how it happened, why it happened and who were those involved and it has forced us to do a deeper journalism and to be more responsive in terms of timing.

This extract echoes Salgado and Stromback’s (2012: 146) observation that as journalism experiences changes, journalists have in recent times adopted an interpretive style of reporting, which is “journalism driven by themes ... reducing journalists to carriers and amplifiers of sources’ messages”.

My first-hand observation at the newsrooms also revealed that although these journalists prefer to use established official sources in their reports, when these are unavailable, they draw from a limited alternative media source pool. This further reiterates Louw's (2001: 163) observation that "[t]he pool of contacts used by any newsroom constitutes a very small minority of the overall population". This was even so much the approach when the story had to do with important government decisions. An online journalist at *Punch* explains:

New media is reshaping our practices in a way. Yesterday, there a Federal Executive Council meeting was held. At that meeting, a decision was made to grant presidential pardon to some ex-convicts but that piece of information was not included in the memo passed to state house correspondents. We observed that it was making rounds on various blogs but the Presidency refused to confirm that story. We desperately wanted to publish that story online but we also wanted to verify it first. The editor and the news editor had to stay in the newsroom until 1am this morning, waiting to hear any confirmation.

The event being discussed here by the online journalist above, (which I also made reference to earlier in Chapter 4) was one that generated a lot of interest on various alternative media sites. The above narrative exemplifies how the political climate in Nigeria impacts on journalists' news sourcing routines and the fact that those sources had to be approved by editors, particularly when such stories were linked to the government. The meeting referred to above, took place during my ethnographic immersion at *Punch* and the following empirical data from my observation provides context:

When I arrived at the newsroom this morning, there were only a handful of journalists at their desks. I planned to interview the news editor later today as per my appointment with him. I stroll around the newsroom for a bit and decide it is time to ask the news editor some questions. He is busy discussing a story idea with another journalist and so I decide to skim through some today's newspapers on his table. *Punch*'s front page cover today had the story about the 'ex-convicts' published under the headline: "Outrage over presidential pardon for VIP ex-convicts". A section of the report read "*The News Agency of Nigeria* that initially sent a story on the controversial pardon, had to call editors later to "withdraw" the story, saying it was sent in error" Throughout this report, most of the official sources refused to confirm the story but *Punch* incorporated tweets from some popular Nigerian tweeters. I find this inclusion interesting because most of the journalists I have interviewed do not always agree that they reference alternative

media sources *per se*. Although Punch was selective in choosing which tweets to include in this report, deciding to go ahead with publishing the story in spite of the silence of ‘official’ news sources, is instructive. When I asked the News editor about the tweets included in this report, he explained in their deciding to use those tweets: “... discretion is very important. In selecting the tweets we incorporate into our news reports and the ones we used for this story, we look out for antecedents. We include tweets that appear genuine and remove any inciting comments before we publish. Alternative media alerts you to certain things happening in other places and we cannot ignore them”.

(Field Notes at *Punch* 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013).

This interview extract takes the point I made elsewhere about the verification of information sourced from alternative media sites further. Not only does this extract highlight that the editor’s selectivity importantly shapes newsmaking practices in these newsrooms but it also shows how power plays out in determining the particularly alternative media ‘voices’ that are heard. It thus suggests a notion and indeed illusion of inclusivity of various alternative media voices when in fact these voices are appropriated, in part, based on those who share the newspaper’s editorial opinion. This is evidenced with the editor’s reference to including “tweets that appear genuine and removing any inciting comments”. While this might speak to the social responsibility that the media attempts to adhere to in keeping the citizenry abreast of happenings around them, it also significantly foregrounds media hegemony, highlighting how positions of power are implicated in the newsmaking process. This is to the extent that the ‘voices’ appropriated from various alternative media sites are positioned within the text to give an impression of a ‘balanced’ report that is inclusive of a ‘multiplicity’ of opinion. A look at the news text about this particular story is also instructive:



**Figure 2a: Screenshot showing the story about the presidential pardon granted to ex-convicts on *Punch's* website**



**Figure 2b: Screenshot of the concluding part of the story above, highlighting alternative media inclusion within the text.**

In incorporating the views from alternative media sites within this news text, *Punch* references “A social commentator, Kayode Ogundamisi said...”, “Social entrepreneur, Gbenga Sosan, said in his tweets...”, “For this #PresidentialPardon case, hope for future sanity...”, “Nnaemeka Nwosu, who has the Twitter handle, @nwosunnaemeka believed the implication ...”. The way alternative media content is included in this news text again substantiates the point I made earlier that Nigerian print journalists perform and articulate their own selective tendencies through the choice, as well as the representation of voices incorporated in the news text. This goes to show that when alternative media content are appropriated in reporting events, Nigerian print journalists, like their counterparts elsewhere still “ [learn] who news editors and editors consider to be "appropriate" contacts [and it] constitutes an important part of the staff-cloning process in any newsroom” (Louw 2001:163).

Further, though most of the journalists claimed that alternative media was making news sourcing easier, empirical data from the interviews and observations show that they still make an attempt to confirm stories from official news sources before they file their reports. This is especially the case for journalists working on desks such as the political desk, crime desk, among others. The journalists were usually seen making frantic phone calls before rounding off and sending their stories to the news editor. I observed this trend of fiddling with mobile phones just before submitting reports to the news editor. When I asked one of the reporters at *Punch* who I observed was having connectivity issues on her phone, she explained that she was having difficulty contacting an official source on her mobile phone, adding that:

...It's to avoid the editor asking you whether you confirmed the story or even risk landing in trouble. You get a story from an online source, you have to authenticate it, balance the story, because we are not using our media to fight personal battles, and you can't just publish anything. In *Punch*, they insist that you must verify the stories. A lot of times when something happens, it breaks first on social media so before you get to where the event is happening, you already have a thread of information to follow. But there are other times when alternative media helps to follow up a story that came to the lime light first in the traditional media. I'll give you an example. There was a case against a modelling agency using that as a front for prostitution, that first broke on traditional media but many media houses were not willing to follow the story and so the girl went on to her *Facebook* profile to

pour [sic.] out her mind. I got in touch with her online and eventually succeeded in cajoling her online to do an interview. She accepted in the end and we did an interview online. That doesn't stop you from contacting traditional sources too. In the case of this model's story, I still had to contact the owner of the modelling agency and spoke with the sponsors of the competition (Crime reporter, *Punch*).

The use of *Facebook* and other online social networking sites as news sources by journalists, such as the Crime reporter above, is indicative of alternative media sites are opening up the pool of information sources which journalists can access. The extract above also shows how journalists continue to rely on traditional official sources in an attempt to provide 'balance' to their reports. This again reiterates the fact that having access to these online sites may not necessarily imply that Nigerian print journalists ignore traditional sources in writing their stories.

This observation was further confirmed in an informal interview with a senior editor at the refectory at *Punch*. She explained that:

"We have to make sure that we have all sides to the story. It is not enough for a journalist to simply write his or her report based on something found from, say *Sahara reporters*. We have to at least give the official sources a chance to provide their own side of the story. Most times, they don't confirm anything. They may say 'no comments' or even refuse to pick up our calls. *That in itself is a comment*. We usually add this to our reports to show that we made an effort to contact them". (Emphasis added)

While the extract above highlights the positions of power that 'official' sources occupy in the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists, it also draws attention to the significance of diasporic alternative media as news leads and news sources in the newsmaking process in these newsrooms. The reference above to *Sahara reporters* underscores the argument that the presence of alternative media sites run and maintained by Nigerians in the diaspora has become an important news sources for journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms. The fact that these diasporic sites serve as important news lead providers in these newsrooms is further reflective of the socio-political context within which these journalists perform their functions. According to a journalist at *Tribune*, "these politicians always have something to hide", and these diasporic alternative media sites are increasingly reputed for leaking information that one is unlikely to find on the pages of a national newspaper in Nigeria (Kperogi, 2008).



Scholars have written widely on the centrality and connection of Africans in the diaspora with the homeland, not only in terms of remittance but also the fact that they contribute significantly to the media of the homeland ( See for example, Chari, 2013; Kperogi, 2008; Ndlela, 2010; Ogunyemi, 2014; Willems and Mano, 2010). In discussing the intersection between diasporic media and those of the homeland, Willems and Mano (2010: 12) observe that migrants “set up a vibrant media culture that cater[s] for a wide audience” in the host country. The same can also be said for mainstream print journalists in Nigeria, as gleaned from the interviews and observations, that the presence of these online sites is not only becoming important news sources but it is also “putting [them] on their toes” as many of the journalists explained. This observation is also echoed elsewhere across the continent where Chari (2013:124) too observes that mainstream media journalists in Zimbabwe face fierce competition from online publications and websites operated by Zimbabweans in the diaspora”.

Thus, one finds that while these various diasporic media sites serve as useful news leads and news sources for Nigerian print journalists, the structures in these newsrooms are still resilient to networking with these sites. My diary entry for 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2013 during my immersion at *Punch* again shows how these journalists are navigating some of the challenges that come with interactivity:

It's 3pm. I am sitting next to the news editor's desk observing some of the journalists in the newsroom. Some of the reporters who returned to the newsroom a while ago are compiling their reports. Still considering whether to interrupt these reporters and ask them for an interview, the news editor calls my attention. He tells me he has to attend a meeting with a few other senior journalists and top management. I ask if it's ok to tag along but he declines and informs me that it is a closed-door. I smile and tell him that it is okay by me and I continue observing the other journalists. It's not all work here in the newsroom, some of the journalists tease themselves about personal stuff. After about two hours, the news editor walks back into the newsroom. I am curious to know what was discussed at that meeting. He quickly makes for his seat and starts reading through the pile of reports that some of the reporters have submitted in the file marked “9 P.M Deadline”. It is four hours until the 9 p.m production deadline so I move closer to have a quick chat with the news editor. (Field notes, *Punch* 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013)

This newsroom observation narrative further reiterates how hierarchical structures are maintained in these newsrooms where only selected senior journalists are privileged to make important decisions about the media organization. Although I asked whether I could be allowed to shadow this management meeting and take observation notes, that request was declined. This might, in part, be because they would not want me writing about that meeting in this thesis, as Paterson and Zoellner (2010:99) have observed elsewhere.

During my informal chat with the editor, he said: “I cannot quite tell you most of what we discussed at that meeting because it has to do with our business strategy but we are seeking ways of maximizing our online platforms. We are also not happy with the way some of these Nigerian bloggers just pick stories off our website and post them as theirs without attributing *Punch* whenever materials are taken from there” (Senior editor, *Punch*).

The news editor’s explanation that they had discussed how to make good use of their website *to maximize* profit as well as ensure that alternative media practitioners, particularly bloggers attribute the whenever materials are culled from their website, suggests a contrast to the idea of networked journalism theorists. *Punch* took steps towards protecting their content online. A visit to the newspaper’s website around June 2013, after my fieldwork in April, I noticed that *Punch* had a copyright caveat beneath most of the stories on its website which reads:

Copyright PUNCH. All rights reserved. This material, and other digital content on this website, may not be reproduced, published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed in whole or in part without prior express written permission from PUNCH. Contact: editor@punchng.com.

This copyright caution is not innocent. It signals a warning to alternative media practitioners, who have been fingered as copying stories from *Punch*’s website to desist from doing so. While the caveat does not necessarily suggest prosecution for those contravene this warning without the “written permission” from *Punch*, it is in itself reflective of how Nigerian print newsrooms are still “guarding open gates” (Singer et al, 2011). It in fact, reiterates the argument that mainstream journalists in Nigeria continue to resist the challenge to their hegemonies as those who have the authority to report about the society’s stories.



Figure 3: Screenshot showing copyright caveat on a news story on *Punch's* website

### 5.3 Journalists' ambivalences towards alternative media: Of proprietorial interference, fears and 'fatwas'

Underpinning Nigerian print journalists' appropriation of content from alternative media sites in their everyday newsmaking process is the element of fear that is implicitly implied in the way they steer clear of content which for instance, undermines their proprietorial interests or pits one religion against the other. The comment of a political journalist at *Vanguard* which also mirrors the views of majority of the journalists in these newsrooms is instructive:

There is still a problem of self-censorship and ownership despite operating in a democratic setting. Even with the FOI<sup>21</sup> Act, the media owners still determine what goes into the newspaper and many of them have political allies. So, you sometimes need to turn a blind eye.

<sup>21</sup> Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act was passed into law in 2011

Another senior editor at *Vanguard* also expressed a similar view:

We are in a peculiar country and because of ownership, it's not every news story that we can publish. This is the only newspaper that is owned by a professional journalist and maybe *This Day*<sup>22</sup>. So, most of the owners of the newspapers in Nigeria are politicians or those who have served in government. Because of that, there are so many things that you have to pretend not to know. This is because if we write a story, we have to put a byline and your life will be in danger.

These comments thus highlight how proprietorial interferences shape journalists' appropriation of alternative media in their newsmaking process even when such information may be true. That they have to 'pretend not to know' further emphasises that a number of negotiations, particularly around understanding those who are 'sacred cows' and must therefore not be touched, mark the construction of news in these newsrooms. This practice is also similar elsewhere in Zimbabwean newsrooms where, as Mano (2005:56) observes, "proprietor[ial] policies and politics" shape journalists' newsmaking practices.

The responses in the extracts above are also typical of the journalists in other Nigerian print newsrooms. Sharing similar sentiments, a senior editor at *Tribune* responded thus:

Alternative media is helping to focus our attention to what is happening especially in revealing some hidden government agenda. But until we have leaders who are ready to be accountable, those who are selfless and who have the love for service, our hands are tied. There have been many instances where we simply ignore such 'tips'. It's simply because at the end of day, if you go ahead to publish what you saw online, it can be easily denied. You know Nigerians like to share information, as events start happening, people start sending stories but it depends on you as the editor to decide what to do with those stories. We have to consider the interests of the publishers and owners of *Tribune* before using information from these online news sites. Will it hurt them? Will it hurt some of the people in government who are our benefactors? I know it's a lot to consider but we have to make money too. That's why we have problems because the job of the media is to expose wrongdoings. But how can we do that? We are afraid of assassins, trailing one

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<sup>22</sup> This Day is a privately-owned newspaper in Nigeria.

about, sponsored by the state and all that. One is at times handicapped or even turning the blind eye or withdrawing into our shell...

Although the concerns of the editor in the excerpt above were not universally shared in all the newsrooms visited for this study, it nonetheless highlights some of the dilemmas journalists in these newsrooms face. The fact that most of these journalists, as the editor in the extract above, have to consider the interests of the newspapers' publishers speaks to how proprietorial interferences shape and constrain how alternative media content are appropriated in the newsmaking process. While this is by no means to suggest that these journalists do not use their own initiatives in determining what stories to publish and the framing of such stories, the excerpts above point to how the agency of these journalists is in fact shaped by their employers. It thus makes these journalists vulnerable to being mere lapdogs, who have "[lost] their bite as watchdogs... [and have been] transformed into snarling Rottweillers in service of the state" (Curran, 2002: 217), reporting whatever suits their financial benefactors and publishers.

Consequently, one finds that there is an extent to which these journalists respond to the intricacies of their context in incorporating alternative media content. One of the reasons for this is articulated in the response below:

[...] We have received threats of being issued a *fatwa*<sup>23</sup> because of the comments we allow on some of our news stories. Many people leave the essence of a story and start commenting on Mohammed and Jesus. I actually remember being called by some of my bosses that allowing such comments to go through was annoying some of the 'high and mighty' and they asked if I want these people to issue a *fatwa* on all my other colleagues. I didn't need to wait to see this happen. I would not want to put any of my colleagues at risk of being killed by a fanatic so I have to make sure that I keep the interaction gate on our website closely monitored basically. (Interview with Online editor at *Vanguard*)

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<sup>23</sup> The fear of being issued a *fatwa* is palpable in these print newsrooms. The case of a former Nigerian journalist who wrote a feature story on the beauty contest in Nigeria in 2002 in which about 200 people were killed in religious clashes is instructive. Zamfara, a northern Nigerian state issued a *fatwa* on this journalist, thus making it acceptable for her to be killed by any Muslim.

The response above thus highlights that in attempting to embrace interactivity of these newspapers' websites, there is the fear of being issued a *fatwa*. This again reinforces the impact which local context factors, and in particular the way religion, which has been blamed for a number of crises in Nigeria, have on the newsmaking practices of these journalists.

Online journalists in these newsrooms also pointed out, as a journalist at *Vanguard* puts it that "a member of the online team still needs to approve a comment before it is allowed to become available in the comment thread." From observing these journalists, I saw how this constituted added pressure where they constantly had to monitor various stories, particularly those that were controversial. The pressures these journalists face is also similar to Canter's (2013:616) finding from interviewing journalists at British local newspapers that while journalists are trying as much as possible to hold on to their gatekeeping function, in the face of interactivity, there is usually "confusion surrounding the moderation or non-moderation of comments and the potential legal implications".

In dealing with the influx of information available from various non-mainstream alternative media, another dilemma which majority of the journalists interviewed also mentioned was the fact that collaborating with alternative media in the news production process, as networked journalism scholars posit, was not acceptable. The response typifies how journalists are reacting to alternative media's supposed the challenge to their profession. This extract further finds explanation in Singer and Ashman's (2009:18) finding from interviewing journalists at U.K's *Guardian* newspaper that "journalists are struggling with how to ethically accommodate the opportunities for freedom and dialogue presented by UGC while safeguarding their credibility and sense of responsibility".

In spite of the fears expressed by many of these journalists in appropriating alternative media, a senior editor at *Vanguard* explained that "the dynamism of the profession takes care of itself and newspaper journalism in Nigeria cannot lose its essence because the power of the written word is still there". Thus, one finds that in spite of appropriating alternative media content, the structures in these newsrooms remain resilient.

Journalists' fears in collaborating with alternative media sites in reporting events were also marked by fears of having different mission from the owners of these sites who might be loyal to one group or the other. In the words of a senior editor at *Guardian*:

Alternative media platforms can provide leads to breaking news but it behoves a professional journalist to go and dig up the story behind the story. Of course in doing that, you might end up with a burnt finger sometimes but to collaborate with alternative journalists can just mean taking that too far. In a country like Nigeria, we cannot collaborate with alternative online journalists because apart from having different purposes, we still need to remain credible...We don't want to incite people. You see, politics in Nigeria is still very volatile and the people who should give you information mostly don't give out information. It's a pretty tough call.

The excerpt above again reiterates why journalists are cautious in appropriating other alternative media content, especially when it had to do with issues around politics. Thus, journalists in these newsrooms, as evidenced in my newsroom observations, are careful in their use of these sources and only use those that mirror their own editorial opinions.

A senior journalist at *Punch* also explained that:

The presence of alternative journalism practices doesn't translate into more openness or press freedom. Government officials complain about how people use social media and if they have their way, they would regulate freedom online. In recent times for instance, top government officials have been complaining about how people use social media and have even called for censoring. I know this is not likely to happen anyway but it goes to show you how far these guys are willing to go to shift the public's attention away from them. I don't think the alternative media is capable of opening up the mediasphere in Nigeria.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The findings discussed in this chapter highlight some of the contextual challenges that shape how Nigerian print journalists appropriate alternative media content in their everyday newsmaking practices. For instance, proprietorial pressures and demands see these journalists adopting self-censorship in adopting alternative media content even when such content may be true. The chapter has also shown how the appropriation of alternative media in these newsrooms is creating 'new' news beats as well as leading to

ethical challenges in these newsrooms. I have highlighted how these alternative media sites are at once ‘news sources’ for these journalists and are at the same time treated with fear in these newsrooms. Thus, their appropriation of alternative media content in their newsmaking practices is shaped and constrained by economic and socio-political context factors.

The next chapter, through textual analysis, interrogates how Nigerian print journalists appropriate alternative media content in reporting key events.



## CHAPTER 6

### Reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests: Narratives of inclusion and exclusion in *Punch* and *Vanguard*

#### 6.1 Introduction

On 1 January 2012, the Nigerian government announced the removal of the fuel subsidy, resulting in a 120 per cent increase in the pump price of petrol per litre. This announcement kindled unprecedented days of protests, the first of their kind, in many cities across Nigeria and beyond<sup>24</sup>. Citizens of Africa's most populous country and the largest producer of crude oil not only took to the streets of major towns and cities, but also *occupied* the social media trending on the #Occupy Nigeria hashtag on Twitter, as well as on Facebook, among other social networking sites and blogs. Compared to the Arab Spring, the Occupy Nigeria protests did not last as long, but will not be forgotten in a hurry. Dubbed 'Nigeria's Harmattan' (Ifejika 2012), Nigerians were not only reacting to the removal of the fuel subsidy, but were also calling for an end to the paradoxical existence of about 70 per cent of the country's citizens who, despite living in an oil-rich country, subsist below the poverty line. These protests were not only tweeted and facebooked, but were also reported by Nigeria's mainstream media and the global media.

For some observers, the question was whether Nigerians could replicate the series of protests that happened in Tunisia and Egypt, which have famously been referred to as the 'Arab Spring'. However, *Occupy Nigeria* was unlike the Occupy movements associated with Hardt, Negri or Graeber's schools of thought and which have roots in Leftist politics as it was not necessarily an attack on capitalism. Rather, it represented the appropriation of symbols which were subsequently localised to meet local demands. *Occupy Nigeria* protested against the political situation in Nigeria at a time when many saw the increase in the pump price of fuel as a way of worsening the prevailing economic hardship.

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<sup>24</sup> The Occupy Nigeria protests also had an international face with protests held at the Nigerian High Commission in London and at the World Bank premises in Washington D.C. Some protesters also expressed solidarity with the protesters in Nigeria by disrupting a meeting organised by the Nigerian government in New York while other solidarity protests held in South Africa and Brussels. For more on the meeting disrupted by protesters in New York, see <http://saharareporters.com/2012/01/19/occupynigeria-activists-new-york-shut-down-ministers-wasteful-town-hall-meeting>

The case of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests is particularly well suited to interrogate how content appropriated from alternative media sites are represented and produced in Nigerian mainstream newspapers and whether (or not) the institutional practices of Nigerian print journalists are necessarily changing with these appropriations. This chapter therefore uses the coverage of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of January 2012 as an illustrative example. In unpacking the news texts produced during these protests, this chapter examines the discursive strategies employed by two Nigerian newspapers, *Punch* and *Vanguard*, paying particular attention to the way alternative media content is reproduced and those given agency to speak in these news texts. As Fairclough (1995: 204) reminds us, the products which the mainstream media sell are “the outcomes of specific professional practices and techniques”. To this end, I am interested in teasing out inflections of exclusion as well as the otherness given to the alternative media content used in these news texts in comparison with the voices from the ‘establishment’ for instance.

This chapter thus seeks to demonstrate how texts produced during times of political and social upheavals in Nigeria, such as the Occupy Nigeria protests, can serve as platforms for interrogating whether or not the appropriation of content from alternative media is necessarily impacting on the traditional practices of Nigerian print journalists. Against this backdrop, sample news texts drawn from the websites of these two Nigerian newspapers are purposively selected and analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In interrogating these news texts as discourse, or as “*language in use*” as Richardson puts it, (2007:220, emphasis in original), I discuss the ambiguity of the inclusions from alternative media in these news texts, which are spaces for expressing dissent and at the same time as spaces that not only criminalises the protests but that also supports the status quo in the way alternative journalism is incorporated within the texts. In deploying CDA, this chapter primarily interrogates how power relations are implicated in these newspaper texts with the way content from alternative media sites are appropriated in reporting the Occupy Nigeria protests. I attempt to draw attention to how the choice of words and news sources, the use of paraphrasing and other linguistic strategies used in this news text reveal some of the uneven tussle which characterise the construction of the news narrative.

## 6.2 Analysing selected *Occupy Nigeria* news texts: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

As argued in the section on CDA in Chapter 3, there are various approaches to deploying CDA in textual analyses which can be linked to the dynamism of the method (Fairclough et al, 2011). Despite these differences, they all seem to be agreeing that discourse does not exist in a vacuum but it is rather socially-constructed and complex. This means that news texts produced in Nigerian newspapers do not necessarily exist in isolation but are inextricably linked with the socio-cultural context within which they are produced. These news texts therefore offer a useful forum to explore how Nigerian print journalists use and appropriate alternative media in their everyday news production routines, particularly in the coverage of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests of January 2012. This study draws largely from an approach to CDA mainly influenced by Fairclough (1995, 2003, 2010) in analysing the news texts produced during the *Occupy Nigeria* protests. Drawing from Gramsci's notion of hegemony, I use CDA in unpacking how power is implicated and contested in the news narrative. In this case, deploying CDA translates into investigating the implications of the discursive practices employed by these two Nigerian newspapers in reporting the fuel-subsidy-removal protests.

To this end, this chapter examines the representation of the alternative media content in these news texts. This is because the way the news narrative is constructed as well as how "people are named in news discourse can have a significant impact on the way ... they are viewed" (Richardson, 2007: 49). The analysis here therefore focuses on the alternative media content appropriated, the agency given to the voices that are included and what the reporting and framing of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests reveals about how and whether (or not) the institutional practices of Nigerian print journalists are necessarily being (re)shaped by the appropriation of alternative media.

A total of six articles – three by *Vanguard* and three by *Punch* are analysed in this chapter from a CDA perspective. These news texts were purposively sampled based on the inclusion of tweets, citizen reports and every other form of alternative journalism as defined in this study. The news texts sampled and analysed in this chapter were those published between 1<sup>st</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2012. This period was the peak of the protests which eventually fizzled out after the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Federal Government reached a consensus.

### 6.3 Framing alternative media ‘inclusion’: Illusions of inclusivity in *Vanguard* and *Punch*’s reporting of *Occupy Nigeria* 2012

A number of discourses are noticeable from the selected news texts, and running through them all is an attempt at citizen inclusion in reports. *Vanguard*’s online news text published on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012 had the headline: ‘As Labour strike begins...report protest in your area!’ This invitation from *Vanguard* for citizens to report themselves follows from their adoption of a similar phrase during the elections of 2011 where voters were invited to send photos and reports of what was happening in their areas. It however reveals a shift in the information gathering practices of mainstream journalists in Nigeria. From a CDA perspective, this news text at a macro- level appears to neutralise power structures that characterise news reporting where privileged voices are mostly allowed to speak. The text continues:

‘The House of Representatives, yesterday, in an emergency sitting also asked government and Labour to shelve the subsidy removal and strike. But neither government nor labour has changed their position. However, in *Vanguard*’s citizen report initiative, we invite our numerous readers to be part of the coverage of the subsidy protest’.

This extract thus attempts to show that the writer of this news text and indeed *Vanguard* understood the important roles that citizens using social media play during protests. It also shows how language was used to normalise the concession of powers to the audience to report as though they had the institutional authority to report events. While this direct invitation for audience participation in the news production process signals a shift in the status of the ‘former audience’ who traditionally waited on journalists to ‘report’ events, it also shows how mainstream journalists still control how they include such reports. This news text further reads:

‘Are you in [sic] the heart of the protest, on the fringe, on the sidewalk etc, wherever you are in the country, let us have [sic.] your stories and images’.

Note how the request for stories is framed: “let us have your stories and images”. This shows how Nigerian newspapers, and *Vanguard*, particularly in this case, attempted to take advantage of Nigerians’ engagement with new information and communication technologies in reporting the protests. From the sentence above, one gets a sense of authority and a sense of power contestation where *Vanguard* is interested in *having* the stories which readers are following. While this might suggest that *Vanguard* was

particularly interested in getting these stories from their audience, it reveals an attempt at reducing the voices of the Nigerians who were protesting to whispers which needed amplification by *Vanguard*. This is further corroborated in the following extract from the news text:

You can send your materials with your name, town and state to:

Email: [subsidyprotest@vanguardngr.com](mailto:subsidyprotest@vanguardngr.com)

SMS: 08061284310, 07030664913, 07061078412

Twitter: @vanguardngrnews

Remember: Remember visit our website, [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com); fan page: <http://www.facebook.com/vanguardngr> and follow us on twitter-@vanguardngrnews for updates!

Although this direct invitation from *Vanguard* for user generated content and other alternative media content suggests that the definition of news is increasingly being shaped by forces outside the newsrooms, it is also important to reiterate the point here that Nigerian print journalists are also seeking ways of holding on to their hegemonic positions. This can be surmised from the extract above as *Vanguard* was careful to provide email addresses for these stories to be sent, mobile numbers for text messages, and the newspaper's official Twitter handle. By providing various points of access through which these 'stories' could be sent, this text suggests that the hierarchies between the audience and mainstream journalists in Nigeria are not necessarily flattening out even when invitations for audience contributions are made. This is because in spite of being aware that the activities of Nigerians who were tweeting or sharing information via their mobile phones or online during the Occupy Nigeria protests could not be ignored the way in which this information is solicited in this text provides a sense in which *Vanguard* still attempted to control the information flow. The invitation for the audience to visit *Vanguard's* website as well as their Facebook and Twitter pages for update is therefore not innocent. While it might be a means of collating information at a central location, the fact that *Vanguard* 'volunteers' to be a type of 'repository' for 'materials' from the audience also speaks to subtle power positions which the Nigerian print media still wields.

I therefore argue that although the invitation for citizens to visit *Vanguard's* website might have been an attempt at giving 'visibility' to these 'alternative' voices it importantly reveals the paradox that marks the appropriation of alternative media by

Nigerian print journalists. While *Vanguard*, in inviting citizens to report what was happening in their area propagate an illusion of openness on one hand, it also reveals how mainstream print journalists in Nigeria are creatively negotiating any challenge, if at all, to their traditional hegemonic positions. It also chimes with Coleman and Ross' (2010:74) observation that "[m]ainstream media are extremely reluctant to give much visibility to organisations which challenge or even threaten the political frames of the media agenda". While Coleman and Ross' argument here is about counterpublics who deploy alternative media, one can also add that Nigerian newspapers negotiate how UGC and information from other alternative media platforms are incorporated into their reportage even when such information might be useful. Rather than encourage a collaborative reporting of the protests by having a different space set up for instance, the invited 'former audience' are to visit *Vanguard*'s website. This further finds credence in the comments of a senior editor at *Vanguard* who stated that inviting the audience to contribute reports during the Occupy Nigeria protests, as with other major news worthy events was "simply part of the gizmo to drive traffic to our website". Thus, while the appropriation of alternative media content by Nigerian print newspapers reveals a paradox of inclusion and openness, it also on the other hand demonstrates how new business models are being thought out as new information and communication technologies proliferate.

Following the invitation to citizens to report protests in their areas, *Vanguard*'s online news for 10th January 2012 had the headline: 'Day 2: Citizens report protest across Nigeria.' This suggests that the 'former audience', who traditionally waited on journalists to feed them news reports, were now the ones relaying news about the protests from their locales. While this text can be read as a response to the request for alternative media content as reported in the text analysed above, it again shows how Nigerian print journalists negotiate their appropriation of alternative media along fairly traditional journalistic lines. The text under review here, gives the impression that readers are being presented with the 'raw' information of what is happening across Nigeria, as seen through the eyes of 'citizen journalists', as an extract from the text reads:

'Nigerians who are either participating in the ongoing protest or who are onlookers sent in firsthand information of the protest as it were [sic] in their areas. Excerpts: [sic].'

The labels which the text uses are noteworthy. Richardson (2007: 49) points out that how "people are named in news discourse can have a significant impact on the way ... they are viewed". In this text, other than the by-lines of the individual writers (in some cases,

only the writer's first name), they are collectively described as for example, "either participating in the ongoing protest or as onlookers". The way these 'Nigerians' are named, thus emphasises the distinctions between those who are against the fuel subsidy removal and those who, according to the connoted meaning of 'onlookers' are indifferent to the protests. Referential strategies as Richardson (2007:50) puts it "project meaning and social values unto the referent ...". In this news text, *Vanguard* appears to have a focus on the 'citizens' perspective, which is indicated in the choice of sources used in this text. Following from the extract above, the text presents stories apparently sent in by 'citizen reporters' from 11 cities across Nigeria. One of the reports incorporated in this text reads:

Business picking up in Sokoto

By Tony, Sokoto

Sokoto State is very calm as if the people are tired of the protest. Some shops are opening right now as I am typing this message. It seems they are tired of staying at home. PHCN officials have resumed work and they have brought light, filling stations are opening. May God help us.

Although this report was presumably sent by a 'citizen' reporter, the normalisation of this comment and its inclusion in this news text suggests that *Vanguard* attempts to show immediacy and the fact that the reports were indeed sent by citizens. While this might have been done to give a sense of belonging to those participating in the protests, it again shows how Nigerian print journalists remain selective in what they classify as publishable alternative media content. Importantly too, although the headline promises reports of the protests across Nigeria, only eleven carefully selected reports are included in this report.

The selected reports too highlight a calm situation in most of the areas in contrast to what would be expected during protest. The following examples are instructive:

No dull moment at Ibafo

By Usman Etafia, Ibafo

As early as 7am this morning [ ...]They mounted canopies at the center [sic] of the road while a DJ is on the stage playing all sorts of musics[sic] to inspire the youths who are making their request in a peaceful manner.

Oyo records peaceful protest

By Akin Ajayi, Oyo

Peaceful demonstration took place in Oyo town

Owerri is calm

By M. Precious, Owerri

It is calm in Owerri. Business is going on as normal!

If we look at the examples above, the inclusion of these contributions seems to indicate a positive evaluation of the protests. Although *Vanguard* here seems to be presenting these reports in the ‘undiluted’ form in which they were sent, the inclusion here arguably implies disapproval for violent and chaotic protests. While the Occupy Nigeria protests were not necessarily peaceful in many cities, the framing of these protests as peaceful with barely any reference to the chaos in other cities is significant. For instance, by the end of the first day, a protester had allegedly been shot dead by the police. As such, the choice of reproducing only the contributions that projected peaceful protests speaks to resisting the voices of the majority of the protesters.

Also, by choosing only to mention the names of the contributors this text does not allude to their positions as citizens. This reinforces the mainstream media’s dominance over whose voices can be heard and how those voices are represented. Schudson (2003) observes that media organisations employ certain frames in news reporting that tend to give ‘voice’ to ‘official’ sources, and in so doing allow the status quo to go unchallenged.

Again, *Vanguard* in its online news of 7<sup>th</sup> January 2012, continued in its path of including snippets from alternative media in reporting the Occupy Nigeria protests. Published under the headline ‘Neighbouring countries hit by subsidy removal’, this news text suggests an implied evaluation of the protests. *Vanguard*, in this news text, also showed an awareness of the various platforms used by the protesters:

[B]y Thursday night, messages on tweeter [sic] were still scanty but one of them on Facebook said there would be protest at Okpara Square, Enugu by 8am.

While there is a reference to social media as platforms for mobilisation for the protests, in including the information found on Facebook, there is no reference to whose Facebook wall or page *Vanguard* culled this information from. While *Vanguard* framed this news text from the perspective of what is trending online, there is also an attempt to include more traditional news sources in the form of a press release:



The Association of Nigeria Authors, ANA (Lagos), in a statement entitled ‘The Season of Anomie’

[...] said “As educated writers, we are resolved to join all possible peaceful activities aimed at expressing the people’s displeasure at the current state of affairs”

Thus, what is evident from this news text is the contradiction of validating the appropriation of content from alternative media sites by incorporating traditional news sources in such a way as to justify the reason for including snippets from social media. In considering the two extracts above, no attribution is given to the information *Vanguard* gleaned from Facebook and other alternative media sites in writing this news text. Rather, there is only a vague attribution to “[...] one of them said on Facebook...”, while in the case of appropriating a more traditional source, a press release, the voices are not only given direct quotations but are represented as: “[...] educated writers...”. As such, the vagueness which *Vanguard* deploys in describing the content from Facebook and the prominence given to the voices represented in the press release, reveals some of the ways in which mainstream print journalists in Nigeria negotiate and contest alternative media inclusion in reporting events such as the Occupy Nigeria protests.

This news text is again selective and somewhat reluctant in acknowledging how alternative media was used during the protests. An example of this can be seen in the extract:

And social media have been helpful too. Some of them such as You tube[sic], Facebook, listservs, blogs, twitter, website, online news media, emails, dating sites, blackberries, phones, etc are employed to boost the protest.

From the example above, *Vanguard* seems to suggest that social media usage during the protest was a sort of appendage which was “employed to boost the protest”. While the extract above lists a variety of alternative media sites, there is an attempt at downplaying how alternative media sites were used as providers of news and comment during the protests as providers of news and comment when in fact this news text itself references content from alternative media sites more in this text than traditional news sources.

With regards to incorporating content from alternative media sites, there are instances where this news text gives little or vague attribution to alternative media users. This is especially the case in sections where this news text incorporates content from a user’s Facebook walls for instance. Not only can one not necessarily differentiate between the opinion of the writer and what exactly was said on these alternative media ‘walls’ but the authorial voice of the alternative media content becomes lost. This can be surmised from the extract below:

The quantity and quality of electronic gadgetry in the hands of protesters should make security people think twice before shooting or beating a protester. One phone camera or the other will capture you and when the protests are over, reckoning time will come a protester, Mr Aja N. Aja wrote on his facebook.

It is noteworthy that in the extract above and throughout this news text, no direct quote is given to any alternative media source. Although instances of violence were reported during the protests, there is no reference to any such from the point of view of some of the ‘protesters’ (or more neutrally, the Nigerians who participated in the protests). Rather, as the extract above reveals, the voices of these protesters are reported using an *indirect quotation*. As Fairclough (2003:49) explains, indirect quotation provides a “summary of what was said or written, not the actual words used, no quotation marks” (2003:49). The extract above only provides a summary of what was said and is presented as though it were the actual words used by “Mr Aja [who] wrote on Facebook”.

Consequently, the use of indirect quotation in this news text and the references given to the ‘protesters’ is suggestive of positions of power and a bias towards the *status quo* who in this case are for example, the ‘educated writers’. The choice of giving prominence to the establishment, for example: “Mr Labaran Maku, the information minister has said...”, “Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) and its chair...” in this text, is thus indicative of the newsmaking practice at *Vanguard* where, in spite of ranking the highest in Nigeria for networking alternative media content, it still is deeply rooted in the hegemonic tradition of naturalising the sources with authority to be heard.

Thus, running through this text are several instances of favouring traditional news sources over those from alternative media sites. Even when voices from alternative media sites are represented in this news text, the framing is such that their voices cannot be heard on their own. They are rather subsumed and summarised, using indirect quotations and are not given authorial privileges. In this news text, the voices incorporated from alternative media sites have their identities obscured. While this may be a way of shielding them from Police “shooting or beating”, it might also mean that it is used in this text to propagate a façade of multiplicity and variety of opinion which might well be only that of the writer of this news text. These extracts are illustrative:

*Example 1:* ...Mr Aja N. Aja wrote on his facebook

*Example 2:* “Customs revenue from imported goods from Nigeria has dried up as there is no trans-border trade after Nigeria decided to close its border”, said a senior

Cameroonian officer who sought anonymity because he is not authorised to speak on behalf of the government.

Notice the agency given to the senior Cameroonian officer in spite of the fact that ‘he is not authorised to speak...’. Also notice how this news text only describes Mr Aja as a protester without any reference to whether or not he indeed took part in the protest for his post on Facebook does not necessarily suggest he being a protester. He could well be a Nigerian in the diaspora or in fact not be a Nigerian at all. As such, the way alternative media sources are named as well as the referential strategies used in this text project the Nigerians who either participated in the protests or simply updated their online profiles as ‘protesters’. As Richardson (2007:50) argues, “referential strategies perform a function within the text. Not only do they project meaning and social values onto the referent, they also establish coherence relations with the way that *other* social actors are referred to and represented” (Emphasis in original). Consequently, *Vanguard*’s framing of the voices of traditional ‘official’ news sources and the alternative media voices suggests a foregrounding and privileging of one against the other.

This news text is also telling of how Nigerian print journalists choose relatively ‘familiar’ voices rather than opening up the space for a diversity of views and voices. It is also the case, as can be gleaned from this text, that when content is, if at all, appropriated from other ‘non-traditional’ news sources, Nigerian print journalists are still reluctant to give visibility to other voices and views thereby making such appropriations mere ‘mentions’ and not necessarily inclusion or engagement with these voices.

Beyond a resistance to foregrounding alternative media content in this news text, one finds that the choice of preferring foreign media analysis on issues about Nigeria still marks journalistic practices in Nigerian print newsrooms. An extract from this news text reads:

A report from African Review gives a detailed account of how the emergency rule in Borno and the fuel hike is grounding the economy...

This extract is revealing of how Nigerian newspapers, in spite of the proliferation of alternative media and other traditional news sources, still skew their reports towards incorporating the views of organisations who necessarily understand the Nigerian context from ‘outside’.

In its reporting of the Occupy Nigeria protests, the *Punch* in one of its news texts, published on January 3 2012, appears to be sympathetic to Nigerians who took to social media to express their concerns about the fuel subsidy removal. However, a closer look

at the news texts reveals narratives and stances that privileged the Nigerian government, as evidenced in the choice of words employed in this news text. The headline reads: 'Trending: Subsidy brouhaha on Facebook, Twitter, others'

This headline presents the view of the journalists and indeed *Punch* on the Occupy Nigeria protests, as an overrated reaction and almost a form of noise from Nigerians who were attempting to seek out comic angles to the fuel subsidy removal. The choice of the word 'brouhaha' in the headline, not only suggests a state of recklessness on the part of those who were sharing such jokes online but also indicates how the removal of the fuel subsidy was almost normalised and justified. The headline also exemplifies how print mainstream journalists attempt a façade of networking information from other 'alternative' non-mainstream sites and presenting an illusion of being sympathetic with the Nigerians who saw the fuel subsidy removal as unhealthy when in fact, the content of the news text reveals subtle shades of disapproval both for the protests as the news teaser reads: 'MAUREEN AZUH and JAYNE AUGOYE capture the witty side of Nigerians' responses to the crisis generated by the fuel subsidy removal'. By equating the comments Nigerians were making about the fuel subsidy removal with comedy, it might appear that the writer of this news text was making light of the situation.

Further, this news text's teaser promises a collection of some of the comic dimensions of the protests, employing the phrase ---'crisis generated by the fuel subsidy removal'--- implies that protests were not only crises in themselves but the fuel subsidy removal was a more serious situation that should not have been reduced to jokes and riddles. The lead of this story stated : "*From word of mouth to messages on Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry, blogs and other social media, Nigerians and their allies have started 'dramatising' their plights in the hands of the Federal government that has removed fuel subsidy*". While this paragraph may appear as a kind of solidarity to the people participating in the protest , it reveals narratives of 'otherness' by indicating that such jokes and '*dramatis[ations]*' about the government could only have been carried out on these alternative media sites. As can be gleaned from the extract above, there is no reference to such 'dramatisations' taking place in the mainstream media or other spaces which represent the establishment. Again, running through this text are narratives of 'otherness' and a sense of alternative media as purveyors of unoriginal and distorted news as indicated in sentences such as:

‘Listen to this fake news that hit the BB<sup>25</sup> newsstand on Sunday, as soon as the subsidy removal was announced, “Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for the fuel subsidy removal...”’.

The choice of words and connotations in this excerpt not only reflects how mainstream journalists dominate the news discourse but also indicates how alternative media users, whose voices are not mostly ‘heard’ in news texts are described as spreading ‘fake news’. While there are excerpts of some of the jokes making rounds on various social media included in this news text, passivization is again used to further reinforce the mainstream media’s subtle disapproval for the Occupy Nigeria protests, at least as evidenced in the following paragraph. *“On the various channels, they are exchanging funny photographs...in a manner making others laugh in the midst of the socio-economic tragedy the subsidy removal appears to represent”*. Scholars who deploy any form of Discourse Analysis in analysing texts agree that the context within which discourses are created remain crucial to making sense of what is said. As Bhatia (2006:177) rightly avers, “the most interesting aspect of any discourse is its context, the processes that make its construction possible and the participants that turn it into real-life action to achieve social objectives”. Within the context of the Occupy Nigeria protests, the removal of the fuel subsidy by the federal government of Nigeria was seen by many as a way of widening the gap between the ‘poor’ and the ‘rich’, those who could afford to power their generating sets throughout the day and those who subsist below the poverty line. As such, this news text more importantly, is reflective of how the mainstream media indirectly confronts the actions of the state by using humour and necessarily suggesting that the news text simply ‘reports’ what is happening. Sentence such as *“in the midst of the socio-economic tragedy the subsidy appears to represent...”* not only connotes how Punch attempts to be ‘objective’ in this report but also at the same time shows their editorial position of disapproval for the fuel subsidy removal.

There is also a sense in which *Punch* ‘plays’ with this subtle confrontation by providing an illusion of ‘support’ for the state in the way actors in the text are named. Some referential strategies seem to draw attention away from the Nigerian government, whose 2012 New Year’s Day announcement led to the Occupy Nigeria protests. As Richardson

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<sup>25</sup> The reference to ‘BB’ here, which is a common parlance in Nigeria for the BlackBerry device, reveals the pervasiveness of the mobile phone and, particularly the BlackBerry, notable for sending BlackBerry Messages, in the everyday lives of those who own it, to the extent that it has become a sort of newsstand. It is common sight to see readers standing around newsstand in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, trying to catch a glimpse of the day’s news.

(2007:49) contends, the way ‘people are named in news discourse can have significant impact on the way ... they are viewed’. In referring to the President, this report noted: “*Understandably, President Goodluck Jonathan is at the centre of some of the exchanges.*” As if to show support or even applaud the government’s decision to remove the subsidy, this text appears to refer to the President only in passing and when it does, starts with ‘*Understandably*’. While these sentences in this news text may appear innocent, they are indeed laden with “power asymmetry” (Bhatia, 2006:178). It is suggestive of how this text justifies the ‘jokes’ that are incorporated in this news text and at the same time a strategy of ‘distancing’ itself (an attempt at objectivity) from the alternative media content appropriated in this text.

Although this news text again appears to present the trending ‘*dramatising[s]*’ on various social media as Nigerians react to the fuel subsidy removal, *Punch* in this news text again reveals some of the ways in which the mainstream media still guard the gates in determining what goes through even when content from alternative media is incorporated in mainstream media’s reporting. This sentence from the text is instructive: “*Below are some of the cracks fast travelling round- presented almost as raw as they come*”. This reveals that some level of gatekeeping and editing had gone into the news production process. *Almost* as used in that sentence suggests that the jokes presented in the news text are by no means the same as were trending online. Thus, there is a sense in which the media and particularly *Punch* in this case put their own agenda forward when they appear to be *neutrally* reporting news. By choosing therefore to incorporate these jokes, *Punch* not only confronts the Nigerian government’s action in removing the fuel subsidy but also suggests that alternative media content are appropriated to the extent that they reflect the media’s editorial position on an issue.

Again, the emphasis in selecting the jokes published in this news text focus on the economic implications of the fuel subsidy removal. The jokes included are carefully selected to reveal the economic hardship and implications that the fuel subsidy removal portends. One of such is written in pidgin<sup>26</sup> English:

***At the barber’s shop***

*Customer: How much you dey cut hair for here (Translation: How much do you charge for a haircut)*

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<sup>26</sup> Pidgin is a creolised form of English language spoken in many parts of Nigeria and is often associated with popular culture

*Barber: Oga na N100 with 'Nepa'*<sup>27</sup> *but N800 with Gen!* (Translation: Sir, it's 100Naira with government-supplied electricity but 800Naira if I have to use a generating set to power the appliance)

*Customer: A beg, flash*<sup>28</sup> *me when Nepa bring light* (Translation: Please inform me when the government-supplied electricity is restored)

While there is a conscious attempt to present the extract above 'as is', by choosing to include jokes like the one above, which are mostly written in Pidgin English, this news text not only informs us of what is being said but also speaks about the class of people associated with and affected by the fuel subsidy removal as those who are marginalised and poor. There is also an allusion to how the fuel subsidy removal would affect everyday life among Nigerians especially young people hoping to get married, the use of BlackBerry phones and that crimes such as armed robbery would take a new dimension.

*Abeg, see subsidy wahala o: A car has just been snatched @gunpoint just after filling his tank at Gbagada and the owner kept screaming: "MY FUEL, My FUEL!!" See wat Nigerians have turned to!*

By choosing to include some of the jokes making rounds online such as the one above, retaining some of the pidgin English used in the original jokes themselves and opting to include the spelling errors of *what* as '*wat*' in the extract above, *Punch* again suggests that the jokes have been published verbatim. By opting to include this particular 'joke', *Punch* not only subtly attempt to present an idea that they too can feel the pulse of ordinary Nigerians but they also touch on how the removal of fuel subsidy would impact on the safety of lives and property.

*Punch* also categorised the 'jokes' included in this news text. Excerpts from the news text read:

***Bride price list***

*An Igbo man just received a bride price list: 1. 25liters of petrol (non-negotiable) 2. N200, 000 cash (negotiable) 3. 20 yards of ankara (negotiable) 4. 30 tubers of Yam (negotiable) 5. 1 bag of salt, etc.*

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<sup>27</sup> NEPA is the abbreviation for National Electric Power Authority and used to be the government corporation in charge of electricity supply in Nigeria. Although now referred to as the Power Holding Corporation of Nigeria (PHCN), many years of epileptic and erratic power supply made many Nigerians refer to electricity itself as Nepa such that when power is restored for instance, one might hear children say 'Up Nepa'

<sup>28</sup> Flashing or beeping (as it is called elsewhere) is the method of calling someone's mobile phone and ending the call just before the recipient picks the call. The missed call is used to denote many things from requesting a call back to being the sign that a certain activity has been or will be carried out.

### ***BB broadcast charge***

*BB chat and pings on me are not free anymore. They now cost N50 to chat and N20 to ping, N5 to view and copy my DP. Please bear with me on this new development, there is no subsidy on BB anymore. As you all know that fuel now costs N140 per litre and I have to fill my generator to respond to your chats and pings. Thank you for your usual cooperation.*

The ‘jokes’ about the bride price list above also alludes to the challenges bachelors, hoping to get married are likely to encounter with the fuel subsidy removal. The extract about the bride price list above, particularly, focuses on an aspect of the Igbo culture where certain items are exchanged before marriage can take place. The emphasis on *25litres of petrol (non-negotiable)*, reiterates the importance that petrol has gained to be included on the bride price list. The other ‘joke’ about the new fees that Blackberry owners would start charging contacts is again reflective of the permeation of the mobile phone in Nigeria. While these jokes may provide the comic vent for these protesters, *Punch*’s preference in including these particular ‘jokes’ is not innocent. It in fact suggests that these ‘jokes’ align with what *Punch* intended to publish. As such, while it might appear that the ‘brouhaha’ trending online was simply replicated on these pages, the inclusion of these ‘jokes’ suggests that the jokes also mirrored some of *Punch*’s reactions to the fuel subsidy removal. What is evident in analysing this news text therefore is that *Punch* is in fact subtly sympathetic to popular concerns about the ending of the fuel subsidy. It is in the light of the argument that the mainstream media continues to maintain its agenda setting that McNair (1999:64) reminds us that the media often “present[s] citizens with a view of the world consistent with the maintenance of the status quo [and their own agenda].”

Further, another striking point in unpacking this news text is that in spite of the reference to Facebook and Twitter specifically in the headline, no reference or attribution is made throughout the text to where the trending jokes and comments were culled from. Rather, these jokes are presented as the writers’ version of what happened online. This again shows how Nigerian print journalists, even when they have clearly sourced information from other alternative sources, choose to hide that fact by refraining from attributing those sources. It also speaks to the idea that mainstream journalists in Nigeria still regard themselves as having the institutional authority as news providers and would rather disregard crediting other ‘non-official’ outlets as the sources of their information. Further, this news text suggests that while *Punch* was interested in including these jokes



from various alternative media to show a version of networked journalism at work, this news text in fact reveals a negotiated 'inclusion' of alternative media content which points to subtle narratives of exclusion and privileging of elitist narratives. This finding and indeed practice further reinforces findings from the ethnography of newsrooms where journalists do not necessarily give attribution when stories have been copied from various online outlets.

While the idea of networked journalism in theory suggests that content from the audience and other non-mainstream journalism actors is included in mainstream media news reports, the dominance of the mainstream is still at play in the way Nigerian newspapers incorporate content from other alternative media sites in their coverage of events. In explaining how dominant narratives work, Mumby (1997:346) observes that this domination occurs "precisely in the struggle between various groups over interpretive possibilities and what gets to count as meaningful that the hegemonic dialectic of power and resistance gets played out."

*Punch's* news text of 8<sup>th</sup> January 2012, is another example of the mainstream media's attempt at propagating an illusion of support for the other voices rarely privileged in the media's coverage of events and pursued a similar path of including snippets from the social media. Published under the headline: *Social media protesters display Jonathan, Mark, others' phone numbers*, at a first glance, this news text seems to suggest that journalists understand how social media can be used to mobilise participants during protests (Matheson and Allan 2010: 179) and that they are reporting just that. However, this headline reveals attempts by *Punch* to use language to naturalise the reference to Nigerians, who were protesting about an occurrence that would have direct impact on their lives, as 'protesters'. By choosing to represent these citizens as 'social media protesters' the writer of this news text further reinforces otherness and the power imbalance between the protesters on the one hand, and the top government officials whose phone numbers have been displayed as the victims on the other hand. Again, Nigerians are here referred to as 'protesters' who have, perhaps defied the rules of privacy by 'displaying' the mobile numbers of two key politicians: that of President Goodluck Jonathan and of the Senate President, David Mark. While this headline appears as a way of informing readers about how the various social media were used during the protests, it suggests subtle disapproval for the act of publishing these numbers and laden with disapproval for the manner in which these social networking sites have been used, as the text continues:

Protesters against the fuel subsidy removal by the Federal Government on Saturday published telephone numbers of public office holders, former heads of government and prominent business persons on various online social networks, including Facebook and Twitter. These personalities were perceived to either have a hand in the policy or have links with President Goodluck Jonathan.

The reference to the offices of the people whose phone numbers were published and the assertion that: ‘these personalities were perceived to either have a hand in the policy or have links with President Goodluck Jonathan’ is again indicative of how *Punch* presents an illusion of disapproval for the act of making those numbers public when in fact the very act of giving space to publishing the story in this news text is indicative of *Punch*’s sympathy, as I noted earlier, to the protests.

Further, this text reveals an emerging trend in Nigerian newsrooms of incorporating snippets from social media, such as Twitter, which are consistent with the media’s editorial position, into their coverage of events. It is also instructive to point out here that although *Punch* included tweets in this report, with direct reference to the names of those tweeting, it is only done on a first name basis, perhaps in an attempt to protect their identities:

‘...Otuyemi tweeted, “Somebody better tell Goodluck Ebele Jonathan that the God that saw Nigerians through Abacha’s regime is still sitting on d [sic] throne”. Another Nigerian, Nedu said, “My formal response to Goodluck Jonathan’s removal of subsidy: The government has declared a war. And I’m ready to be on the front line!’

It is also observable that even in including these tweets, the twitter handles of those tweeting are not included in the text. However, not all those whose tweets were included were addressed with their first names. This extract is instructive:

“For instance, popular comedian, Gbenga Adeyinka, on Saturday tweeted, “God please, we are praying and begging you to touch the heart of President Goodluck Jonathan to reverse this”.

Notice the agency *Punch* gives agency to this particular tweet as coming from a ‘popular’ comedian who can be easily identified. Not only does this tweet challenge the Nigerian government’s decision to remove the fuel subsidy, it also touches on the emotions and

religiosity<sup>29</sup> which many Nigerians are known for. In Nigeria where the flawed judicial system means that the ordinary citizen is often denied justice, God is usually invoked to ‘touch the heart’ of its leaders. Including this particular tweet alongside those which compared the Goodluck Jonathan-led administration with the dark days of military repression of General Sani Abacha as indicated in a previous extract is also indicative of how *Punch* ‘allowed’ various voices and opinions.

This news text also published tweets that used humour to respond to the removal of the fuel subsidy: “one Omodunbi also tweeted, I am something, when I was young I had no shoes but now I eat with N3m every day. What am I?” During the protests the social media were awash with riddles and jokes made by Nigerians trying to find comic relief in the situation. The above quote alludes to the President’s suffering as a youngster, walking barefooted because he had no shoes, compared to the luxury he now enjoys as president with a daily feeding allowance of about three million naira (approx. £12,000). As a country where government officials rarely declare their assets<sup>30</sup>, information that President Goodluck Jonathan’s daily catering budget was set at around £12,000 was invariably set to create uproar among citizens who felt there were being starved any access to the ‘national cake’<sup>31</sup> nor were they getting the dividends of democracy. Incorporating this sort of tweet in the news text therefore creates the impression that the mainstream media in Nigeria still adhere to “their liberal democratic responsibility [of] act[ing] as honest, fair and neutral mediator ---- accessible to all and sundry” (Nyamnjoh, 2010:62). It also furthers the notion that the newspaper’s editor understands and shares the grievances of the protesters who might have been ‘shocked’ by the news of the

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<sup>29</sup> In Nigeria, religion is big business. While a 2004 BBC survey polled Nigeria as the most religious country in the world, a 2012 survey by Win-Gallup International Religiosity and Atheism Index ranks Nigeria second. While these surveys and figures might ignore other contextual factors, it is nevertheless illustrative of the centrality of religion to many facets of popular culture in Nigeria. More on the surveys, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/wtwtgod/3490490.stm> and <http://thecitizenng.com/other-news/survey-nigeria-is-second-most-religious-country-in-the-world/>

<sup>30</sup> Public declaration of assets owned by politicians is not a norm in Nigeria and even when the figures are featured in the budget, not many people understand the implication of those figures. As such, information about the President’s daily feeding allowance was big news which citizens joked about on Twitter during the Occupy Nigeria protests. Former President Umaru Yar’Adua was the first elected politician in Nigeria to publicly declare his assets and to date remains the only politician to have done so. More on Yaradua’s assets’ declaration can be found here: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200706290001.html>

<sup>31</sup> ‘National cake’ is a Nigerian parlance used to connote the country’s resources and wealth. Politicians are usually accused of feasting on this ‘cake’ and only permitting those loyal to them to have a little piece. This article provides further details and context to this phrase: <http://saharareporters.com/2011/09/05/bingeing-our-national-cake>

President's daily feeding allowance. For instance, results from the Afrobarometer<sup>32</sup> Round 5 survey in Nigeria revealed that 62% of Nigerians wanted the fuel subsidy to remain and as such the announcement that the government was withdrawing the subsidy was bound to attract a reaction from Nigerians. Nonetheless, *Punch* exerts journalistic authority when it comes to actually publishing the supposedly 'displayed' telephone numbers by choosing to replace some digits of the telephone numbers with asterisks. The news text reported thus: 'President Jonathan switched off his GLO number. This is his Zain line, call him – 080230020\*\* ... Direct Action! Obasanjo rigged himself in, and imposed a sick Yar'Adua and clueless Jonathan. Now we pay for it. Call him on 080550000\*\*# Occupy Nigeria [sic.]'

The way in which these tweets are included in the news text, and indeed the "ways of understanding", to use Manning's (2001:41) words, which this news text foregrounds reveals *Punch's* and by extension, the Nigerian mainstream media's resistance to simply collaborating with 'amateurs' and 'citizen journalists' as networked journalism theorists argue (See for example, Beckett, 2010; Russell 2011; Heinrich, 2011). By censoring the tweets prior to publication and especially by being discreet with the telephone numbers, this news text suggests that in spite of the proliferation of alternative journalisms, Nigerian newspapers still negotiate 'inclusion'. Thus, while the inclusion of tweets in this news text might seem to suggest *Punch's* attempt at networking with ordinary citizens who were tweeting during the Occupy Nigeria protests, it is necessarily reflective of the Nigerian media's negotiated 'privileging' of alternative media content.

Nonetheless, the point needs to be made that *Punch's* inclusion of tweets in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests remains significant especially considering that various context-specific factors such as proprietorial demands, and the relationship between the press and the political class, shape and constrain the voices allowed to speak in the news text. Rather than ignore tweets that published the numbers of these key politicians, *Punch* includes them in strategic ways. This news text for instance, ended as follows: 'Abubakar, a Nigerian wrote "Goodluck Jonathan is our new Fuel Haram".' Incorporating this

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<sup>32</sup> Afrobarometer describes itself as "an independent, non-partisan, African-based network of researchers". Its findings are based on public opinion surveys conducted with adult population and these surveys are intended to "measure popular perspectives on the social, political, and economic environments in each country where it is implemented and across Africa".

[http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/media\\_briefing/nig\\_r5\\_presentation1.pdf](http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/media_briefing/nig_r5_presentation1.pdf)

particular tweet into this news text, at a time when the activities of *Boko Haram* continue to be a security threat and concern both to Nigerians and international observers, is significant. It not only suggests that *Punch* created the impression of having their fingers on the pulse of the citizens, but also that it agrees that the President, by removing the fuel subsidy had constituted a 'Fuel Haram' in Nigeria.

In spite of these inclusion however, there is a sense in which the alternative media content incorporated in the news texts analysed in this chapter served as 'puppets' that mimicked Nigerian newspapers' impression of the fuel subsidy removal. Interestingly, the illusion of inclusion created by incorporating content from alternative media sites in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests was also corroborated by some of the journalists I interviewed in the newsrooms. Some of them argued that appropriating content from alternative media sites in the newsmaking process is one of their financial viability strategies. In the words of a senior editor at *Guardian*, "we sold more copies during the [Occupy Nigeria] protests because many people wanted to check that what they saw on various social media was true". This socio-cultural attachment to newspaper reading in Nigeria and the fact that the newspaper in Nigeria still is a record of truth, partly explain why newspaper organisations in Nigeria are still viable in spite of the narratives about the decline in newspaper sales and readership elsewhere (See Akinfemisoye and Deffor, 2014).

Consequently, these wider social practices are at the heart of analysing these texts. As Richardson (2007:114) argues, "social practices surround and shape the work of journalists, meaning that an analysis of the social practices of newspaper discourse requires the analyst to look outside the text and examine the relationships between journalism and the formation as a whole". Thus, it can be argued that the appropriation of content from alternative media by mainstream print newspapers in Nigeria is in part, shaped by the patronage that they enjoy.

In another selected news text from *Vanguard's* website published on January 5 2012, the focus is on the economic implication of the protests to the state. The headline reads: 'Removal of fuel subsidy: Protesters ground Benin<sup>33</sup> City'. This news text focuses on the economic implications of the protests. However, the thematic structure running through this news text privileges the status quo where the citizens who participated in the protests

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<sup>33</sup> Benin is the capital of Edo state located in the Western part of Nigeria. The current governor of the state was the former national Labour leader and this may explain why this writer decided to focus on the activities of unions in the state.

are nameless and faceless. The news lead for instance stated that “Economic activities were grounded in Benin city...when market women, youths, Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) Trade Union Congress (TUC)...in their thousands, stormed the streets of the ancient city, protesting the Federal Government’s removal of fuel subsidy”. Rather than have quotes from the people who allegedly “stormed the streets”, this text is riddled with references to the official sources who enjoy “social hegemony” (Schudson, 2000: 184) as newsmakers. When it comes to referring to the “thousands [who] stormed the streets”, they are collectively referred to as “the crowd” or “protesters” whose voices can only be heard in the voices of people like “Dr. Ugbodaga who addressed the crowd”. As Richardson (2007:53) reminds us, “predication is used to criticise, undermine and vilify certain social actors sometimes with potentially dangerous consequences”. Thus, running through this text, the voices of the “market women, youths”, as the text reports in the first sentence of the lead, are denied any form of social agency to have their voices included in the news text. Rather, they are rendered voiceless and only spoken for by the privileged social actors such as the chairmen of the organisations and directors of the Non-Governmental Organisations who participated in the protests. This is evidenced in the third paragraph of the news text:

The protest was led by the Chairman of the state chapter of the Nigerian Medical Association(NMA), Dr. Philip Ugbodaga, President of the Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Nimo Bassey, President of the Conference of NGOs in the state... When the other citizens or ‘protesters’ who participated in “ground[ing] Benin city” are given a voice, the writer of this news text presented their voices thus:

‘The protesters carried a coffin and placards reading “Jonathan you are a disappointment, resign now”, Edo people say no to fuel”, Jonathan, we are disappointed with you”, “Resign if you are incapable”...’

As such, while it appears that the protesters were indeed allowed to speak in this news text, they are only allowed entry through their placards as though they had no voices like the other social actors. Cottle (2003:6) notes that the way sources are “legitimated or symbolically positioned as “other”, labelled deviant or literally rendered speechless... can have far reaching consequences” on the way power structures are implied in news texts. Thus, one can reasonably infer, as evidenced from this news text, that although the event being reported focuses on the masses, the discourse *Vanguard* employed in this report, with the way sources were named, gave prominence to the status quo and in so doing normalised the power structures implicated in the text to make it appear as common sense

that the social actors whose voices were heard in the text were the ones who are *supposed* to speak.

It can thus be inferred from the foregoing that the elitist position which the mainstream print media in Nigeria enjoys may partly explain why the news texts they publish mostly contains the worldviews of the powerful members of the increasingly shrinking socio-political and economic group in Nigeria. Importantly, this news text reveals how by choosing to represent and construct the reporting of events, as this text about the *Occupy Nigeria* protest reveals, along the lines of powerful social actors, mainstream print journalists in Nigeria further exclude the ‘others’ whose voices are rarely privileged in their coverage. This again raises the point about the close ties between the government and the press, where most, if not all, newspaper owners in Nigeria are politically-inclined and supportive of the government. Where they seem to be antagonistic, it is because their owners or benefactors belong to the opposition. This was, in fact, a common theme gleaned from the interviews conducted with journalists across the four newsrooms sampled in this study. As one reporter at Tribune puts it in Yoruba, “Owo ijoba lo dun lati na” (translated: It’s the government’s money that is sweet to spend).

One can thus reasonably argue based on the foregoing textual analyses that although mainstream journalists incorporated content from alternative media in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests, they, in fact, as Deuze (2008b:850) puts put, “end up representing and thereby reproducing existing power formations and institutionalised relationships in society” with the way these inclusions are made.

Also taking a similar path of appropriating content from alternative media in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests a news text from *Punch*’s website published on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2012 opens with the headline “Protests continue in Lagos, Abuja, Asaba”. While the headline of a news text is “part of news rhetoric whose function is to attract the reader” (Bells, 1991:189) to what the news text is about, this headline is not necessarily a reflection of what this text does. Rather, the text uses various forms of paraphrasing and passive sentences in reporting the protests. For example, those participating in the “*street protests and rallies in Lagos, Abuja and Asaba*” are described as “*thousands of people gathered ... to demand the return of subsidy and reversal of the pump price of fuel from N141 to N65*”. It is interesting to note that the majority of those participating in the

protests are referred to using the neutral word ‘people’ without any reference to who these people are or what they represent.

However, few of these ‘people’ are identifiable and allowed to speak in this text. An extract from the text reads:

The crowd in Lagos was addressed by the Convener of the Save Nigeria Group, Pastor Tunde Bakare; Afrobeat musician, Femi Kuti; popular Yoruba actress, Ronke Ojo, among others.

The agency given to the voices allowed to speak in this text is noteworthy. It not only highlights the power relations between the social status of those taking part in the protest but it also, in giving visibility to these three participants, reflects inequalities in terms of who is able to speak or not. As the sentence above shows, the convenor of the Save Nigeria Group is also recognised in his capacity as a religious title holder, a ‘Pastor’. The reference to the title of the other two people mentioned in the extract above is also significant as it seems to show that the protests cut across various strata of the society. The representation of the classes of people in this text: “the crowd in Lagos...”, “thousands of people...” and the fact that only ‘important’ players have their names and titles mentioned, as the extract above reveals, suggests how *Punch* in this text reinforces the dominance of the status quo, of those whose voices can *naturally* be heard over those (‘the crowd’) whose voices remains whispers.

Throughout this text, which is presented as a developing story with a” [m]ore details later” caveat at the end, only one direct quote is used. The views of the other ‘people’ participating in the protest are paraphrased and presented as reaction to the fuel subsidy. This direct quote reads:

Bakare noted, “In spite of the lying propaganda, it is our responsibility to channel our collective energies in the right direction and remain focused on the main issues rather than using ‘ring worm’ medicine to cure leprosy.”

While the extract above might be read as the exact words Bakare used since it is presented in quotation marks, the reporting verb used in this extract: “noted” is not necessarily innocent. This is because the choice of “reporting clause” that journalists employ can significantly frame how readers interpret the quote (Richardson, 2007:102). As such, the choice of ‘noted’ in reporting Bakare’s opinion above suggests an implicit reflection of *Punch*’s editorial opinion. *Punch* could have easily used alternative verbs such as



‘claimed’ or even ‘said’ instead of ‘noted’. As Richardson (2007:103) explains, “[t]he verbal process chosen to characterise reported speech frames reader understandings of the reported event...” In this case, the choice of ‘noted’ in reporting the only direct quote used in this news text is therefore significant.

Again, the choice of paraphrasing most of the comments using indirect quotation in this news text is also illustrative of the uneven power relations that marks how Nigerian newspapers appropriate content from alternative media. The power and influence given to some of the ‘people’ who participated in the protest is also worthy of note:

In a 2,408-word statement, which he read to the crowd in Lagos, Bakare said the subsidy issue was being used to defraud Nigerians. The link is <http://www.facebook.com/notes/save-nigeria-group-official-fan-page/press-release-by-the-covener-of-save-nigeria-group-sng-ojota-rally-day-5/10150596950869783>

From the extract above, there is a sense in which Bakare, a former vice-presidential candidate of one of the major opposition parties during the 2011 elections, is branded as an important source in this news text. Not only does this news text go as far as telling us the exact number of words contained in Bakare’s address, it also includes the link to the page where the address can be read on Facebook. In legitimising and emphasising Bakare’s position as an ‘important’ news source in this text, not only does this text notify the reader of the exact number of words contained in his address to the crowd but also includes the hyperlink to Bakare’s address on Facebook.

While the inclusion of a Facebook link might suggest that *Punch* regarded networking with alternative media sites as important in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests, the extract above indirectly reproduces the dominance and influence of one news source over others. The choice of meticulously including the (exact) number of words contained in this ‘statement’ as well as the link to the post on Facebook suggests a perception of this news source as both important and representative of *Punch*’s opinion of the protests.

Consequently, *Punch* in this text legitimises and emphasises “Pastor Tunde Bakare” as a “powerful participant *controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants*.”(Fairclough, 2001:38. Emphasis in original). While one might argue that the inclusion of the ‘Pastor’ prefix was done to differentiate and specify the

exact source being quoted, it is indeed the agency given to the named news sources used in this news text that highlights the ‘ordinariness’ and in fact ‘Othering’ of the “thousands of people gathered at the Gani Fawehinmi (Freedom Park) at Ojota, Lagos...”

In sum, the fact that this *Punch*, in this news text replaces the byline which should be the names of the reporters who wrote or at least compiled this story, with “AGENCY REPORTER” again shows how Nigerian newspapers take actors that share their editorial opinions and presents such as the view of many. While the headline of this news text: **Protests continue in Lagos, Abuja, Asaba** seemingly suggests a report of the on-going protests in various cities, more than half of this news text is in fact devoted to reporting the summary of Bakare’s Facebook address. The use of only one direct quote in this text with the voices of others constructed using indirect quotes is also importantly indicative of how this *Punch* news story enabled ‘powerful’ individual(s) to shape the reporting of the *Occupy Nigeria* protests.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has, through the analysis of sample news texts published during the *Occupy Nigeria* protests, shown how the Nigerian print media negotiates the inclusion of alternative media content in reporting key newsworthy events. The news texts analysed in this chapter also show that in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests, Nigerian newspapers were subtly sympathetic to popular concerns about the fuel subsidy removal. For instance, *Punch* in reporting the protests, devoted spaces to publishing jokes and other ‘comic’ strategies employed by Nigerians during the protests. While some of the jokes made light of the fuel subsidy removal, the fact that these were published in national dailies suggests how Nigerian print journalists creatively confront the state without risking censorship that may come in various forms. The chapter has also shown that although *Punch* and *Vanguard* appropriated alternative media content in reporting the *Occupy Nigeria* protests, the inclusion did not necessarily advance an ‘inclusive’ and attempt at a ‘democratic’ news narrative where a variety of voices are represented. Rather, the content appropriated were importantly those which echoed these newspapers’ editorial positions on the removal of the fuel subsidy.

The texts analysed in this chapter have also revealed some of the uneven power relations that typify Nigerian newspaper’s reporting of events such as the *Occupy Nigeria* protests.

The chapter has shown how Nigerian print journalists give visibility to some news sources and deny others such visibility even when such content have been appropriated from alternative media sites.

The next chapter explores how journalists in the four print newsrooms in this study appropriated alternative media content in reporting the elections of 2011.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Collaboration and resistance: Nigerian print journalists' response to alternative journalisms in reporting Nigeria's elections of 2011**

#### **Introduction**

*“During the 2011 elections, many people were tweeting about what was happening around them. You see we tried collaborating with the people who were posting on these social media platforms to a very large extent, but we still had to be very careful. At the end of the day, we had all sorts of aggregation going on.”*(Interview with senior editor, *Guardian*)

This chapter explores some of the ways in which Nigerian print journalists react and respond to the proliferation of alternative journalistic content in reporting dramatic moments such as elections. Periods of election and political unrest in Africa, as elsewhere, are significant milestones which generally portend heightened demands on journalists to tell the stories of these happenings. These periods have, in recent times, also been marked by massive use of new information and communication technologies where for instance, tweets are ‘tweeted’ and ‘retweeted’ and alternative journalisms reach their peak. While discussions about elections in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, have problematized the idea of elections as precursors to democracy (Adejumobi, 2000; Akhaine, 2011; Ifukor, 2010; Kew, 2010; Omotola, 2010; Willems, 2012), the process of appropriating alternative journalistic content by mainstream print journalists in the country has received little attention.

Using the elections of 2011 as an illustrative anchor, this chapter therefore focuses on how Nigerian print journalists decide the alternative journalistic content they appropriate in their newsmaking routines within the context of the largely stifling impact of political, economic and proprietorial demands. While this chapter does not focus on the event of the elections itself, the discussions draw attention to some of the challenges that these journalists face in appropriating alternative journalisms, particularly as it relates to reporting the 2011 elections, and some of the ‘methods’ devised to navigate these challenges. Drawing from in-depth interviews with journalists in the four newsrooms

studied, the discussions in this chapter also examine how the processes of inclusion and exclusion of alternative journalisms are taking place in Nigerian print newsrooms. This, I believe, has implications for understanding newsmaking practices in these spheres and particularly how the proliferation of alternative journalism impacts on the daily newsmaking cultures of Nigerian print journalists.

The rest of this chapter proceeds through four sections. The first provides a cursory overview of the Nigerian 2011 general elections. This provides a background for discussing how the proliferation of alternative journalisms during the elections meant a collective monitoring of events as they unfolded. The second discusses the process of the appropriation of alternative journalisms in Nigerian print newsrooms in reporting the elections of 2011. Doing so centres the place of alternative journalisms in the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists. The third section examines some of the challenges, particularly the impact of organisational and socio-political bottlenecks, which shaped these journalists' appropriation of alternative journalisms in reporting of the 2011 elections. The discussions highlight issues of journalists' self-censorship as well as how they navigated these challenges. This chapter ends with a reflection of what these findings mean for newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms.

### **7.1.1 Cursory overview and context of Nigeria's elections of 2011**

Nigeria returned to civil rule for the fourth time, after a general election in 1999 and the subsequent military handover to a democratically-elected President on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1999, amid a number of unresolved questions (Ihonybere, 1999). Elections in Nigeria have, for a long time, remained the subject of many debates. While elections are believed to be central to the survival of democracies, they have, as Omotola (2010: 535) argues, "been one of the main problems of [Nigeria's] democratization process." The subsequent elections after 1999 further heightened the many unanswered questions as they too were marred with many instances of rigging, electoral malpractices and violence. These elections, held in 2003 and 2007 were widely decried (Nwabueze and Ekwughe, 2014:72; See also Tar and Zack-Williams, 2007) and described as "selection" processes (Ifukor, 2010) where the 'power of the thumb' mattered very little. Tar and Zack-Williams (2007: 540) concluded after their study of the 2007 elections that "like all previous post-independence elections, the 2007 elections were full of controversies and widely condemned as fraudulent, violent and stage-managed by the outgoing president Olusegun Obasanjo". As such, elections in Nigeria, like elsewhere on the continent, have been

regarded as being as problematic as the processes that gave birth to them. For Willems (2012:8), elections in many African states are mostly “embedded rituals” which are conducted periodically “to endorse the power of the ruling classes.”

Nigeria’s elections of 2011 were historic for a number of reasons. First, by 2011, Nigeria’s fourth republic had lasted 12 years and the elections were the fourth in a row. This is significant considering that the first republic lasted only five years and three months before a military take-over, while the second republic lasted for a period of four years and two months and was again overthrown by the Nigerian military. The third republic was truncated before it was born with the military’s annulment of the June 12 1993 elections ushering in with it one of the most turbulent periods for the Nigerian press (Ibelema, 2003). Second, the proliferation of new information and communication technologies meant massive engagement with the Internet, mobile phones and other platforms mediated by new information and communication technologies. This in turn resulted in a myriad of information that had never been experienced before during previous Nigerian elections. During the election campaigns, there were many people tweeting using various hashtags and sharing these on a variety of platforms. Nigerian politicians too latched on to the social media frenzy with some of them setting up Twitter accounts according to a BBC report (Mbah, 2011) while others sent their campaign messages as text messages to the mobile phones of prospective voters using the bulk SMS service provided by telecommunications companies.

Thus, when Nigerians went to the polls in April 2011, many observers within and outside Nigeria closely monitored these elections both offline and online. Nigeria’s 2011 three-tier polls—national assembly, presidential and gubernatorial—initially scheduled to be held on 2, 9 and 16 April, and postponed<sup>34[1]</sup> due to electoral materials arriving late, were held on 9, 16 and 26 April, respectively. Despite the post-election violence that was evident in some parts of Nigeria, combined with *Boko Haram* attacks, several more positive, if not glowing, appraisals of the 2011 election were offered. For Akhaine (2011: 649), “a distinct blend of political will and patriotism, buttressed by meaningful contributions from citizens, the civil service and the military all came together to make Nigeria’s 2011 elections a success story”. The Commonwealth Observer Group also commented that the “April 2011 elections marked a genuine celebration of democracy in Africa’s most populous country” (Commonwealth Observer Group 2011). As earlier

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<sup>34[1]</sup>The postponement of the three-tier elections and subsequent rescheduling was reported by the mainstream media and the headlines expressed disappointment at the development. For instance, *Vanguard* reported it under the headline: ‘Chaos! National Assembly Elections postponed to April 9’ (Vanguard, April 4 2011)

noted, alternative media played a significant role not only during the elections but also during the electioneering as many politicians signed up for social media profiles. These politicians were said to have used various social networking sites to “gain electoral mileage”<sup>35[2]</sup> before and during the elections of 2011, as a way of connecting with the electorates. President Goodluck Jonathan, for instance, adopted Facebook as a medium for “dialoguing” with Nigerians on 28 June 2010 and subsequently made his first announcement to contest in the presidential election on Facebook on 15 September 2010 (Adibe and Odoemelam 2012; Jonathan, Facebook post, 15 September 2011). Until this time, no political candidate in Nigeria had made their intentions to contest known first on social media as such announcements have usually been made on the mainstream media.

This consequently presaged the significant role of alternative media and the proliferation of alternative journalisms in the coverage of the elections of 2011. During the elections, there was an unprecedented use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, among others, by citizens, which were used to share alternative journalistic content of happenings in their areas. Various non-governmental organisations such as *Global Voices Online*<sup>36[3]</sup> and *Enough is Enough Nigeria Coalition*<sup>37[4]</sup> (EiE) too honed in on the widespread use of alternative media platforms. They had portals set up on their websites where citizens could post reports and photos of what was happening at various polling stations. From the foregoing therefore, unpacking Nigeria print journalists’ reporting of the elections of 2011 indeed provides significant insights into changes and continuities in their newsmaking practices.

## 7.2 Appropriating alternative media in reporting Nigeria’s elections of 2011

Journalists in the four newsrooms visited for this study were unanimously of the view that the proliferation of alternative journalisms on various non-mainstream media sites

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<sup>35[2]</sup> This is according to a report on the BBC website that mainstream media was ‘shunned’ for the social media during the elections of 2011 as many of the electorates interacted with the candidates via various social media platforms. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13048880>

<sup>36[3]</sup> Global Voices Online was one of the numerous alternative media platforms which dedicated space to reporting the 2011 elections as well as soliciting reports from Nigerians who had reports about the elections. More on *Global Voices Online* during the elections of 2011 can be found here <http://globalvoicesonline.org/specialcoverage/2011-special-coverage/nigeria-elections-2011/#featured>

<sup>37[4]</sup> *Enough is Enough Coalition Nigeria* describes itself as “a coalition of individuals and youth-led organizations committed to instituting a culture of good governance and public accountability in Nigeria through advocacy, activism and the mobilization of the youth population as responsible citizens” It was also one of websites that encourage Nigerians to send messages of happenings in their areas during the elections of 2011. They also instituted the RSVP (Register Select Vote Protect) campaign aimed at encouraging Nigerian youths to vote. More on EiE here <http://eie.ng/about-us/>

served as important sources in reporting the 2011 elections. Most of the journalists explained that the information they received from citizens during the elections of 2011 was unprecedented and served as useful new ‘leads’. In the words of a senior editor at *Vanguard*:

The activities of ordinary citizens who were tweeting from various polling stations, updating their Facebook pages as well as those who posted blog posts really helped us in carrying out our roles as journalists. It helped widen the scope of our reports and gave it more depth, especially considering that there were many areas that we could not physically send a reporter to. We simply had to confirm and verify the stories from the official sources before we could use such in our own reports.

Another journalist at *Guardian* also shared similar sentiments but raised another dimension as to how they appropriated alternative journalisms:

The alternative media helped us to monitor what was happening during the election, through twitter, Facebook and even on all these blogs. The election monitors were able to transfer information about the elections but we still had to confirm and verify the reports because sometimes they are opinionated... We have our limitations in terms of ownership and the authorities ... [pauses] the government authorities. Let’s face it; these guys give us more adverts. We have to consider all these and that’s why we limit ourselves to information that we can verify. The level of censorship we have is not that suffocating but then again these alternative media and bloggers don’t have the limitation of censorship that we have. You have online news sites like *Sahara reporters*, or even *Linda Ikeji’s Blog*. These guys can just publish anything but we can’t. Breaking the news without censorship is where there is threat for us. Most of the things online are tainted with bias and a political class has seen that as a political advantage. They really used that during the elections and we couldn’t risk being puppets.

The extracts above highlight the point made earlier that alternative journalisms serve as useful news leads and sources for Nigerian print journalists. While noting that the veracity of the information importantly shapes how it is appropriated, the comments above also



foreground how contextual factors constrain and shape the incorporation of alternative journalistic content. One finds that although the Nigerian media has been described as partly free<sup>38[5]</sup> from government interferences, other factors such as proprietorial pressures, economic survival impact on how alternative journalistic content are appropriated. As such, the Nigerian print media space is at once inclusive and exclusive. Inclusive in the ways these journalists attempt to collaborate with alternative journalists in reporting events such as the elections of 2011 while at the same time adopting self-censorship as a means of remaining loyal to context-imposed editorial interferences.

However, the process of appropriating alternative journalisms in Nigerian print newsrooms is by no means straightforward. It is in fact laden with a number of contradictions particularly in reporting the elections of 2011. This was evidenced in interviews with senior editors from *Guardian*, and *Vanguard* respectively:

During the 2011 elections, many people were tweeting about what was happening around them. You see we tried collaborating with the people who were posting on these social media platforms to a very large extent, maybe not so much but at the end of the day, we had all sorts of aggregation going on. It's very difficult to ignore any platform that can make the audience buy into the information you're selling but at the same time, you have to be careful about what you publish. Take the post-election crisis in the North as an example. That is a fresh reminder that we need to be careful in choosing what we publish. So during the elections, we had a page called *Citizen Guardian*. It was specifically for people to send in reports and pictures of what was happening in the polling stations around them. We could not ignore what was happening in terms of audience participation and we decided to hone in on that to give them a sense of belonging. (Interview with senior editor at *Guardian*)

During the elections, we had a number of interactive reports on our website, and so we invited the audience to tell us what was going on in their areas. At the end of the day, the interaction between us and the audience was simply part of the 'gizmo'[sic] to drive traffic to our website [and was not necessarily to voice the voiceless]. We did that deliberately because those are some of the things that drive traffic to our website and advertisers will only advertise based on the value of the

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<sup>38[5]</sup> Freedom House categorised the Nigerian press as 'partly free' in a 2014 Freedom of the Press report. Details here: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/nigeria#.VPWmTnysWxw>

traffic. The in-thing during the elections was that everyone had something to say and we decided to hone in on that. (Interview with senior editor at *Vanguard*, emphasis added).

The extracts above draw attention to how these journalists were selective in appropriating alternative media content in reporting the elections. Although there is emphasis on the veracity of the information which circulated on various non-mainstream platforms during the elections, the excerpts above also highlight that in reporting these elections, the news values' 'cloth' for these journalists had to be widened. Beyond the elements of news values discussed in the literature on journalistic practice (see for example, Bell, 1991; Brighton and Foy, 2007; Fowler, 1991; Galtung and Ruge, 1965), the extracts above foregrounds 'marketability' as a criteria which Nigerian print journalists considered in reporting the elections of 2011. From the comments of the senior editors above, there is a sense in which the supposed attempt at "giving the audience a sense of belonging" and soliciting reports from citizens taking part in the elections, translated into material value for these newspapers. A journalist at *Punch* also attested to how financial viability shaped the appropriation of alternative journalisms in reporting the elections of 2011:

...It will interest you to know that we had an election portal and we gave people a platform to air and share their views. But you can't run a media house as if you're running the Red Cross. Even the Red Cross needs funding and so, it's all about being creative. It's not as if you're selling the news but you are making your platforms so sophisticated that they can deliver news in diverse forms. You can deliver it in different forms. News doesn't come as news alone these days. We develop content. And we have to develop it in a way that it attracts traffic which will attract advertisers. This was very fundamental in reporting the elections [of 2011].

Of significance in the extract above is how mainstream print journalists in Nigerian newsrooms constantly have to respond to the proliferation of new information and communication technologies which circulate alternative journalisms. While highlighting that there is a sense in which a decentring of the journalistic space is taking place in these newsrooms, there is also the economic undertone which drives an illusion of inclusivity.

Although most of these journalists noted that they encouraged citizen participation on their newspapers' websites in reporting the elections, it is the manner in which such 'networking' was carried out that is instructive. For example, a closer examination of a

news text published on *Vanguard*'s website on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2011, without a reporter's byline, points to contradictions and complexities in collaborating with alternative journalisms in reporting the elections. Published under the headline: *"Today's Election: What is happening in your area?"*, this news report goes against the grain of much of what journalists do, in part, because instead of 'reporting' the elections, this news text reads: *"Vanguard invites you to be part of today's history by telling the world what is happening in your area as Nigerians vote today"*. This direct invitation reveals a shift in journalism practices in Nigerian newsrooms, as elsewhere, where the proliferation of alternative journalisms during the elections of 2011, is partly responsible for journalists adopting a networked approach to reporting. It also emphasises the point that alternative media and alternative journalisms significantly differentiated the reporting of these elections from previous ones in Nigeria.



**Figure 4: Screenshot of *Vanguard*'s online news for 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2011**

This news text further invites the audience to become part of the news production process by “*post[ing] news, photos and videos of elections or events they find interesting for the world to see at Vanguard’s highly interactive community*”. Note the specific reference to where the solicited content should be posted. Thus, while this invitation might arguably appear as Nigerian print journalists becoming “gatewatchers” together with everyone else as Bruns (2008) suggests, it also significantly points to the contradictions contained therein. This is because the audience being invited to post news and photos are not only directed to where such should be submitted: “*Vanguard’s highly interactive community*” but this news text also demands that “*Comments should be brief, frank and to the point*”. This instruction from the news text is telling and significantly points to how *Vanguard* still attempts to reinforce its hegemonic presence by dictating the parameters of the information they are asking the audience to provide.

Consequently, it is noteworthy that even in instances where these journalists seek collaboration with the audience and various alternative media sites in reporting key events such as the elections of 2011, such collaborations are marked with a number of negotiations which emphasise the hegemonic postures of these newspapers. As this news text shows, what might be regarded as a ‘simple’ invitation to network with the audience and other “writer-gatherers” (Couldry, 2010) in reporting an event subliminally reinforces the status quo position of Nigeria’s print media.

Beyond the traffic to *Vanguard’s* website that this story would have, arguably, generated during the elections of 2011, inviting the audience to report themselves suggests that the proliferation of alternative journalisms “challenge the exclusive authority...of professional journalists” (Atton, 2007:17). Across all the newsrooms studied, many of the journalists highlighted that they also had unsolicited alternative journalistic content which they could not ignore in reporting the elections of 2011. A senior editor at *Guardian* remembered it this way:

There was a deluge coming in by way of text message, by way of email and there was some serious audience participation going on during the elections that you couldn’t ignore. We had to engage with these people because at the end of the day, you get the sense that people also feel a sense of belonging when you publish some of those things that they send to you through other platforms. We felt that it had a feel-good sense for the audience.

The need to retain readership and provide the audience with a sense of belonging shaped the appropriation of alternative journalisms in reporting the elections as the excerpts above suggest. However, some of the journalists argued that discretion importantly shaped such appropriations. According to an online journalist at *Punch*,

...I just had to look at the story or if it's a tweet and based on my judgement, I would decide whether to use or not. We had many pictures sent to us and tweeted at us on our Twitter page but I had to really check that the person knew what they were talking about. If it's a source I trust, I just went ahead and posted some of the information on our website. You know what is on the website can be easily retracted but I don't think we would have been able to do that with the print edition.

In spite of the varied approaches to appropriating alternative journalisms in reporting the elections, the journalists interviewed were unanimous in agreeing that the volume of instant reports of happenings at various polling centres which they received provided a wide pool to draw from in reporting the elections of 2011. The comments of a news reporter at *Vanguard* and a senior editor at *Guardian* capture these sentiments:

Alternative media helped during the 2011 elections because something could have transpired before the journalist gets to the scene and so you can easily try to piece the information together. I think it made, in so many ways, our job easier because there is only so much a journalist can do because this country is big. There are places where journalists might not get to. So during the 2011 elections, you could easily log on to Twitter and you would see what has been uploaded, then you can contact the person who tweeted or call the closest news agency close by to confirm the story. (News reporter, *Vanguard*)

During the elections of 2011, we couldn't have relied only on official sources. I will tell you of a phenomenon that happened. Even the politicians themselves or the political parties themselves got some of their members to be there to record happenings at various polling booths so that if someone wanted to snatch a ballot box, it would be recorded. I don't know how many journalists you can have in Nigeria that will be able to cover all the polling booths but you could have citizen journalists. It might not be totally unbiased but at least they could give you photographs of what happened. To that extent we needed to rely on a wider contact but of course you still have to relate to the traditional sources, go interview people, what happened here what did not happen here and all that. But as I

said earlier, it became more encouraging; the penetration of these platforms made it a bit easier for you to cover a wider range. Although the question of quality of the information you're getting is a different thing altogether [...] but all the way from Zamfara state, a citizen could send me a report that there are no ballot boxes or electoral officials in a particular polling booth. At the very least, that could be a lie being posted by an interested party but at the end of the day, he has given you a useful lead that you can then follow up with your own traditional source. Our mandate in covering the elections (of 2011) was very clear. Everything that would be pro-democracy was what we reported...so we couldn't risk publishing any report that could not be confirmed by our known sources. (Senior editor, *Guardian*)

While the extracts above draw attention to the presence of a wider pool of sources which these journalists drew from in reporting the elections, it also reiterates the point that the gatekeeping process remains an integral part of the newsmaking process in Nigerian print newsrooms. The extracts also corroborate the point that the process of news gathering follows routinized practices where these journalists would much rather speak to traditional 'trusted' sources even when the 'news leads' come from alternative journalistic content. This also finds bearing in Louw's (2001: 160) argument that "gatekeeping has been institutionalised in...[mainstream] newsrooms, where the process of selection, emphasis and de-emphasis has been turned into a set of systematised routines".

The next section focuses on some of the challenges that shaped and constrained these journalists' appropriation of alternative journalism in reporting the elections of 2011.

### **7.3 "It's not a tea party": Navigating the incorporation of alternative journalism in reporting the elections of 2011**

Although most of the journalists in the newsrooms studied acknowledged that alternative journalism and alternative media sites served as useful news sources in reporting the elections, they argued that a collaborative approach was not necessarily encouraged. According to a senior editor at *Vanguard*,

There can't be any serious collaboration with all those people writing all over the place. They are free to write whatever they like on their blogs and the like but it's different with journalism. It's not a tea party and not everyone is invited. It's not for the ill-trained and that's why the media has to protect itself from scavengers. Yes, many people sent us a lot of tweets and photos during the elections and this really augmented our roles as

journalists. It helped widen the scope of our reports but it also helped us to do what we had to do anyway. We had to report!

Unambiguous as this senior editor's claims are that "not everyone is invited", it is not necessarily the case in practice. This is because *Vanguard* actively solicited for alternative journalistic content in reporting the elections. While dedicating spaces on its website to publishing some of these reports via its "highly interactive community" as stated in the text in figure 4 above, the comments above precisely typify the illusion of inclusivity that some Nigerian newspapers create particularly with regards to appropriating alternative journalisms. This editor's disapproval of collaboration in theory and the importance that was accorded to various forms of alternative journalistic content during the elections in practice, exemplifies the contradictions that many journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms face.

Further, excerpts from some of my interviews with journalists in these newsrooms reiterate their position on collaboration and how it played out in reporting the elections.

I don't think there can be collaboration between us and alternative media practitioners, especially because we still have a name to protect. In any case, most of these bloggers monitor us. We all monitor ourselves. They don't actually have anything of their own, they also pick [sic] from various places. What most of these bloggers did during the elections was to just publish any gist they had from people at the polling booths as breaking news. We couldn't risk doing that. These politicians would say 'Punch has money' and they would sue us. (Assistant editor, *Punch*)

During the elections we still had to be very selective even when we incorporated reports from alternative sources because we didn't want to incite people. Politics in Nigeria is still very volatile and the people who should give you information mostly don't give out information. It's a pretty tough call. (Political reporter, *Tribune*)

As a newspaper, we also planned to monitor it and we were on ground 24hours a day. On those days, I wasn't leaving here until 1am. We were monitoring and we also sent some of our correspondents outside Lagos to areas that are of vital importance for us. For instance, the place where the President would cast his vote was important for us and you want to deploy people to places where you think are quite controversial. About the people tweeting, we were not relying on them alone for information. Our correspondents were at the counting centres, they were observing and they were asked to use of new media to

get in touch with us. We opened a platform for them to send snippets as the counting was going on, like ‘PDP is leading, AC is taking over, Labour Party is having an edge... and so on’ You know, we encouraged them to do this and send us minute-by-minute information such as ‘party officials are fighting here’, and so on, so that we would have a full picture of what was actually happening there. (Online editor, *Punch*)

The comments above highlight the nuances of newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms today. First, although Nigerian print journalists monitored alternative media sites just as they would other traditional news sources in reporting the elections, they importantly draw on internalised professional expectations. According to one journalist at *Tribune*, “*we were asked to sign up for Facebook and twitter accounts in the run-up to the elections so that we could easily monitor what people were posting online but we are trained professional journalists and the stories needs to answer the 5Ws and H*”. This finding not only suggests resistance to collaborating with alternative media practitioners in reporting the elections of 2011 but also goes against the grain of the networked journalism thesis. As Beckett (2010:1) argues, the presence of the Internet and other new information and communication technologies “[change] the creation of news from being linear and top-down to a collaborative process.” While networked journalism favours a decentralised non-hierarchical process that encourages a diversity of voices and opinions, the interview extract above points to the opposite where emphasis is placed on the traditional journalistic training of these journalists.

Second, the political context in Nigeria is linked to how these appropriations are done which are not necessarily dependent majorly on the veracity of the information. As such, these journalists have internalised this in their newsmaking practices. This saw some of the journalists in these newsrooms arguing that reporting the elections of 2011 was not necessarily only about telling the story of what was happening. It was also about cementing the relationships between the media owners and their ‘sponsors’.

Beyond keeping the relationship between media owners and their ‘benefactors’ alive, journalists in these newsrooms also highlighted that they approached alternative journalistic content with caution while preferring those from ‘trusted’ news agencies in reporting the elections:

There were also election monitors who were posting information about the elections online. But we still had to confirm and verify the reports because sometimes they are opinionated. I mean we were more comfortable picking their reports from *Reuters* or even



*News Agency of Nigeria* because we know these agencies must have verified the reports. It was very important for us because you can just fall prey to some of these politicians who would use you to report lies. (News reporter, *Vanguard*)

The social media really helped with information during the elections. There were a lot of blogs and websites that had useful information. But for any journalist who knows his onions you don't just take it and 'slam'. The problem with just taking stories from these alternative media is that you don't know whose side they are on. They may just want to be mischievous and say 'some people are rigging here' or something. We got many tweets from a lot of people during the elections but we had to double-check to be sure that know that what the person is saying is true. At this stage of tweeting in Nigeria, you still have to be careful. (Online journalist, *Guardian*)

While the extracts above are again reflective of the political climate in Nigeria, particularly during elections when misinformation could result in violence, some of these journalists argued that the other market forces shaped their appropriation of alternative media content in reporting the elections 2011.

### **7.3.1 “We can’t bite the finger that feeds us”: Of alternative journalisms and journalists’ self-censorship in reporting the elections of 2011**

During the interviews, most of the journalists highlighted how the economic and political environment in Nigeria, particularly during the elections meant that they had to frame some reports in certain ways or completely ignore reports that did not present their ‘benefactors’ in good light. These journalists also referenced instances where media ownership pressures led to the adoption of self-censorship which in turn influenced reports from alternative media sites were appropriated into their coverage of the elections. A journalist from *Vanguard* articulates how this challenge played out during the elections:

Many people used their mobile phones to capture scenes of how the elections went in their constituencies. But there were some occasions where even after our colleagues on the ground had verified such reports, our bosses advised against using the report because ‘you can’t bite the finger that feeds you’. This remains a serious challenge to our profession because even with the passing of the FOI Act<sup>39[6]</sup> the sponsors and owners [of the media] still determine what gets through.

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<sup>39[6]</sup> Nigeria’s Freedom of Information Act was passed into law in 2011.

This comment thus presents some of the issues Nigerian journalists contend with such as proprietorial interference that limits what journalists are allowed to report even when the data to support such reports are available. It also reveals that the adoption of content circulating on platforms made possible by the proliferation of new information and communication technologies in Nigerian print newsrooms is inflected with local exigencies. The need to remain in the ‘good books’ of those whose ‘finger’ oil the financial wheels of these newspapers means that journalists had to follow a predetermined news template in reporting the elections of 2011. A senior editor at *Tribune* further corroborated this finding, disclosing that:

The presence of alternative media helped in covering the 2011 elections. You see, we had a lot of information from different sources but do we have listening leaders? But it’s just that the Nigerian media hmmn (takes a long pause). There is a problem (takes another long pause and whispers in Yoruba<sup>40[7]</sup>). *Şé iwọ ọmo yì kò ní tú àşírí wa ní ilú òyìnbó báyiĩ* (loosely translated: hope you will not blow our cover when you get back to England?)... The issue is, some of the media houses have been bought off, the survival instinct, and the poverty instinct is not helping matters at all. What you find now in Nigeria is that virtually all the main media houses that claim to be independent depend on government’s money and there is a popular saying among journalists that “*owo ijoba l’o dun na*” (loosely translated: government’s money is sweet to spend). Most of the so-called politicians have the media in their pockets and to publish a story that is anti-government is to ruin that relationship... We had a lot of information from various blogs about discrepancies during the election. *Sahara reporters* and some other websites were able to post such on their websites but how many of such stories were we able to publish? Where ballot boxes were snatched or even stuffed before the day of the election, so who are you to publish such stories?

During the interview with this editor, the responses, pauses, silences and rhetorical questions, some of which I have reproduced in the extract above are reflective of the distinctive and particular conditions that shape newsmaking practices in Nigeria. These conditions also highlight some of the challenges that these journalists face especially when it comes to reporting events such as elections where the Nigerian press still plays crucial functions. The use of rhetorical questions and particularly how this respondent is worried that the presence of information from various alternative media outlets is unlikely

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<sup>40[7]</sup> Yoruba is one of the major languages spoken in Nigeria.

to change the dynamics of how the media in Nigeria reports, is significant. It again reiterates the fact that the appropriation of alternative media in Nigerian print is not usually straightforward. The reference to the media being “bought off”, “survival instincts” suggests that proprietorial demands and pressures shape the newsmaking practices in these newsrooms. While highlighting how the socio-political context within which these journalists operate shape their newsmaking practices, the comments above also raise a relevant point about how the economies of scale and the need for economic survival shaped the reporting of the elections of 2011, and still influences newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms.

Thus, these structural conditions see these journalists sometimes following pre-determined news frames even when available information suggests otherwise, preferring instead to publish “fawning editorials” as Ibelema (2008) puts it. Thus, one finds that despite the fact that most Nigerian newspapers claim to be privately-owned, parochial and partisan newsmaking practices become normalised. And as such, professional journalistic values that define how happenings become categorised as news give way to a scenario where Nigerian print journalists play to the tune of “intrusive publishers who use their [media outfits] to attain personal or political goals” (Ibelema, 2008:30). Some of these journalists attested to carrying out such practices with one journalist at *Guardian* noting that, “...*Let’s face it, government is still the greatest dispenser of favours[sic] and we are not saints yet.*” While another at *Vanguard* puts it this way:

I mean, we were networking with many people on Facebook and Twitter during the elections and they were providing very useful information. Some even had photos and videos. But at the end of the day, it’s what your editor says that is news. You know, there were reports that we received that we couldn’t use...we just had to be careful.

While these extracts are reflective of some of the contradictions that mark newsmaking practices in Nigerian newsrooms and how this impacted on the reporting of the elections of 2011, there is still a sense in which these journalists are “routinely creat[ing] new ways to circumvent censorship and possible confrontation with the state” (Ogola 2010:124). The point however must be made that as evidenced in the interview extracts in this section, the search for economic survival among Nigerian print journalists had a shaping impact on how alternative journalism was appropriated in reporting the elections of 2011.

### 7.3.2 Confronting censorship: how social media content shaped Nigerian print journalists' reporting of the elections of 2011

Although newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms are constrained and shaped by the political climate, among others (Oso, 2012), other professional and legal factors shaped journalists' appropriation of alternative journalism in reporting the elections of 2011. Some of these journalists also highlighted that the adoption of content from alternative media sites in reporting the elections was based on the personal, the human-angle content of these reports. I quote from an interview with a senior journalist at *Punch* who gave a specific example of how she adopted alternative journalism in reporting the elections:

There was a time during the elections that some youth corps<sup>41[8]</sup> members were killed. The government tried to suppress that information but it was all over Facebook. You could easily log in to Facebook and see comments and posts on the Facebook walls of the victims. We got the information about their killing from Facebook. You could read about what their friends were saying about those who were killed and even what some of the victims themselves wrote on their profiles before they died. Some of them wrote of how they had been intimidated to allow underage voters to vote and some other pressures they were facing. As a mother myself, I didn't even need to start wondering whether to use the story or not. It was huge and very painful too. Of course, in writing that story, what you really had to say was "from what was posted on the Facebook account of these people..." just to attribute where you got the information from this is what happened to those corps members. I did a story that friends and parents were complaining that they don't want their children posted to those troubled state and NYSC actually responded. So you see, in doing that story, my source was Facebook and that was what I quoted as the source but it was the human-angle side to it that was more interesting. That way, it won't even matter where you got the story from. And to show that you are not fabricating lies, you copy what is tweeted, and include that 'this person posted this information on Facebook, this other one sent this on BBM', and you copy and you say you got it from there. At least, those people can easily be traced on Facebook if anyone is in doubt. That really helped me in getting to the human side of the elections. It wasn't just about who won but about those who lost their lives during the elections.

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<sup>41[8]</sup> The National Youth Service Corps is the government agency responsible for mobilising and posting young Nigerians upon graduation from universities and polytechnics to states across the country for one-year compulsory service. The scheme was born after the Nigerian civil war in 1970 as a means of fostering unity among Nigerians.

It can be deduced from the extract above that reporting the elections of 2011 was also skewed towards the human cost of the elections. The extract above also shows how ordinary election stories found voice in the mainstream media as a result of their circulation in social media sites. It also shows that in reporting the elections, there were instances where the ‘personal’ and stories with ‘emotional appeal’ shaped the frames and reporting of the elections. In such instances, the stories circulating on various social media sites were both news drivers and sources for these journalists. This is because reporting the elections of 2011 posed several challenges for these journalists. In particular, obtaining comments on the true picture of events as the elections progressed for many of these journalists was challenging, as evidenced in the extract above, because the official sources who ought to make such information available were “constantly seeking to control information flow...” (Eti, 2012: 24) in their attempts to ‘supress’ unfavourable reports. The extract above thus shows how these journalists drew on the ‘human-angle’ perspective in appropriating alternative journalisms as news sources in reporting the elections. Asked why this approach was privileged, a journalist at *Guardian* noted that “...it was a way of exposing the rot in the system and giving encouragement to those who are doing things to strengthen the course of democracy in Nigeria. That’s what *Guardian* stands for”. Thus, one finds that appropriating some of the stories on these social media sites during the elections made it possible for Nigerian print journalists to confront the state and mainstream media’s institutional censorial practices which often ensure such ordinary stories are not published.

Added to the constraining political atmosphere in reporting the elections of 2011, the fear of litigation and the need to contest any challenge to these journalists’ gatekeeping functions also had ‘constraining’ impacts on these journalists’ appropriation of alternative journalistic content. An assistant editor at *Tribune* described her approach to appropriating alternative journalisms in reporting the elections:

...Yes, we incorporated some of what people at various polling stations were sending to us but we also needed to strengthen our gates. We used those reports to strengthen our landmarks. And as long as the laws have not changed, we cannot relax our professional practices because we are a registered corporate body that can be sued. According to a law by the Federal government, we cannot publish election results until they have been confirmed by INEC<sup>42[9]</sup>. Although we had a lot of people sending us pictures of anomalies

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<sup>42[9]</sup> INEC, an abbreviation for Independent National Electoral Commission is the electoral regulatory body in Nigeria

at various polling stations, we couldn't risk just publishing anything that was posted online. Being a registered corporate body we can be sued for misleading the public if we just go by whatever we find on alternative media platforms.

Although the extract above points to how these journalists retained the power to determine how alternative journalistic reports were used in reporting the elections, the fear of libel suits and litigation added to these journalists' dilemma in appropriating such content. As the extract above shows, the limited media freedom in Nigeria also had a 'shaping' impact in how alternative journalisms were appropriated in reporting the elections of 2011. Also expressing similar sentiments as to why alternative journalisms were approached with caution in reporting the elections of 2011, a senior journalist at *Vanguard* pointed out:

You can be detained if you misfire [sic]. The Freedom of Information Act is still on paper in Nigeria. Who will even bail you out? It's better to just be sure of your information before you publish. It's sometimes difficult but one of the things we did during the 2011 elections and which we will continue to do is to verify. Many people have been assassinated for just publishing stories. One has to be very careful.

The extract above again points to the impact of the context within which these journalists operate on their newsmaking practices, and in particular how they reported the elections of 2011. While emphasising that validating the authenticity of any information before it is published is central to the newsmaking practices in these newsrooms, the extract above also centres the risks involved in being a journalist in Nigeria. In a context where the ability of the judiciary to carry out its functions unhindered has been repeatedly questioned, the comments above highlight how Nigerian print journalists remain cautious in appropriating content from sources that cannot be verified. It also draws attention to how the fear of litigation shaped these journalists' appropriation of stories circulating on various social media sites in reporting the elections of 2011.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has shed some light on how journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms creatively appropriated alternative journalisms in reporting the elections of 2011 and how this is reflective of changing and fixed newsmaking practices. The evidence from the interviews discussed in this chapter has also highlighted some of the contextual factors that shaped and impinged upon journalists' appropriation of alternative journalisms in reporting the elections in the newsrooms studied. While attempts at crowd-sourcing by

some of these newsrooms, to a certain degree, arguably decentred journalists' news gathering practices in reporting the elections, this chapter has shown that the manner in which these appropriations were carried out necessarily emphasised the Nigerian print media's resistance to editorial diversity and inclusion. Thus, while alternative journalisms boomed during the elections, only a fraction made it through to the pages or websites of the Nigerian newspapers studied, suggesting that these journalists' adoption of alternative journalistic content in reporting the elections was less pluralistic. Indeed, where such contents were appropriated in reporting the elections, they were done along the constraining impacts of organisational and contextual (mainly political and economic) imperatives.

In sum, this chapter has shown that the social, cultural and political atmosphere in Nigeria, together with institutional professional factors shaped Nigerian print journalists' appropriation of alternative journalisms and made for a negotiated adoption of alternative journalistic content in reporting the elections. This chapter, together with the others in this thesis has shown that it is useful to qualify claims of collaborative newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms and in particular the notion of an "African Networked Journalism" (Beckett, 2008:120). This is because, such collaboration is fraught with contradictions, asymmetrical power relations and sometimes fundamentally ambiguous.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Conclusions**

#### **8.0 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the thesis. It provides a synthesis of the findings discussed in the preceding chapters against the study's aims and objectives. As I have explained already in some depth the points that I will be referring back to here in earlier chapters, I will not be repeating them in detail in this chapter. Instead, the chapter brings together some of the key conclusions arising from earlier chapters to provide an overview of the study's core findings, interwoven with a concise analysis of their collective significance and an elucidation of their originality.

This study set out to interrogate whether or not the presence of new information and communication technologies and the adoption of alternative media content were impacting on the institutional practices of Nigerian print journalists. It explored how print journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms appropriate alternative media in their everyday news production process in learning how the process of appropriation takes place. The study also sought to understand whether the presence of new information and communication technologies, which has brought on an upsurge in the various forms of non-mainstream alternative journalism, is (re)shaping journalism practices in mainstream print newsrooms in Nigeria as well as whether 'new' newsroom cultures are (or not) emerging. To address the study's broad aim, three objectives guided the study:

- i. To explore how Nigerian print journalists use and appropriate alternative media in their everyday newsmaking practices.
- ii. To interrogate the extent to which the appropriation of alternative media is (or not) redefining and challenging institutional journalistic routines and practices in Nigerian print newsrooms.
- iii. To probe whether local context factors influence how print journalists in Nigeria include non-mainstream alternative media in their coverage of key events.

To meet these objectives, the study deployed a qualitative research approach combining an ethnographic study of four Nigerian print newsrooms and Critical Discourse Analysis of news texts. The ethnography of newsrooms comprised in-depth interviews with journalists and observations. It revealed the complexities of everyday newsmaking



practices in Nigerian print newsrooms and how these journalists negotiate the appropriation of alternative media content in their practices. While the ethnography was essential in understanding whether (or not) the presence of new media technologies is reshaping newsmaking practices in these newsrooms, the textual analysis was crucial to the study of how alternative media content are appropriated and included in the news texts.

This study rejected a technological determinist approach to studying how Nigerian print journalists appropriate new media technologies in their newsmaking practices and found strength is in its rootedness in a sociological approach. The study argued that while the impact of new media technologies on journalistic practices is evident, it remains crucial to steer clear of narratives that universalise experiences from one context to the other. Against this backdrop, this study was hinged on the social constructivism school of thought and the sociology of journalism framework. Together, these approaches foreground the centrality of the wider socio-cultural context in shaping journalists' newsmaking practices. They also contend that beyond what new media technologies *do* to journalists, is the need to examine what journalists do *with* these technologies.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds through four sections. The first section, divided into three sub-sections evaluates the study's findings. The second outlines the study's contribution to knowledge. Doing so highlights the importance of this study for African media scholarship. The third discusses the limitations of this study and leads to the fourth section which points to areas of future research and recommendations. The chapter ends with a researcher's reflection highlighting lessons learnt during the research process. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 established the basis that underpinned the discussions in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.

### **8.1.1 Alternative media appropriation in everyday newsmaking practices**

Chapter 4 focused on the everyday newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists and how they appropriate new media technologies and alternative media content. It highlighted the routinized patterns of newsmaking practices in these newsrooms and how alternative media sites have constituted important news sources for these journalists. The findings discussed in this chapter point to how alternative media appropriation is woven

into the newsmaking practices of Nigerian print journalists. For instance, these journalists devote time during the newsmaking process to check alternative media sites in order to have a feel of what the ‘buzz’ is. The chapter also showed how the notions of deadline have taken on new meanings in these newsrooms with the media’s agenda-setting role forced to respond to ‘trends’ on various alternative media sites. The findings discussed in this chapter also confirm that journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms “have not shied away from exploiting digital technology in sourcing news and information” (Mudhai, 2011:681) nor are they “mired in ‘backwardness’ or passively awaiting external salvation in regard to attempts to use ICTs” (Berger, 2005:1). Rather, their creative appropriation of new media technologies alternative media content is widening traditional newsmaking practices. For instance, the mobile phone has become so normalised in their newsmaking practices that journalists are not only able to file their reports from the field but they also rely on it as an ‘extended arm’ in reaching out to news sources. The findings further suggest that the mobile phone pervades the working and private lives of these journalists to the extent that they are able to keep in touch with breaking news and potential news sources at any time of the day.

While the findings in this study generally point to the localised appropriation of new media technologies in these newsrooms and reject determinist perspectives that celebrate the technologies in themselves, a number of ethical implications for newsmaking practices come to the fore. As discussed in Chapter 5, the proliferation of new media technologies has widened traditional news beats for these journalists to the extent that checking alternative media sites, particularly those run and maintained by Nigerians in the diaspora has become an integral part of newsmaking practices in these newsrooms. This dependence on online news sites has however promoted the practice of plagiarising stories from these platforms among sports journalists, in particular, who simply sometimes ‘copy and paste’ stories. Though senior journalists in these newsrooms regard the presence of these sites as significantly ‘putting them on their toes’ other much younger and technology-savvy journalists regards them as providing ‘easier access’ to stories.

Chapters 4 and 5 further highlight some of the contextual challenges that constrain and shape how journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms appropriate new media technologies, particularly the mobile phone in their newsmaking practices. For instance, Chapter 4 shows that while journalists connect with news sources via their mobile phones, erratic electricity supply in Nigeria often lead to being disconnected from using the

technology. They however navigate these challenges by going to the newsrooms with the mobile phone chargers thus establishing connection and “denying exclusion its smile of triumph” (Nyamnjoh, 2005:209). What this suggests is that in spite of ‘unfavourable’ contextual conditions, Nigerian print journalists, like other Africans, have found creative ways of appropriating new media technologies in their everyday practices.

### **8.1.2 Navigating challenges to institutional journalistic practices**

The study finds that the presence of new media technologies and the attendant alternative media content which circulate on these platforms are fraught with contradictions with regards to challenging institutional journalistic practices in these newsrooms. For instance, as Chapter 5 shows, in cases where these journalists get tip-offs about certain stories, they still confirm the veracity of such stories through established traditional sources. However, at other instances, they are forced to go with what is available on these platforms, in part, because those who should confirm the veracity of such are not available. Thus, there is a sense in which these appropriations are done to suit local demands. The wider socio-cultural and political context means that journalists find these alternative media content at once constraining and opening up new frontiers with regards to news gathering. As such, we cannot speak of a sort of rapture from the ‘old’ to the new because what appears as ‘new’ is in fact an appropriation of the new to suit the old. As highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5, economic, socio-cultural and political factors also have constraining impact on how journalists appropriate alternative media content in their newsmaking practices. For instance, they consider not only proprietorial interests and economic benefits for their newspapers but there is also the element of fear that promotes self-censorship in the way alternative media content is appropriated. Journalists have no confidence in the flawed judicial system in Nigeria and would rather stick with ‘verifiable’ information than invoke the Freedom of Information Act in soliciting information beyond their reach.

Therefore, as has emerged in this study, journalistic practices in Nigerian print newsrooms defy such neat demarcations as journalists, for instance, becoming “gatewatchers” together with everyone else as Bruns (2007) argues. While they importantly harness the widening access to information that new media technologies make possible, they necessarily do this within the constraining limits of professional and contextual factors. Daily editorial conferences are held in these newsrooms and it is at these meetings that the news agenda is discussed. Although breaking news, for instance

from alternative media sites sometimes intervene, newsmaking structures in these newsrooms are resilient. Thus, the study finds that in appropriating alternative media in the news production process, Nigerian print newsrooms are not necessarily becoming open for 'alternative' voices to gain unhindered access nor is the relationship between professional journalists and 'alternative' journalists necessarily becoming rhizomatic.

### **8.1.3 The place of contextual factors in reporting key events**

In Chapters 6 and 7, the focus shifted from examining everyday newsmaking practices to unpacking Nigerian print journalists' reporting of specific events: the Occupy Nigeria protests and the elections of 2011. These chapters, like others in the thesis, find that context importantly shape and influence how these journalists use alternative media content in their reporting of the Occupy Nigeria protests and the elections of 2011. The textual analyses in Chapter 6 reveal some of the uneven power relations that typify Nigerian newspapers' reporting of events such as the Occupy Nigeria protests even when most of the information used in these reports have been sourced from alternative media sites. It also shows how these journalists confront state powers by appropriating content that aligns with their editorial position in reporting events. For instance, *Punch* included tweets and other such content from various online sites that used humour in discussing the removal of the fuel subsidy. While such inclusions might give an impression of an 'open' and 'inclusive' media space during the reporting of the protests, it in fact demonstrates how Nigerian print journalists maintain their hegemonic positions.

Chapter 7 also highlighted that local context factors influence these journalists' appropriation of alternative media content. Though most of the journalists agreed that the magnitude of information available on various online sites during the elections of 2011 was unprecedented and served as useful news 'leads', the appropriation of such content was not straightforward. The chapter shows how these newsrooms negotiated inclusion by policing the parameters of collaborating with the audience and other citizens who actively engaged with new media technologies during the elections. For instance, *Guardian* dedicated a page called *Citizen Guardian* within the newspaper to report contributions and photos sent by citizens from various polling stations. *Vanguard* too actively solicited for these 'citizen reports' to be sent to its 'highly interactive community' online. While these initiatives might suggest attempts at a more 'inclusive' media space, they were in fact used to further an illusion of inclusivity. In the words of a senior editor

at *Vanguard*, inviting the audience to participate in reporting the elections was “simply part of the gizmo to drive traffic to our website”.

Thus, the study finds that there is a sense in which proprietorial demands and pressures together with contextual (mainly political and economic) imperatives speak to how alternative media content is appropriated in Nigerian print newsrooms. It is therefore useful to be measured in appropriating claims that the proliferation of new media technologies has triggered collaborative newsmaking practices in African and particularly Nigerian newsrooms.

## **8.2 Towards confronting the ‘single story’ of newsmaking practices: My modest contribution to knowledge**

The study addresses a gap in media scholarship by going beyond the binaries that mark discussions of what new media technologies mean for mainstream journalism practices to unpacking how journalists appropriate these technologies in a Nigerian context. This is important partly because generalisations mostly portend the discussions of what new media technologies mean for mainstream journalism. As I have attempted to show in this study, I argue that local context demands importantly shape and constrain what the proliferation of new media technologies mean for journalists’ newsmaking practices. The study shows that while the (disruptive) impact of new media technologies in Nigerian print newsrooms cannot be ignored, the appropriation of alternative media content is in contrast to what the networked journalism school advocates, for instance. Thus, it remains essential to foreground the centrality of context in discussions around the ‘democratising’ value of new media technologies for journalism. This not only ensures context-specific theorising from ‘within’ but it also importantly enables a variety of voices. It is also necessary to “situate these emerging trends and practices [about journalism in Africa] within the context of African realities” as Nyamnjoh (1999:15) argues, in order to avoid the risk of running into what Chimamanda Adichie (2009) calls the “danger of a single story”. “The single story”, as Chimamanda argues in her 2009 TED talk, “creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

This study also differs from others in not only being the first ethnographic study of Nigerian print newsrooms to date but also in providing an African, and particularly

Nigerian perspective on how and whether (or not) the everyday newsmaking practices of journalists in Nigerian print newsrooms are shaped and constrained, if at all, by alternative journalisms. While ethnography of newsrooms have remained useful in theorising about media practices, more such studies, beyond fancy survey graphs, are needed to provide empirical data that advances theorising from within. This study is thus a move towards that end.

### **8.3 Study limitations, strengths and areas for future research**

This study's focus on four newspapers out of the over 100 that exist in Nigeria might be regarded as a weakness. However, I argue that this choice boiled down to issues of access and the need to have a manageable sample within the limits of time that a PhD affords. I also maintain that this study (as discussed in Chapter 3) was interested in examining a particular phenomenon and it was important that I used a fairly manageable sample. It was also in keeping with the qualitative research tradition, which I mentioned in Chapter 3 and repeat here that a small sample allows for "depth and detail...rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question" (Patton, 1990:53-54).

This study did not focus on Nigerian broadcast newsrooms and did not include interviews with popular Nigerian bloggers or owners of diasporic alternative media sites that I observed journalists visiting, during my immersion. As I explained in Chapter 3, the study's aim was to interrogate newsmaking practices in Nigerian print newsrooms.

Future studies may therefore benefit from examining how Nigerian broadcast journalists appropriate new media technologies in their practices and whether it is enabling an 'inclusive' media space. This study also focused primarily on the newsrooms of these four newspapers. Although scholars such as Wahl-Jorgensen (2009) and Zelizer (2004) have called for (as I discussed in Chapter 3) a decentralised approach to newsroom ethnographies that includes other journalistic practices that take place outside the newsroom, I found that my attempt at including alternative media practitioners in the sample distracted from this study's aim. However, I made sure that interviews with journalists were not confined to the physical newsroom spaces (See Chapter 3). Another weakness might be that this study did not compare the reporting of previous Nigerian elections with the reporting of the 2011 elections analysed in Chapter 6. While I attempted a comparative analysis of the reporting of these elections, the websites of these

newspapers had been updated many times that such archival materials were unavailable. Perhaps, other studies might want to pursue a comparative analysis of Nigerian newspapers' reporting of elections in Nigeria to investigate whether the media space is necessarily becoming more 'democratic'. Being *in situ* in these newsrooms during the reporting of key events might also be useful for nuanced analysis.

#### **8.4 Researcher's Reflexivity**

During the process of this research, I have learnt many valuable lessons. In particular, that researching within the Nigerian context is laden with a number of challenges. As I discussed in Chapter 3, gaining access into these newsrooms was a part of the process that proved challenging. It took several weeks, many emails and phone calls for me to gain the confidence of the editors who granted me access to these newsrooms. Retrospectively, I am wondering if scheduling my fieldwork during the Occupy Nigeria protests might have enabled me to have a 'first-hand feel' of how journalists negotiated their inclusion of content that circulated on various online sites. However, such periods, as indeed was the period of the protest, usually see violence escalating. As such, I think the situating of my fieldwork after the protests was helpful.

Having come to the end of this process, I suggest that while an ethnographic approach to studying the everyday practices and dynamics in Nigerian newsrooms remains significantly useful, future research which produces more such primary data is needed in adequately theorising the impact of alternative media on the institutional practices of mainstream journalists. This is all the more important in teasing out the complexities that mark the appropriation of alternative media in the everyday newsmaking practices.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1



#### **Interview Information Sheet**

##### **Study Title: Interrogating the new ‘alternative’ media: of ‘networked’ journalism and democracy in Nigeria**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. To help you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will entail. Please take time to read the following information carefully and do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is unclear or if you need further information.

##### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This project, which is partly funded by the University of Central Lancashire under the International PhD scholarship scheme, is examining how you deploy alternative media content and new media technologies during the news production process. As you are a professional journalist, your opinions and thoughts about the impact of ‘alternative’ media (social media, citizen media, community media, blogging, etc) on the institutional practices of your profession will be of immense value to this research.

##### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen to participate in this research because you are a professional journalist working for a newspaper organisation in Nigeria. During this interview, I will be asking you questions about what you think of the relationship between yourself and the audience with the proliferation of ‘new’ media and the implications of these on Nigeria’s democratisation project.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign below. You may refuse to answer certain questions and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Participating in this research will be help in advancing the understanding of journalism practices in Nigeria.

##### **What will happen to me if I take part?**



The interview will be audiotaped and it is expected to last for approximately 40 minutes. You will be asked during the interview whether or not you want to say your job title and place of employment. All information collected from you will be treated confidentially and stored on a password-protected personal computer.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results will be used in my thesis and may be published in other academic publications and reports. This research operates under the research ethics protocols of the University of Central Lancashire, Preston United Kingdom.

I hereby agree to be interviewed under the conditions set above.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

I hereby agree that in order to back up written notes an audio recording of this interview can be taken. (Please circle):    Yes                      No

Thank you for your help with this research. Please let me know whether you would be interested in receiving summaries of this research once it is completed. Should you have further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. George Ogola.

Kind regards,

Motilola Olufenwa Akinfemisoye

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## Appendix 2

### Interview Schedule

Hello, my name is Motilola Akinfemisoye and I am here to ask you if you think the proliferation of ‘alternative’ media (social media, community media, new media, mobile phones, etc.) is impacting and changing your profession as professional journalists.

During the interview, I would like to discuss the following issues: institutional practices of Nigerian journalists in the digital era, your perceptions of your roles as journalists in Nigeria’s democratisation project as well as how you choose your news sources.

1. What do new media mean for your profession and for you as a journalist?
2. In your opinion, do you think the activities of other ‘alternative’ media are impacting on journalism practices in Nigeria?
3. Can you give me examples of what has changed (if any) in the way you carry out your professional duties?
4. Have these impacts been felt in your writing style?
5. What relationship exists between yourselves and the audience?
6. Have the traditional ‘gates’ which the audience had to pass through to get to you been lifted? Can you explain how? Please give examples.
7. With your experience of journalism practice, how would you describe the coverage of the 2011 general elections? How did you determine the news sources you included in your coverage of the elections?
8. How did you decide which audience reports to use during the Occupy Nigeria protests?

9. Do you think Facebook updates, tweets or blog posts, for instance influenced power structures between yourself and the audience? How did you experience this?
10. Do you think 'alternative' media are negotiating spaces within your profession? How?
11. Do you feel that you lost your audience to the 'alternative' media during the 2011 elections?
12. In the coverage of the 2011 elections, how did you determine the news agenda to pursue?
13. In what ways do you think your profession can help Nigeria actualise its democratisation project?
14. Can there be collaboration between yourselves and 'alternative' media practitioners?
15. Do you monitor other 'alternative' media outlets in search of 'breaking' news?
16. Is there anything else regarding this topic which you think I have not mentioned during this interview?

Thank you very much for your time.

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## As Labour strike begins... report protest in your area!

on January 09, 2012 / in [News](#) 8:44 am / [Comments](#)

The Labour nationwide strike over the removal of subsidy on petrol commences today, after efforts by the Federal Government to avert the strike with the announcement of some palliative measures, new policy decisions, National Industrial Court (NIC) order, restraining labour from embarking on protests/strike failed.

The House of Representatives, yesterday, in an emergency sitting also asked government and Labour to shelve the subsidy removal and strike.

But neither government nor labour has changed their position.

However, in Vanguard's citizen report initiative, we invite our numerous readers to be part of the coverage of the subsidy protest.

Readers should send us reports of the strike/ protest in their areas, as these reports will be quickly verified and published immediatly.

This also includes photos and videos.

Are you in the heart of the protest, on the fringe, on the side walk etc. wherever you are in the country, let us have your stories and images.



File photo: Fuel subsidy protesters in Lagos.

You can send your materials with your name, town and state to:

Email: [subsidyprotest@vanguardngr.com](mailto:subsidyprotest@vanguardngr.com) (<mailto:subsidyprotest@vanguardngr.com>)



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## Day 2: Citizens report protest across Nigeria

on January 10, 2012 / in [News](#) 5:02 pm / [Comments](#)

As the national strike/mass protest called by the Nigerian Labour unions enters the second day, Nigerians who are either participating in the ongoing protest or who are onlookers sent in firsthand information of the protest as it were in their areas. Excerpts:

Economic activities still grounded in Ilorin

By Ayeni, C.T, Ilorin

Here in Ilorin economic activities are completely paralyzed, bonfire were made at Offa Garage roundabout. Water supply is still cutoff as at 2pm of today, the day 2 of fuel subsidy removal protest.

No protest in Jigawa

By Halliru Audu, Dutse

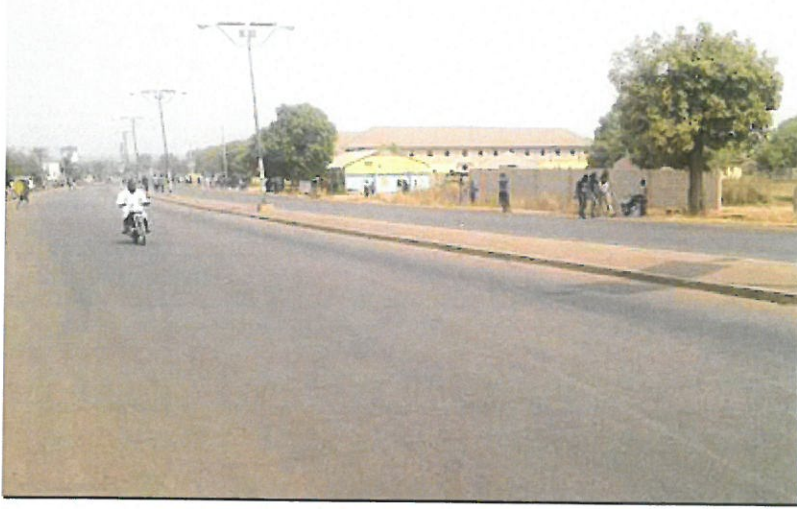
The situation here in Dutse, the Jigawa State capital, is very calm. There is no protest today, but only that commercial activities were grounded, banks, hospitals, market, transport services, and schools' activities were totally shutdown.

Business picking up in Sokoto

By Tony, Sokoto

Sokoto State is very calm as if the people are tired of the protest. Some shops are opening right now as I am typing this message. It seems they are tired of staying at home. PHCN officials have resumed work and they have brought light, filling stations are opening. May God help us.





Deserted ever busy Makurdi road, Lafia, Nasarawa State

Security agents disperse protesters in Kaduna

By JB Samuel, Zaria

In Zaria, Kaduna State, protesters came out enmasse blocking the major road that lead from Zaria city to Dan-Magaji, burning tyres. However, the military in conjunction with the police came and dispersed the protesters at about 10 :55am.. meanwhile, banks and markets are closed. There was no commercial vehicles on the road.

In Kwara, prostesters ask Jonathan to resign

By Agboola Oloyin

Protest continued across the state capital. Some protesters were calling on the military to take over. They said Jonathan should resign

Protest continues in Lafia

By Musa Sarki, Lafia

Protest is going on peacefully in Lafia, Nasarawa State on the 2nd day. In most areas and streets, youths are preventing vehicles from moving. There is total compliance in Lafia. For example, the ever busy Makurdi road is empty.

No dull moment at Ibafo

By Usman Etafia, Ibafo

As early as 7am this morning,angry youths who are against the fuel subsidy removal by the federal government troop out in their thousands to block the ever busy Lagos/ Ibadan expressway, Ibafo, Ogun State. They mounted canopies at the center of the road while a DJ is on the stage playing all sorts of musics to inspire the youths who are making their request in a peaceful manner. Meanwhile, the ever busy road is deserted of vehicles.

No protest in Ahoada, Rivers State

By Kelgrin Kelly, Ahoada,

Though no protest here in Ahoada but most part of the town is free of the usual vehicular movement. Some businesses and shops were under lock and key,as those who opened complained of low patronage due to the strike action,and high cost of goods. All banks here in Ahoada were also closed to customers,while the state general hospital Ahoada performed





A canopy placed at the centre of Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, Ibafo, by protesters skeletal services to patients. The local government secretariat, Ahoada was also paralysed as most of the staff did not report for duties.

Meanwhile, security is tight as the various law enforcement agencies were sighted at strategic locations of the town.

Protesters raise the tempo in Kebbi

By Nura Teecha, Yauri.

In Yauri-Kebbi State, today's protest recorded higher turnout than that of Monday. All shops are closed. Virtually all the adults and youths are taking part in the protest; saying that they are against the withdrawal of subsidy. The protest is well organised and peaceful.

Oyo records peaceful protest

By Akin Ajayi, Oyo

Peaceful demonstration took place in Oyo town. Bonfire was made at Oyagbe, Saabo, Akesan and Owode, powered by NAOS, NLC and artisan. They were saying subsidy must stay, sell fuel at 60 naira, remember you were not born with a silver spoon. However, every business activities in the area were paralysed.

Owerri is calm

By M. Precious, Owerri

It is calm in Owerri. Business is going on as normal! However, banks are not open, civil servants are at home though! Filling stations and other firms and businesses are open like its a normal day!

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## Neighbouring countries hit by subsidy removal

on January 07, 2012 / in [Special Report](#) 12:07 am / [Comments](#)

By Uduma Kalu

- S/ East, S/South quiet as protest rocks Nigeria
- In Kano, Christians guard Muslims
- Cameroon feels fuel hike, Boko Haram
- Social media boost protest

The anti subsidy removal protests are not only hitting Nigeria, neighbouring countries such as Cameroon is also getting the heat. But all seems to be quiet on the the eastern and southern Nigerian fronts as protests rock the rest of Nigeria. But by Thursday night, messages on tweeter were still scanty but one of them on Facebook said there would be protest at Okpara Square, Enugu by 8 am.

The leader is Lorenzo Menakaya. He doubles as the Occupy Nigeria coordinator. It will be a peaceful march with the members bearing metal shields. On Monday, there will be NLC protest. Aside Enugu, other South East and South South states will tie up with NLC.

However in Benin, Edo State, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), and its chair, Nnimmo Bassey, in solidarity with civil society groups under the aegis of Coalition to Save Nigeria, staged a public protest. The coalition of civil society groups in Edo State included the Nigerian Bar Association, Nigerian Union of Journalists, Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Bike Riders Association of Nigeria, market women and students among others.

The Association of Nigeria Authors, ANA (Lagos), in a statement entitled 'The Season of Anomie', a reference to Wole Soyinka's novel, said, "As educated writers, we are resolved to join all possible peaceful activities aimed at expressing the people's displeasure at the current state of affairs. A responsible and responsive government cannot and should not be seen to be deaf to the desires of the people it claims to serve!"

Meanwhile, Cameroonians living in the border areas with Nigeria are counting losses following President Goodluck Jonathan's recent declaration of state of emergency in some states of Northern Nigeria, and closing of the border between the two neighbouring countries. The move has affected prices of basic commodities in the areas especially as a result of higher petro prices and lack of supplies from the Nigerian markets.





Subsidy: A Day After : Struggle for fuel in Ibadan.

And the social media have been helpful too. Some of them such as YouTube, Facebook, listervs, blogs, twitter, website, online news media, emails, dating sites, blackberries, phones, etc, are employed to boost the protest. The internet has thus made it easy to access the leaders of the country to probe the removal of the subsidy.

For example, online newsmidia, Sahara Reporters shows pictures of its unsuccessful live interview with the Finance minister, Dr Ngozi Okojo Iweala. There are videos on Facebook showing the London protests by Nigerians and this is troubling Jonathan. Inside government sources said Jonathan's Facebook page which was not updated since the protest broke is filled with outrageous remarks which are more of a slur on the president.

But to help stem the spread of hate against the government, a massive number of new sign ups will go on Facebook and Twitter with counter-messages that are friendly to the regime, a media source said. They will canvass the government's policies and praise merits of subsidy removal.

The quantity and quality of electronic gadgetry in the hands of protesters should make security people think twice before shooting or beating a protester. One phone camera or the other will capture you, and when the protests are over, reckoning time will come a protester, Mr. Aja N. Aja wrote on his facebook.

The protesters are also learning from what is happening in other parts of the world. From the Tahir Square, Egypt, Kano Christians and Muslims learned to guard each other as they pray. This is a new development in the history of Nigeria considering the recent bomb blast by some insurgent groups called Boko Haram.

The Muslim community has also vowed to escort the Christians to their places of worship so as to protect them against any form of attack. In London, Nigerians' websites reported an allegation of bribery by Nigerian officials to stop the planned protest.

And the heat is also being felt in far away places like Cameroon. A report from African Review gives a detailed account of how the emergency rule in Borno and the fuel hike is grounding the economy of the northern Cameroonian towns.

Cameroon feels fuel hike, Boko Haram

Already, prices of basic commodities that Cameroonian traders used to buy cheaply from the Nigerian side, in Borno State, have more than tripled. Mr. Labaran Maku, the information minister had said, "The major beneficiaries of subsidy are the rich, middle class and some neighbouring countries where the products are smuggled oftentimes."

The price hikes in Cameroon are said to be as a result of the closure of Banki frontier market that used to supply Cameroon denying them a source of affordable goods.

"Customs revenue from imported goods from Nigeria has dried up as there is no trans-border trade after Nigeria decided to close its border", said a senior Cameroonian customs officer who sought anonymity because he is not authorised to speak on behalf of the government.



Faced with growing threat of terrorism from the Islamists terror group Boko Haram, Nigeria recently closed its borders with some of the neighbouring countries, in a bid to halt cross border terror activities.

As borders were closed, Nigeria also announced a decision on to scrap oil subsidies. That has affected bordering Cameroon towns that have relied on Nigeria for petroleum supply.

Over the years, smuggling of fuel from Nigeria for sale in areas within Cameroon has been on the rise especially due to better prices.

It seems someone is not happy with our peace, otherwise how else do you explain the abrupt removal of subsidies all over Africa, from Cameroon, through Guinea, to Nigeria and Ghana.

If Goodluck Johnathan had any self interests at hand, of course he would have removed the subsidy gradually to cushion the effects on his people, but this abrupt removal, more than doubling the fuel prices in Nigeria is political suicide and definitely the wishes of someone above him who wants to see Nigeria go through the kind of chaos we saw in the Middle East, US and Europe. Someone does not like our peace.'

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## Trending: Subsidy brouhaha on Facebook, Twitter, others

JANUARY 3, 2012 :



MAUREEN AZUH and JAYNE AUGOYE capture the witty side of Nigerians' responses to the crisis generated by the fuel subsidy removal

From word of mouth to messages on Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry, blogs and other social media, Nigerians and their distant allies have started 'dramatising' their plights in the hands of the Federal Government that has removed fuel subsidy. Outside government circles where officials are trying hard to play down the pain the decision has inflicted on the polity, everyone knows that tough times are really here. But because man shall not live by

agonising alone, many people have resolved to air their views in very creative ways.

On the various channels, they are exchanging funny photographs, sketches, cartoons, jokes, anecdotes, euphemisms and outright abuses in a manner making others to laugh in the midst of the socio-economic tragedy the subsidy removal appears to represent.

Understandably, President Goodluck Jonathan is at the centre of some of the exchanges. Besides, the influence of Boko Haram has become so dominant that its essence is also echoing through the jokes.

Listen to this fake news that hit the BB newsstand on Sunday, as soon as the subsidy removal was announced, "Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for the fuel subsidy removal..." Below are some of the cracks fast travelling round – presented almost as raw as they come.

### At the barber's shop

Customer : How much you dey cut hair for here?

Barber: Oga na N100 with 'Nepa' but N800 with Gen'

Customer : A beg, flash me when Nepa bring light.

### Lucky thief

A thief was caught and a tyre was put around his neck and a box of matches was brought out, but nobody agreed to bring petrol . D thief smiled and said, "Thanks to fuel subsidy removal."

### Frank Edoho

My name is Frank Edoho... This is who Wants to be a Millionaire.... The next question is for 50 LITRES of petrol...

### Warning to GEJ

Bad roads, Boko Haram bombings, unemployment, Niger Delta militants, insensitive govt, corruption & fuel increase to N150...GEJ, u don fall my hand finish sha.. Abeg remove dt ya Fedora cap & put on ur Thinking

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### LIVE UPDATE

Ade, Abuja: National Collation: The much awaited moment is almost here. INEC commissioners are now taking their seats. Prof. Jega is now being awaited

March 31, 2015 - 11:10 am



Nigerian artist calls for peace through paintings, ahead of polls (cctv Africa)

March 31, 2015 - 9:43 am

The Rivers Government has declared dusk to dawn curfew in the state with effect from Monday, the Secretary to the State Government, Mr. George Feyi, announces.

March 31, 2015 - 1:10 am

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**FG deploys soldiers, policemen**

2cap cos d damage will be collateral....Cheii! Cry my beloved country.

### Startling implications

Witches and wizards will carry passengers at night at affordable prices. Most importantly, Jonathan will finally have the money to send his wife to nursery school.

### At gunpoint

Abeg, see subsidy wahala o: A car has just been snatched @ gunpoint just after filling his tank at Gbagada and the owner kept screaming: "MY FUEL, My FUEL!!" See wat Nigerians have been turned to!

### Bride price list

An Igbo man just received a bride price list: 1. 25litres of petrol (non-negotiable) 2. N200,000 cash(negotiable) 3. 20 yards of ankara (negotiable) 4. 30 tubers of Yam (negotiable), 5. 1 bag of salt, etc.

### BB broadcast charge

BB chat and pings on me are not free anymore. They now cost N50 to chat and N20 to ping, N5 to view and copy my DP. Please, bear with me on this new development, there is no subsidy on BB anymore. As you all know that fuel now costs N140 per litre and I have to fill my generator to respond to your chats and pings. Thank you for your usual cooperation.

### Effects of fuel subsidy removal

- There'll nw b more pedestrians dan cars. Pedestrians on dual carriageways, cars wil nw use d sidewalks.
- No more using of generator to watch seasonal films.
- Nw some boys r gonna strt using fuel to toast chicks.. "Baby take a look at my guage, I hv full tank."
- No more car accidents, na ankle and knee dislocation we go dey suffer nw.
- New breakup line: Baby, ur haus is too far. I can't do this anymore. "Irreconcilable differences."
- Guys will start posing wit 50 litre kegs of petrol in pictures.
- Babes wuld not ask for Brazilian, Peruvian, Indian nor Malaysian hair but a full tank from their boyfriends.
- Witches and wizards will carry passengers at night at affordable prices.
- Maybe traffic will reduce on Lag roads.
- People who have gone to the village for holiday might not return.
- My neighbourhood is dead silent not even one generator can be heard.
- Bicycle sellers report high rise in sales
- You can deposit your fuel at Zenith Bank, Diamond Bank, GT Bank or any bank close 2 you.
- Bride price will increase and may even include 25litres of petrol.
- Don't be shocked if u are slapped for trying to burn a thief with petrol.
- Barbing Saloon: Nepa 200, Gen 800.
- "Walk out" will be a popular thing among lovers.
- No more accidents, it will be knee and ankle dislocations.
- Girl: I like going to expensive places.
- Boy: Meet me at Mobil filling station.

in NTA



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## Social media protesters display Jonathan, Mark, others' phone numbers

JANUARY 8, 2012 : LEKE BAIYEWU



Protesters against the fuel subsidy removal by the Federal Government on Saturday published telephone numbers of public office holders, former heads of government and prominent business persons on various online social networks, including Facebook and Twitter.

These personalities were perceived to either have a hand in the policy or have links with President Goodluck Jonathan.

For example, one of the posts by a Nigerian on Facebook read, "080358971\*\* is the phone number of Minister of information, Labaran Maku. Don't call, he won't answer.

Just send him a text on how you feel about the subsidy. Give him a piece of your mind!"

Others were: "No to oil subsidy removal. Tell David Mark how you feel – 080350088\*\* Text, don't claim subsidy removal has affected text messaging."

"Also, Gen. Gowon on 0803408800\*\*. Send messages, if dem no gree pick.

"President Jonathan switched off his GLO number. This is his Zain line, call him – 080230020\*\*, "Senator David Mark (Senate President) – 080350088\*\*.

"Direct Action! Obasanjo rigged himself in, and then imposed a sick Yar'Adua and clueless Jonathan. Now, we pay for it. Call him on 080550000\*\* #OccupyNigeria"

Also, the President's twitter account was also bombarded with messages from Nigerians, who registered their displeasure with the new policy.

For instance, popular comedian, Gbenga Adeyinka, on Saturday tweeted, "God please, we are praying and begging you to touch the heart of President Goodluck Jonathan to reverse this."

One Omodunbi also tweeted, "I am something, when I was young I had no shoes but now I eat with N3m every day. What am I?"

Just like Omodunbi, Otuyemi tweeted, "Somebody better tell Goodluck Ebele Jonathan that the God that saw Nigerians through Abacha's regime is still sitting on d throne."

Another Nigerian, Nedu said, "My formal response to Goodluck Jonathan's removal of subsidy: The government has declared a war. And I'm ready to be on the front line!"

Ayana also said, "I hardly ever regret my actions but this I do. I rue the day I voted for Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Yes, please you may quote me."

Abubakar, a Nigerian wrote, "Goodluck Jonathan is now our 'Fuel Haram.'"

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Ade, Abuja: National Collation: The much awaited moment is almost here. INEC commissioners are now taking their seats. Prof. Jega is now being awaited

March 31, 2015 - 11:10 am



Nigerian artist calls for peace through paintings, ahead of polls (cctv Africa)

March 31, 2015 - 9:43 am

The Rivers Government has declared dusk to dawn curfew in the state with effect from Monday, the Secretary to the State Government, Mr. George Feyi, announces.

March 31, 2015 - 1:10 am

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**FG deploys soldiers, policemen**

March 31st, 2015



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## Protests continue in Lagos, Abuja, Asaba

JANUARY 13, 2012 : AGENCY REPORTER

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### LIVE UPDATE

National Collation, Abuja: "We apologise for starting behind schedule. Several states are ready and in few minutes we will continue with the collation for states we could not take yesterday. We will start shortly," says INEC announcer

March 31, 2015 - 11:15 am

Ade, Abuja: National Collation: The much awaited moment is almost here. INEC commissioners are now taking their seats. Prof. Jega is now being awaited

March 31, 2015 - 11:10 am

The general strike against the removal of fuel subsidy continued for the fifth day running, with street protests and rallies in Lagos, Abuja and Asaba.

Thousands of people gathered at the Gani Fawehinmi (Freedom Park) at Ojota, Lagos State to demand the return of subsidy and reversal of the pump price of fuel from N141 to N65.

The crowd in Lagos was addressed by the Convener of the Save Nigeria Group, Pastor Tunde Bakare; Afrobeat musician, Femi Kuti; popular Yoruba actress, Ronke Ojo; among others.

In a 2,408-word statement, which he read to the crowd in Lagos, Bakare said the subsidy issue was being used to defraud Nigerians.

The link is <http://www.facebook.com/notes/save-nigeria-group-official-fan-page/press-release-by-the-convener-of-save-nigeria-group-sng-ojota-rally-day-5/10150596950869783>

He accused the Federal Government of using distorted images of the protests and twisted reports to portray to Nigerians that the entire country was calm.

Bakare noted, "In spite of the lying propaganda, it is part of our responsibility to channel our collective energies in the right direction and remain focused on the main issues rather than using 'ring worm' medicine to cure leprosy."

Bakare also gave the Federal Government this weekend to revert to N65 or risk tougher actions from ordinary Nigerians.

The cleric also reeled out alleged beneficiaries of the fuel subsidy and how the nation was swindled of huge sums of money by oil industry operators.

He also said the rally would end early on Friday to allow Muslim protesters to observe a special Jumat service at the park.

The service was organised and well attended by Muslims.

There were pockets of protests in different parts of the state such as Falomo in Ikoyi. Protesters also observed a minute's silence for persons who died during the protests.

Protests were also scheduled for some cities in other countries.

Aviation workers gathered at the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos to prevent flights from taking off or landing.

In Abuja, the rally at Area One was addressed by the President of the Trade Union Congress, Mr. Peter Esele; former member of the House of Representatives, Mr. Dino Melaye; President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, Mr. Abdulwaheed Omar; and a number of labour and civil rights leaders.

They counselled Nigerians not to relent in the struggle for justice and equity and reiterated the demand for the return of fuel subsidy and reversal of the price to N65.

Protesters also marched to the Government House, Asaba, Delta State, demanding to be addressed by Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan.



Nigerian artist calls for peace through paintings, ahead of polls (cctv Africa)

March 31, 2015 - 9:43 am

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## Negotiating convergence

Motilola Olufenwa Akinfemisoye

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# NEGOTIATING CONVERGENCE

## “Alternative” journalism and institutional practices of Nigerian journalists

Motilola Olufenwa Akinfemisoye

*This article critically interrogates the impact of new information and communication technologies on the institutional practices of mainstream journalists in Nigeria with particular reference to current newsroom practices and how user-generated content (UGC) was incorporated into mainstream media coverage of the 2011 Nigerian election. Rooted in the sociology of journalism, the study employs an ethnographic approach to examine the implications of new information and communication technologies for journalistic practices in Nigeria. With a reading of new information technologies as “alternative journalism”, the ethnography, which deployed in-depth interviews with print journalists as well as newsroom observation, investigated whether “alternative journalism” is challenging traditional newsroom culture in Nigeria. The findings suggest that alternative journalism is redefining the roles of mainstream journalists as “news producers”. Journalists have become “gatewatchers” with everyone else, especially during the 2011 elections when citizens actively engaged with alternative journalism in reporting the elections. However, mainstream journalists continue to contest their hegemonic traditional practices of giving prominence to “official” sources in news reporting, and negotiate how “alternative journalism” in the form of UGC is networked into mainstream reporting to avoid publishing rumours. The study concludes that contrary to scholarship that sees digital technologies as “de-professionalising” journalists, mainstream journalism in Nigeria maintains the dominant discourse by articulating and appropriating content from “alternative” sources for subtle economic motives.*

**KEYWORDS** alternative journalism; elections; institutional journalistic practices; newsroom culture; Nigeria; user-generated content

### Introduction

The proliferation of new digital technologies has heralded discourses about their potential to revolutionise many aspects of human existence and even leapfrog development for developing economies like those in Africa. This has witnessed calls for caution, with Alzouma (2005, 351) arguing that “the general conditions in which people are living do not change suddenly with the introduction of the internet”. The impacts of these digital technologies on the speed at which information disseminates has also been said to impact on journalistic practices, making for a shift in the balance of power and blurring the lines between journalists and “the-people-formerly-known-as-the-audience” (Rosen 2006). The narrative is that the rise of the internet and mobile phones, among other new information and communication technologies, is transforming journalism, making it increasingly an “interactive practice” (Heinrich 2013), while

journalists are becoming “robohacks” (Hargreaves 2003) who practise “churnalism” (Davies 2008). This appears to paint a picture of what is happening in “Western” mediaspheres. However, exploring whether (or not) the presence of these new digital technologies is influencing the institutional practices of professional journalists in Africa, and particularly Nigeria which is the focus in this article, is pertinent in order to identify not only how shifting journalistic cultures are emerging but also identify how Nigerian journalists are adapting to the digital revolution.

This study therefore interrogates whether (or not) the adoption of digital technologies in Nigerian newsrooms and the inclusion of user-generated content (UGC) in mainstream reporting are redefining the institutional journalistic practices of Nigerian journalists and creating “new” newsroom cultures. Drawing on an ethnographic approach, the study investigates how mainstream journalists adopt digital technologies and incorporate UGC in their daily journalistic routines, questioning if this is necessarily impacting on traditional journalistic structures in Nigeria. In examining these trends, the coverage of Nigeria’s 2011 elections provides an example for benchmarking which, if any, new trends and cultures are emerging in Nigerian newsrooms with the adoption of new digital technologies.

Nigerian media have since their birth in 1859 been influential in the country’s democratisation project, with the 1990s being particularly significant in its political history. Although the media “developed and crystallized along ethnic lines with underlying religious cum ethnic undertones” (Dare 2011, 12), it has remained “one of the most resilient and daring segments of Nigeria’s civil society” (Olukotun 2004, 71) as well as one that “has had the most successful radical press in the democratisation struggle in Africa” (Adebanwi 2011, 48). The transition from military rule to civilian rule in 1999 did not come without a price as the freedom of Nigerian media was greatly hampered with the promulgation of draconian laws such as Decree 2 of 1984, the Nigerian Press Council Decree No. 85 of 1992, the Newspapers Decree No. 43 of 1993, and a host of others. Decree 2 of 1984, for instance, empowered the Inspector General of Police to detain indefinitely, without trial, any person considered as a risk to state security (see Ojebode 2011); many journalists were imprisoned and assassinated.<sup>1</sup> However, with the return to civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian press still grapples with being truly independent, with a recent press freedom index ranking placing it at 115th position out of 179 countries (Reporters Without Borders 2013).

With the widespread adoption of the World Wide Web and other digital technologies which continue to provide a breeding space for alternative journalistic practices to thrive (Atton 2013, 132), Nigerian journalism provides an excellent avenue for examining what the presence of “non-mainstream” journalism means for the institutional practices of journalists in “non-Western” mediaspheres. In examining this trend, the coverage of the elections of 2011 in Nigeria presents a useful illustration for probing how “alternative” journalisms are negotiating spaces within the mainstream media. “Alternative” media and “alternative” journalism(s), used interchangeably in this article, are defined following Atton and Couldry (2003, 579) as “media produced outside mainstream media institutions and networks”.

The adoption of new information and communication technologies such as the internet, personal computers and mobile phones in Nigeria continues to witness a geometric progression with internet penetration, for instance, rising from 0.16 per cent in 2000 to about 29 per cent as at June 2012 (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2012). Mobile

phones are also increasingly becoming ubiquitous in Africa and have recently been labelled as the “new talking drum of everyday Africa” (de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, and Brinkman 2009). In Nigeria, mobile phone subscriptions continue to rise, with the latest figures at April 2013 suggesting over 145 million subscribers from the 266,461 subscribers in 2001 (Nigerian Communications Commission 2013). The media, moreover, do not exist in isolation of these transformations. As new digital technologies become widespread, journalism in Nigeria is adopting these technologies in news production and dissemination processes. For instance, all major national dailies in Nigeria have an online presence on social networking sites and operate functioning websites where online versions of their newspapers are published.

New media in Africa particularly has been said to play major roles in the democratisation projects of many countries despite the issue of limited access (Nyamnjoh 2005; Arntsen 2010). Dunisami Moyo’s (2010) study of the Zimbabwean 2008 elections reveals, for instance, how new alternative media, especially mobile phones, can act as “monitors of democracy”. The adoption of these digital technologies in Nigeria have played vital roles in connecting the “people-formerly-known-as-the-audience” with mainstream journalists in the coverage of key events such as the elections of 2011, the Occupy Nigeria protests of 2012, among others where the use of hashtags, for instance, has allowed journalists to keep track of unfolding events.

### Contextualising Nigeria’s 2011 Elections

In April 2011, Nigerians went to the polls for the fourth time since the dawn of civil rule which had lasted 12 years. After three widely decried previous elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007, the elections of 2011 were undoubtedly crucial to Nigeria’s political history. Scholars generally agree that elections are essential to the survival of democracies (Adejumobi 2000) and, as Bratton (1998, 52) tells us, although “elections do not in themselves constitute a consolidated democracy ... [they] remain fundamental, not only for installing democratic governments, but as a necessary requisite for broader democratic consolidation”. However, several previous attempts at consolidating a democratic government in Nigeria proved abortive with the collapse of the first republic between 1960 and 1966, the second republic from 1979 to 1983 and the annulment of the generally acclaimed free and fair election of 12 June 1993 which would have been the third republic. The fourth republic, however, began with the elections of 1999 and the subsequent military handover to civilian rule on 29 May 1999. Since returning to civil rule in 1999, elections in Nigeria, as Omotola (2010, 535) argues, “have been one of the main problems of the democratization process”. For instance, Tar and Zack-Williams (2007, 540) concluded after the study of the 2007 elections that “like all previous post-independence elections, the 2007 elections were full of controversies and widely condemned as fraudulent, violent and stage-managed by the outgoing president Olusegun Obasanjo”.

As such, the discrepancies of previous elections saw many observers within and outside Nigeria closely monitoring the elections of 2011 both offline and online. Nigeria’s 2011 three-tier polls—national assembly, presidential and gubernatorial—initially scheduled to be held on 2, 9 and 16 April, and postponed due to electoral materials arriving late, were held on 9, 16 and 26 April, respectively. Despite the

post-election violence that was evident in some parts of Nigeria, several more positive, if not glowing, appraisals of the 2011 election were offered. For Akhaine (2011, 649), “a distinct blend of political will and patriotism, buttressed by meaningful contributions from citizens, the civil service and the military all came together to make Nigeria’s 2011 elections a success story”. The Commonwealth Observer Group also commented that the “April 2011 elections marked a genuine celebration of democracy in Africa’s most populous country” (Commonwealth Observer Group 2011). Also significant was the way social media was deployed during the electioneering campaign by politicians as well as during the elections. President Goodluck Jonathan, for instance, adopted Facebook as a medium for “dialoguing” with Nigerians on 28 June 2010 and subsequently made his first announcement to contest in the presidential election on Facebook on 15 September 2010 (Adibe and Odoemelam 2012; Jonathan, Facebook post, 15 September 2011). This presaged the significant role of alternative media in the coverage of the elections of 2011.

Consequently, the coverage of Nigeria’s 2011 elections provides an example for benchmarking the new trends and cultures which are emerging in Nigerian newsrooms with the proliferation of new information and communication technologies and mobile telephony, which made audience participation in reporting the 2011 elections unprecedented and remarkable. This study will further explore how the presence of “alternative” journalisms are impacting on the daily practices of Nigerian journalists and whether the appropriation of UGC into mainstream reporting is necessarily challenging their institutional practices.

### Methodological Approach

In gathering empirical data for this study, an ethnographic approach comprising semi-structured interviews with professional journalists in Nigeria and a non-participant newsroom observation was adopted in investigating what new “alternative” media means for the institutional journalistic practices of Nigerian journalists. In addition to the ethnography, a textual analysis of news texts written during the election was conducted to provide a reading of how Nigerian journalists included (or excluded) alternative media content in the coverage of the elections of 2011. As Singer (2009, 191) notes, “Such triangulation increases confidence in the interpretation of findings [and] it is particularly useful for exploring the “why” as well as the “what” of a subject”.

On the ethnography of newsrooms, Cottle (2007, 2) explains that deploying an ethnographic approach to studying media organisations “help[s] to reveal the constraints, contingencies and complexities ‘at work’” as well as help in understanding “the production of the discourses ‘at play’ within news media representations”. Born (2005, 15) concurs that ethnography is “a sharp tool for discerning not just the unifying features but the divisions, boundaries and conflicts of the society being studied”. In Willig’s (2013, 373) words, “newsroom ethnographies have enabled us to go straight to the heart of news organisations and show us how journalists go about their daily routines”. Thus, ethnography of newsrooms brings to the fore the socio-cultural realities in the newsroom, and provides useful evidence in explaining whether or not the proliferation of digital technologies is rewriting and reshaping journalistic practices in

Nigeria. Newsroom ethnography provided insights into the workings and practices of journalists in the news production process and revealed that journalists continue to contest their hegemonic role as the watchdog for citizens.

This study focused on Nigerian newspapers which have, despite many challenges, remained “one of the most resilient and daring segments of Nigeria’s civil society” (Olukotun 2004, 71). Nigeria has the largest press in Africa (Olukotun 2004) with over 100 newspapers and magazines, with most of them being private commercial ventures (BBC News 2012). The exact statistics for Nigerian newspapers’ circulation and readership is unknown because “Nigerian newspapers ... do not make such information available to the public” (Akingbulu and Bussiek 2010, 9). Four privately owned national dailies, which are relatively popular among the Nigerian reading public, were sampled for this study. Most newspaper organisations in Nigeria have their headquarters in Lagos, South-West Nigeria, and three of the four included in this study fall into this category. The newspapers are: *The Punch*, a family-owned media organisation with headquarters in Lagos; *Vanguard*, owned by Vanguard Media Limited with headquarters in Lagos and established by a journalist; and the *Guardian* owned by Guardian Newspapers Limited with headquarters in Lagos. The fourth, *Nigerian Tribune*, is Nigeria’s oldest surviving private newspaper established by the first Premier of Nigeria’s Western region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and is headquartered in Ibadan, a city in the South-West of Nigeria.

The ethnography, which was conducted between April 2012 and April 2013, involved about 125 journalists, whose identities remain anonymous in line with the ethical approval obtained for this study. The journalists interviewed were selected using purposive and snowball sampling, where journalists were asked who they thought it would be valuable to interview next. All participants in the study also use new digital technologies accessed either through their newsrooms or via personal mobiles or Blackberry smartphones or a combination of both. This was a necessary criterion for ensuring that those who actively use digital technologies in carrying out their duties took part in the study.

The interviews were conducted at various locations, including the newsrooms, editors’ offices, and online journalists’ offices<sup>2</sup> and the staff refectories. Included among the semi-structured interviews were questions about whether alternative journalistic practices were impacting on the way journalists carry out their institutional routine, how reports from alternative media sites were judged newsworthy and included in reporting the elections of 2011, and whether they agreed with notions that alternative media should be networked into the mainstream media. The interviews were transcribed, analysed and coded into themes.

Observations for this study occurred primarily in daily-section newsrooms of the four newspapers. Additional observation took place in the weekend newsroom of *Nigerian Tribune* and refectories of *The Punch* and *Vanguard*. Evidence that “African journalists have not shied away from exploiting digital technology in sourcing news and information” (Mudhai 2011, 681) was also gleaned from the observations since the mobile phone (and particularly Blackberry) was an evident and ubiquitous tool which journalists used in news sourcing (see also Mabweazara 2011). In the following sections, I explore emerging trends in the studied newsrooms and how mainstream journalists incorporated UGC in reporting the elections of 2011.

## Covering Nigeria's 2011 Elections: UGC and Journalists' Dilemmas

Nigerian journalism, it has been argued, has played instrumental roles in the transition to civil rule (Agbese 2006; Dare 2011; Olukotun 2004), especially with the guerrilla journalism activities during the 1990s. However, with the influx of new information and communication technologies which made audience participation and engagement remarkable during the elections of 2011, mainstream journalists, according to one *Tribune* reporter, had to actively engage with "new" digital technologies in order to "be on top of information" from various polling stations:

As journalists ..., we were asked to sign up for Facebook and Twitter accounts in the run-up to the elections so that we could easily monitor what people were posting on social media. But we still had to verify these stories because in Nigeria, people like to blow events out of proportion.

In reporting the elections of 2011, UGCs posted on various alternative media sites served as "leads" for the mainstream journalists who still had to verify such information from official sources. In the words of a senior journalist at *Tribune*:

The trend during the election was that people posted different results. Ten people from the same polling station usually had varying reports but we had to wait for the official reports from INEC [Independent National Electoral Commission, Nigeria's electoral body] before we published such information.

The presence of election reports on alternative media sites also meant that Nigerian journalists did not necessarily have to be physically present at all the electoral polling stations to know what was happening. They could remain at their offices and act as "verifiers" and news aggregators:

The activities of ordinary citizens who were tweeting from various polling stations, updating their Facebook pages as well as those who posted blog posts really augmented our roles as journalists. It helped widen the scope of our reports and gave it more depth, especially considering that there were many areas that we could not physically send a reporter to. We simply had to confirm and verify the stories from the official sources.

This comment reveals how the presence of alternative journalism is reshaping the practices of Nigerian journalism with regards to the pool of information sources available to draw from. It also signals how journalists sometimes resist including "alternative voices" while preferring to leave the *status quo* unchallenged.

For mainstream Nigerian journalists, reporting the elections of 2011 posed several challenges, especially with regards to obtaining comments on the true picture of events as the elections progressed because the official sources who ought to make such information available are "constantly seeking to control information flow for the benefit of the ruling elite" (Eti 2012, 24). The fear of libel suits and litigation is also a dilemma that mainstream journalists in Nigeria contend with when incorporating information from alternative media sites into their reports. A senior editor at *Tribune* explains:

According to a law by the Federal government, we cannot publish election results until they have been confirmed by INEC. Although we had a lot of people sending us pictures of anomalies at various polling stations, we couldn't risk just publishing anything that was posted online. Being a registered corporate body we can be sued for misleading the public if we just go by whatever we find on alternative media platforms.



Issues of media ownership leading to journalists' adoption of self-censorship again influenced how mainstream Nigerian journalists appropriated reports from alternative media sites into their coverage of the elections of 2011. A journalist from *Vanguard* articulates how this challenge played out during the elections:

Many people used their mobile phones to capture scenes of how the elections went in their constituencies. But there were some occasions where even after our colleague on the ground had verified such reports, our bosses advised against using the report because "you can't bite the finger that feeds you". This remains a serious challenge to our profession because even with the passing of the FOI Act<sup>3</sup> the sponsors and owners [of mainstream media] still determine what gets through.

This comment thus presents some of the issues Nigerian journalists contend with such as proprietorial interference that limits what journalists are allowed to report even when the data to support such reports are available. It also reveals that the adoption of new information and communication technologies in Nigerian newsrooms is localised based on the cultural context.

Notwithstanding the dilemmas which the presence of alternative journalism content posed for Nigerian journalists in the coverage of the elections of 2011, some of the newspapers solicited for UGC to be posted to a section of their websites dedicated to election monitoring. *Vanguard's* online news report for 2 April 2011, the day that the elections were initially scheduled to begin, for example, had its headline as "Today's Election: What's Happening in Your Area?" *Vanguard* 2011. This is in direct contrast to what journalists traditionally do, in that instead of "reporting" the election, the news text goes on to say "Vanguard invites you to be part of today's history by telling the world what is happening in your area as Nigerians vote today". This direct invitation for the audience and other "writer-gatherers" (Couldry 2010), to become part of the news production process by "post[ing] news, photos and videos of elections or events they find interesting for the world to see at Vanguard's highly interactive community" bears testimony to the narrative that the proliferation of new digital technologies has made journalists become "gatewatchers" together with everyone else (Bruns 2008).

*The Punch's* online news text of 10 April 2011, the day after the start of the elections of 2011 which began with the national assembly election, opens with the headline "The Facebook, Twitter Election" (Ogunseye 2011). The most obvious part of this headline is its allegory. The previous day's national assembly election is here described not as a typical Nigerian election but as one where social media played defining roles. The election is also framed in this news text as though it was organised and carried out on social networking sites as the writer of the news text explained: "The tweets, Facebook updates, Skype messages and pictures that voters exchanged via emails and mobile phones gave [INEC] addresses of the polling booths, the locations, the number of people who ... voted and the votes that each party won". The reporter further noted that "while it is too early ... to measure the role ... the new media are likely to exert on the results..." (emphasis added). Here, citizens' use of alternative media is celebrated as being responsible for tasks such as successful vote counting and other activities which constitutionally fall within the ambits of the electoral commission. Running through this text are direct quotes from alternative media sources which are used to create an impression of the mainstream's inclusion of "unofficial" news sources, thus revealing a smokescreen shift in the institutional



practices of Nigerian journalism. As such, the power structures inherent within the text, with reference to choice of news sources, emphasise the audience as shaping the media agenda in this text. Ross (2007, 466) points out that “who is asked to speak in the news, as well as what the news is, says crucially important things about whose voice counts, who has status in the society”.

However, the voices represented in the news texts analysed above might not necessarily be reflective of an inclusive media as market forces played critical roles in the ways UGC was incorporated into the Nigerian media’s coverage of elections of 2011. Jodi Dean’s concept of communicative capitalism which “designates that form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communication technologies” (Dean 2008, 104), aptly captures the scenario that played out in the ways mainstream journalists appropriated UGC in reporting the elections of 2011. A senior editor at *Vanguard* explained:

During the elections, we had a number of interactive reports on our website, and invited the audience to tell us what was going on in their areas. We did that deliberately because those are some of the stuffs that drive traffic to our website and advertisers will only advertise based on the value of the traffic. At the end of the day, the interaction between us and the audience was simply part of the “gizmo” [*sic*] to drive traffic to our website [and was not necessarily to voice the voiceless]. The in-thing during the elections was that everyone had something to say and we decided to hone in on that.

This raises a relevant point about how the economies of scale and the need for privately owned media organisations to remain afloat impact on the way UGC is appropriated in the mainstream media. These findings also reveal that despite UGC constituting a part of the mainstream media’s coverage of the elections of 2011, the narrative that the “self-image [of journalists] has been thoroughly shaken”, as Bogaerts and Carpentier (2013, 60) argue, might not necessarily be the case in Nigeria. Journalists in Nigeria generally see themselves as the “society’s truth-teller[s]” (McNair 1998, 65). As the online news editor at the *Guardian* notes, “You still have to look out for newsworthy tweets and filter it out to report what is news. That’s what we did during the elections”.

### **Journalism-on-the-go: When the Present is the Deadline**

Although technological convergence is evident in Nigerian newsrooms in that all the four media organisations visited had computers connected to the internet, other socio-economic implications are evident. Findings from this study reveal that journalists in Nigeria are not only adapting to the changes that the presence of “alternative” media sources in the form of UGC introduce, but are also competing with “alternative” media practitioners in being the first to break news. A senior editor at *The Punch* explained:

Things are a lot more dynamic now and alternative media is really putting us on our toes in that we too want to be the first to break news. Sometimes we change our cover story up to four times before going to press because we want to be sure that we beat all our competitors to it. One of the greatest challenges facing us as journalists

is that our profession is becoming “journalism-on-the-go”; producing restaurant-style food at the speed of flipping burgers at a fast-food joint. We are still serving the same menu but the timing is now very different if we are to remain relevant in these times. You can run a reaction to what has been trending on social media. The challenges that reporters grapple with are now much more complex than they used to be before.

This quote reveals some of the dilemmas which Nigerian journalists face with the presence of digital technologies, forcing them to embrace dynamism in order to remain sustainable. It also shows how journalists continue to contest their hegemonic presence as “the nation’s social conscience”, to use Olukotun’s (2002, 318) words, in the face of other platforms which also provide newsworthy information.

Observations at newsrooms also revealed some emerging trends in the way Nigerian journalists practise their trade. Whereas traditionally journalists would go to their beats, follow up stories and in some cases contact the official sources relevant to the story via fixed lines or more recently via mobile phones (either through phone calls or text messages), the presence of alternative media sites has added another dimension to the news beats which Nigerian journalists visit as part of their daily routine. As was explained by a senior editor at the *Guardian*:

When I get to the newsroom every day, I have a list of about five alternative media outlets whose websites I visit first thing in the morning as soon as I resume for the day to see what the buzz is. I check Sahara reporters, Premium times Nigeria, Huhuonline, Pointblank news and Elendu reports to see some of the stories they are following. These alternative media sites usually have scoops which I can then assign a reporter to work on during the day.

This again raises the point that the working routines of mainstream journalists are being reshaped by the presence of alternative media. Journalists now not only have to attend to their various news beats, but also have to monitor alternative media sites as both competitors and news-lead-providers, in a bid to produce newsworthy content as well as report what is happening off- and online.

For mainstream Nigerian journalists, the meaning of deadline and production time have changed drastically in that the presence of UGC, just clicks away, means that the present is the deadline. Rather than the traditional freedom of waiting 24 hours before a story is updated, mainstream journalists in Nigeria increasingly find themselves struggling to keep up with immediacy “because there is too much information online ... so you have to zero in from a particular point” (reporter, *The Punch*).

Observations also showed that sports journalists gleaned more information from social networking sites, which have become new news beats, in writing their stories than journalists on other desks. From following sportsmen and women on Twitter to gleaning reports from other mainstream sports website, a sports reporter at *The Punch* explained:

I depend on social media a lot in writing my stories and we have the advantage of packaging and making stories fuller. I follow most footballers on Twitter and set up Google alerts to monitor what the sportsmen, especially footballers, are saying. For instance, in covering [Peter] Odemwingie’s saga at West Bromwich football club, I monitored his tweets to get his reactions. Most times, these footballers tweet what they think of the next game or why they didn’t win a game *as such not being at my Twitter beat will mean missing a big story*. (emphasis added)

This finding reveals another emerging practice in Nigerian newsrooms where journalists do not necessarily have to physically interview news sources but can glean comments made on their social network pages and pass such on as news. While this practice may bridge the gap of access to some news sources, it might make journalists susceptible to publishing falsehood in instances where the source's online account has been hacked.

### **Alternative Journalism and Nigeria's Mainstream Media: Connecting the Dots**

The presence of various alternative journalistic practices has led to calls that professional journalists and Rosen's (2006) people-formerly-known-as-the-audience, should collaborate in the news production process, fostering the idea of a networked media ecology. This study, however, revealed that mainstream Nigerian journalism regards alternative media practices as competition and would rather not collaborate in the ways networked journalism scholars advocate where "publics acting as creators, investigators, reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors of news and where all variety of media, amateurs and professional, corporate and independent products and interests intersect at a new level" (Russell 2011, 1). The gates are still very high in Nigerian newsrooms, not only in terms of audience inclusion in reporting but also in terms of who is allowed on their premises. At *The Punch*, the news editor and other senior journalists had a closed-door management meeting which lasted almost three hours during the fieldwork for this study. The editor later briefed this researcher that they were discussing strategies of maximising their website to drive more useful traffic which advertisers will pay for. He also mentioned that they were becoming worried at the way some of their stories were published on alternative media sites and blogs without attribution.

Observation during this study revealed that some traditional structures remain. At the four newsrooms where ethnography for this study was conducted, some traditional practices remain. Editorial conferences, where about 7–10 senior editors came together to discuss the stories that made it to the pages of their competitors as well as typographical errors in the day's edition, were held daily. News story ideas which can be developed in future editions are also collaboratively discussed during these editorial conferences. This suggests that news production is still very much a collaborative effort in a bid to ensuring that all information published has been thoroughly verified.

So in spite of the activities of alternative media practitioners, mainstream media journalists in Nigeria still hold very strongly to their traditional institutional practices. A senior editor at *The Punch* explains:

The presence of alternative journalism practices doesn't translate into more openness or press freedom. Government officials complain about how people use social media and, if they have their way, they would regulate freedom online. In recent times, for instance, top government officials complain about how people use social media and have called for censoring. We are always trying to be careful that in incorporating materials from alternative media sites, we don't become tools in the hands of rumour peddlers.

This reveals that the potential of alternative media for media democratisation in Nigeria has yet to be achieved. Being a country where many subtle interests are likely to be parts of the agenda of alternative media practitioners, mainstream journalists still exercise caution in incorporating reports from alternative sites.

Newsroom observation at *Vanguard* again revealed that institutional routines of breaking leaks to readers may not necessarily be eluding mainstream journalists in the wake of Assange's WikiLeaks. The following scenario offers an illustration:

It's 1710 hrs. A scoop about explosives found buried in the house of a politician in Kaduna state [a Northern Nigerian state] has just come through via a Blackberry message. The deputy editor puts a call through from the Lagos headquarters to the mobile phone of the correspondent in Kaduna state asking him to verify the story and to send photographs of the site. The Kaduna correspondent had not heard about the story before the call from the deputy editor and promises to investigate. The newsroom becomes very rowdy and noisy as reporters who have gone out on assignments return to hand in their stories. The sub-desk reporters continue planning other pages, while the cover and page 3 await findings about the explosives. Other editors too make frantic calls to out-station correspondents to send in their stories so they can be approved and the pages planned. Frustration rises too especially when the editorial content for the next edition had not been approved by the editor. In the midst of this chaos, the deputy news editor remains on the phone to the correspondent in Kaduna and is monitoring other newspaper websites to see if they had posted any information about the explosives. The online editor is not permitted to share it as breaking news on the website yet. And the scoop paid off, only *Vanguard* had the story on its front page the following day. (Notes from newsroom observation at *Vanguard*, 6 March 2013)

These findings show that in spite of the exposés which alternative media break, mainstream journalists still stick to their professional journalistic routines of fact-checking and verification before publishing stories. Evidence from the observations also revealed emerging news cultures where UGC is appropriated to become part of the mainstream. For instance, at the time of the researcher's fieldwork at *The Punch* newspaper, the organisation had six weeks earlier launched a new page in its print edition called *i-punch* where latest trends on social media were reported and the reactions of selected Nigerians got published. The *Punch* reporter in charge of this page noted that "alternative media in Nigeria is a competition and *the mainstream media too had to keep up with that challenge*" (emphasis added). Asked whether alternative media is redefining journalism practices in Nigeria, a senior editor noted:

Alternative media have only come to complement the existing structures in Nigerian media. There's still this traditional attachment to newspapers in Nigeria. Nigerians still have the attachment to printed matter and some advertisers still prefer to advertise in physical newspapers. Alternative media has also provided the means for us as journalists to uphold the integrity of our reportage because people still want to check that what they have read on alternative media platforms is the truth.

Although mainstream journalists in Nigeria claim to "uphold integrity in [their] reportage", issues of self-censorship remain an impediment to being the society's watchdog. A reporter at *Vanguard* commented on the challenge journalists in Nigeria face in terms of being restricted on what they can report:

Most funding come from the corridors of power and *you cannot afford to bite the finger that feeds you*. No media organisation in Nigeria can claim to survive on circulation funds because the bulk of adverts still come from the government. As such, even when there are reports on alternative media about the government, which may be true, we still apply self-censorship because we can be sued for using such stories. (emphasis added)

Market forces make for self-censorship on the part of the journalists and the poor remuneration of journalists, as Mabweazara's (2010) study of Zimbabwean journalists revealed, is also prevalent in Nigeria. In the words of Oso (2012, 33) this has "seriously whittled down any form of commitment to professionalism among journalists. It has also made the news making process so porous that it is very easy for parochial interests in political society to penetrate the news columns".

## Conclusion

This study has shown that the permeation of new information and communication technologies as well as the presence of alternative journalisms in Nigeria may not necessarily be re-wiring journalistic structures in Nigeria. However, the institutional practices of mainstream journalists are being challenged. Since hegemony is never complete, journalists continue to contest their space in the mediascape by going beyond just breaking news to providing more in-depth and interpretive reports. As was the case during the elections of 2011, Nigerian journalists sought out ways to maximise profits in the ways they incorporated UGC into their coverage of the elections. As such, the presence of alternative journalisms is making mainstream Nigerian journalism rethink its business models.

In the words of an assistant news editor at *The Punch*, "we are maximising all platforms so that we will still remain sustainable in the face of alternative media". Despite the availability of the internet and computers in all the newsrooms sampled for this study, Nigerian journalists still hold on to their traditional structures of holding editorial conferences where every participant was physically present. Although journalists are increasingly adapting UGC to mainstream reporting, these inclusions were mostly negotiated to suit the interests of the media organisations as well as fit into established news-making practices.

Another key finding of this study is the centrality of local context factors in shaping and constraining how UGC is appropriated in the newsrooms studied. Issues of proprietorial interference, for instance, has led to a culture of censoring discourses from alternative media sources in order to avoid slighting advertisers and funding which mostly comes from the corridors of power.

This study concludes that despite dominant narratives suggesting mainstream journalism faces extinction with the presence of digital technologies which fuel alternative media, Nigeria's mainstream media is adapting to these changes by appropriating these supposed threats to economic advantage.

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## NOTES

1. Nduka Irabor and Tunde Thompson were two print journalists working for the *Guardian* newspaper who were imprisoned during Muhammadu Buhari's regime in 1984 for publishing an investigation about missing funds in the petroleum ministry (Ojebode 2011).
2. The journalists in charge of the newspapers' websites at *The Punch* and *Guardian* had their desks in separate offices from the newsroom. This I was told during one of the interviews, was to "facilitate better concentration" in monitoring alternative media sites (online journalist, *Guardian*).
3. Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act was passed into law in 2011.

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# Challenging hegemonic media practices: Of 'alternative' media and Nigeria's democracy

Motilola Olufenwa Akinfemisoye

## Abstract

The Nigerian press has played a significant role as a public watchdog, but the proliferation of new information technologies poses the question: Is journalism in Nigeria under threat and increasingly becoming a networked activity? This article interrogates the extent to which the collaboration between professional journalists and 'the-people-formerly-known-as-the-audience' is influencing institutional journalistic practices in Nigeria. Using the Occupy Nigeria protests, this study employs a combination of an ethnographic approach utilising semi-structured interviews and newsroom observations and critical discourse analysis of news texts to investigate whether other forms of 'alternative' journalism are creating shifts in the balance of power between professional journalists and the audience.

**Keywords:** alternative media, ethnographic approach, information technologies, journalistic practices, Nigerian press, Occupy Nigeria

## Introduction

Other forms of alternative media ... present challenges to mainstream journalism,  
 they challenge the exclusive authority and expertise of professional journalists

– Atton 2007, 17

On 1 January 2012, the Nigerian government announced the removal of the fuel subsidy, resulting in a 120 per cent increase in the pump price of petrol per litre. This announcement kindled unprecedented days of protests, the first of their kind, in many cities across Nigeria. Citizens of Africa's most populous country and the largest producer of crude oil not only took to the streets of major towns and cities, but also *occupied* the social media trending on the #Occupy Nigeria hashtag on Twitter, as well as on Facebook, among other social networking sites and blogs. Compared to the Arab Spring, the Occupy Nigeria protests did not last as long, but will not be forgotten in a hurry. Dubbed 'Nigeria's Harmattan' (Ifejika 2012), Nigerians were not only reacting

to the removal of the fuel subsidy, but were also calling for an end to the paradoxical existence of about 70 per cent of the country's citizens who, despite living in an oil-rich nation, subsist below the poverty line. These protests were not only tweeted and facebooked, but were also reported by Nigeria's mainstream media and the global media.

For some observers, Occupy Nigeria became a litmus test to check whether Nigerians could replicate what happened in Tunisia and Egypt. But Occupy Nigeria, unlike the Occupy movements associated with Hardt, Negri or Graeber's schools of thought and which have roots in Leftist politics, was not an attack on capitalism. Rather, it represented the appropriation of symbols which were subsequently localised to meet local demands. Occupy Nigeria protested against the political situation in Nigeria at a time when many saw the increase in the pump price of fuel as a way of furthering the prevailing economic hardship. Can it therefore be said that the Internet provided avenues for Nigerians to challenge dominant discourses on how the Occupy Nigeria protests were reported? Is there evidence that the Internet may help Nigeria actualise its democratisation project? Many academics regard the Internet as having the potential to take over the role of the press, dethrone autocratic governments, and advance the course of democracy (Megenta 2011, 7). While some argue that new media can play significant roles in sustaining democracy, others opine that new media and democracy remain strange bedfellows. Moyo (2010), for instance, provides empirical evidence from the 2008 Zimbabwean elections to suggest that the new media facilitate democracy by acting as 'monitors of democracy'. Loader and Mercea (2011, 758), however, question whether claims about the Internet's democratic potentials 'offer new opportunities for challenging dominant discourses and privileged positions of power'. Sunstein (2001) concurs that having the audience report their versions of reality will result in them consuming only those stories they want to see or hear. He notes that the Internet and all forms of 'alternative' news production wreak havoc on democracies. Fenton (2008, 238), too, advances this argument by pointing out that although the Internet offers a space for mobilisation, its potential to encourage democracy 'is not dependent on its primary features of interactivity, multiplicity and polycentrality, which are often celebrated and heralded as offering intrinsic democratic benefit'.

In discussing the media scene in Nigeria *vis-à-vis* the activities of 'alternative' journalisms, a cursory look at how it evolved and where it stands today is pertinent. The history of the Nigerian press predates the country's political history, which started with the birth of the *Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba* in 1859. Subsequently established newspapers took a nationalist stance against the colonial powers until 1960, when Nigeria gained independence from Britain. Thereafter, the government-owned media became extended mouthpieces for government agendas, but the newspapers – which were largely privately owned – continued to champion the rights of all Nigerians.

By the early 1990s the broadcast media sector was deregulated, which meant that more players could join the media stage. Although the deregulation marked a turning point in the history of the Nigerian press, it did not take long for the military regime to clamp down on the activities of journalists, with the promulgation of anti-press

freedom decrees such as the *Nigerian Press Council Decree* No. 85 of 1992 and the *Newspapers Decree* No. 43 of 1993. In his book, *Guerrilla journalism: Dispatches from the underground*, Sunday Dare chronicles what he, as a journalist and newspaper editor during the 1990s, along with his colleagues, went through during the military regimes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, when many were imprisoned without trial and some went into exile. In the face of repressive promulgations, and the assassination and imprisonment of journalists (especially between 1995 and 1998), the media made tortuous progress when Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999. The local media, like their counterparts in other African countries, are ‘among the forces that have shaped and continue to define the establishment of democracy’ (Tettey 2001, 5). But with the presence of ‘alternative’ journalisms, would any counter-hegemonic discourses be useful in actualising Nigeria’s democratisation project? This article seeks to examine whether any collaboration between professional journalists and the ‘people-formerly-known-as-the-audience’, as advocated by certain scholars, is possible in Nigeria’s media sector and whether it will influence journalistic institutional practices. Using the Occupy Nigeria protests as an empirical example, this article questions whether or not journalists’ reporting on the protests via tweets and other ‘alternative’ media platforms opened traditional journalistic gates through such reports from ‘other’ channels. Did that facilitate a discourse that was counter-hegemonic to those the media were used to framing?

### Locating the Nigerian press within journalism literature on new media

The Nigerian media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, like elsewhere, are said to be in a significant phase of transformation, with vast quantities of information readily available to audiences. The concomitant changes in the news production process have received substantial academic attention (Deuze 2008; Fenton 2009; Heinrich 2011; McNair 2006; Russell 2011). Media scholars have argued that journalism is currently experiencing a level of transformation not seen since the emergence of the press in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In Nigeria, the widespread availability and adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) tools such as the Internet, personal computers and mobile phones, among others, has led to ‘alternative’ journalisms emerging. A recent survey showed that in December 2011, Nigeria had approximately 45 million Internet users in a population of 160 million (i.e. 28% of the population), compared to 200 000 users (0.16%) in 2000 (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2012). The adoption of mobile telephony has similarly been instrumental in this transformation. Of the 649 million subscribers in Africa by the end of 2011, 93 million – the highest number in Africa – were Nigerians, and technology experts predict that the figure will continue to rise (BBC News, 9 November 2011). With social networking sites, blogs and mobile phones providing alternative platforms for discourse about governance and social issues (affecting the citizenry in Nigeria as well as in other countries around the world), scholars concede that journalists operate in difficult times and that the profession is undergoing ‘an identity crisis’ (Allan 2005, 1; Anderson and Weymouth et al. 2007, 17). Without necessarily

being a technological determinist, this author suggests that the events which shook the political elite of North Africa, the worldwide Occupy protests and especially the Occupy Nigeria protests investigated here, suggest that citizens now use new media in ways that have made ‘gatewatchers’ (Bruns 2008) of the audience and professional journalists, as they collectively monitor ‘breaking’ news.

Thus, academic debates argue whether ‘alternative media have provided new spaces for alternative voices ... that provide for specific community interests’ (Silverstone 1999, 103). The discourse focuses on those technological innovations which are not only challenging journalism, but are also making the media converge online, where the demarcations between print, radio and television are blurring. For some scholars, Rosen’s (2006) ‘the-people-formerly-known-as-the-audience’ have become nodes in a network structure that is impacting on the news production process (Barney 2004) and challenging the roles of journalists working in the mainstream media. Others argue that the social media are facilitating a paradigm shift in the practise of journalism. Domingo (2011, xv) remarks that ‘social networks have become a source, a promotional space and an interaction opportunity between journalists and their publics, challenging the boundaries between the professional and the individual persona of reporters’, while Hermida (2012, 1) concedes that ‘open, networked digital media tools challenge the individualistic top-down ideology of traditional journalism’.

Although there is no unanimously agreed-on theory to describe the collaboration between professional journalists and the ‘former-audience’ in the news production process, academics have coined various terms to describe this phenomenon – something which serves as a starting point for this article. It has been variously dubbed ‘ambient journalism’, ‘network journalism’, ‘networked journalism’ and ‘networked-convergent journalism’ (Heinrich 2011; Hermida 2010; Mudhai 2011; Russell 2011). In describing this transformation in journalism, Hermida (2010, 300) notes that ‘ambient journalism presents a multi-faceted and fragmented news experience, marking a shift away from the classical paradigm of journalism’. Fundamentally, these phrases all seem to underscore the relationship between old and new media, mainstream and alternative media – a notable rejection of the binaries that informed older scholarship on the relationship between new and traditional media.

Key thinkers of networked journalism include Jeff Jarvis, Charlie Beckett, Adrienne Russell, Ansgard Heinrich, Jessica Clark and Tracy van Slyke, among others. Russell (2011, 1) notes that networked journalism sees ‘publics acting as creators, investigators, reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors of news and where all variety of media, amateurs and professional, corporate and independent products and interests intersect at a new level’. Beckett (2010, 1) agrees that networked journalism is ‘a synthesis of traditional news journalism and the emerging participatory media enabled by Web 2.0 technologies such as mobile phones, email, websites, blogs, micro-blogging and social networks’. Certain key thinkers (Arntsen 2010; Mudhai, Tettey and Banda 2009; Nyamnjoh 2005) believe that not only is there a link between the new media’s interaction with mainstream media and democracy, but also that new media actually play an important role in Africa’s democratisation project. Benkler (2006) puts forward a similar argument, namely that the Internet can help democracy thrive, in that it affords

citizens the space to interact with one another and to participate in discourses on the public sphere.

Numerous scholars argue, however, that other forms of ‘alternative’ media should not be networked into mainstream media. For Samuel Freedman (2006), ‘citizen journalism does not merely challenge the notion of professionalism in journalism but completely circumvents it ...[and] forms part of a larger attempt to degrade, even disenfranchise journalism as practiced by trained professionals’. He advises against including citizens in the journalistic process, because ‘to congratulate the wannabe with the title “journalist” is only to further erode the line between raw material and the finished product’ (Freedman 2006). Freedman is, however, not alone in his views. Stuart Allan documented the reaction of several journalists and news editors after the July 2005 bombings in London. Their responses showed that they agree journalism is changing, but one interviewee commented that ‘to create an open stream that’s not edited is not to offer readers what we’re here for. We’re editors, and you’ve got to keep that in mind’ (Allan 2007, 17). Greer and McLaughlin (2010) observe that the reports and images gathered by citizens during ‘public protest [which] have the potential to provide dramatic newsworthy’ materials, can be damaging to the status quo. The present study, therefore, sought to find out how Nigerian journalists handled these issues during the Occupy Nigeria protests.

## Methodological approach

In gathering empirical data on what Nigerian professional journalists think of their professions given the proliferation of new media technologies and the consequences such ‘alternative’ journalisms have for Nigeria’s nascent democracy, 36 journalists participated in this study. A combination of an ethnographic approach (using semi-structured interviews with professional journalists working for privately-owned newspapers) was used alongside newsroom observations and critical discourse analysis (CDA) of selected news texts gleaned during the Occupy Nigeria protests from the websites of two leading newspapers in Nigeria: *Punch* and *Vanguard*. Ethnography was deemed appropriate for this study because it provides an avenue for the researcher to have direct contact with the phenomenon being studied. Also, the ‘identity’ crisis which journalism is currently facing means that ‘ethnographies of news production remain as essential as ever for explaining and understanding the complexities involved’ (Cottle 2007, 1). Tedlock (2003, 165) similarly notes that ‘ethnography involves an on-going attempt to place specific encounters, events and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context’. The in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were part of the pilot study for this research, were conducted with four senior journalists who are also editors at four Nigerian newspapers. The newsroom observations were carried out in two newsrooms, to provide a basis for comparing the findings stemming from the interviews.

The newspapers (*Punch*, *Vanguard*, *Nigerian Tribune* and *Guardian*) are privately-owned national dailies with headquarters in two major Nigerian cities: Lagos, often referred to as Nigeria’s commercial hub, and Ibadan, regarded as the political headquarters of South West Nigeria (Lawal 2011). Participants were selected purposively on



the basis of their journalistic experiences in terms of years on the job and professional rank. For this study, senior reporters who are also editors were sampled. Interviewing them thus provided an opportunity for the researcher to draw from the participants' wealth of experience in terms of what used to be the norm in the news production process, and the changes they now experience with the presence of new media technologies. The study sought to investigate whether or not institutional journalistic practices, in terms of news production and distribution, were still intact or had been abandoned – especially with reference to coverage of the Occupy Nigeria protests. The fieldwork was carried out between March and April 2012 – a time when security concerns about the activities of Boko Haram topped Nigeria's agenda. Subsequent events took their toll on the media, with the bombing of *ThisDay* newspaper's headquarters in Abuja in April 2012.

Further to the responses obtained during the interviews and what was observed in the newsrooms, analysis of news texts using CDA was carried out to examine whether or not the inclusion of alternative journalism materials came anywhere near challenging the existing power dynamics of the news production process.

CDA as a method of textual analysis has different approaches: the social-psychological approach (Wetherell and Potter) examines 'social psychological issues through the studying of the use of language' (Antaki et al. 2003, 2). Van Dijk, on the other hand, combines the social and cognitive approaches to CDA. He argues for the 'sociocognitive study of the reproduction of power abuse by discourse' (discourse.org 2009). For Fairclough (2010, 3), CDA's approach to analysing text is three-pronged: 'it is relational, it is dialectical, and it is transdisciplinary'. Taking this argument further is Richardson (2007, 37) who notes that 'Fairclough's model of CDA ... provides a more accessible method of doing CDA than alternative theoretical approaches'. He argues that 'CDA approaches discourse as a circular process in which social practices influence texts ... and in turn texts help influence society via shaping the viewpoints of those who ... consume them' (Richardson 2007, 37).

Analysing texts using CDA also allows for the exploration of 'questions of power' in that 'power and ideologies may have an effect on each of the contextual levels' (Titscher et al. 2000, 151). Power in the context of this article refers to the institutional journalistic authority journalists exert in the news production process and, as such, examining how this played out in coverage of the Occupy Nigeria protests is germane to a reading of whether or not alternative journalisms were able to challenge hegemonic discourses within mainstream journalism.

## Towards counter-hegemony or media predominance?

As Gramsci (1971, 12) notes, hegemony is consent which is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production'. The practise of journalism in Nigeria, as in most countries in the world, gives rise to a version of hegemonic discourse in that 'journalism does not operate outside ideology and hegemony but is deeply embedded within them' (Carpentier and Cammaerts 2007, 966). It is therefore

germane to understand how journalists in Nigeria perform their institutional roles of being the Fourth Estate, especially with regard to the coverage of the fuel-subsidy-removal protests, and to unpack how power is contested and implicated in the news narrative.

### The voices behind the pen

As already noted, the mainstream media in Nigeria continue to shape the country's democracy. Newspaper organisations in particular, although being more commercially oriented than independent (Tettey 2001), assume an anti-government standpoint in their news coverage, and a commercial outlook in order to attract advertisers. As such, the disposition of journalists working for newspapers tilts more towards the political economy, and this is evident in the way they covered the Occupy Nigeria protests. A senior journalist interviewed at *Punch* newspaper commented:

*New media has opened up new frontiers and has made us as journalists more aware that the audience is very much interested in understanding Nigeria's political situation. During the Occupy Nigeria protests, I sent out journalists to various 'squares' where the protests were taking place. They spoke with the protesters and that served as a scoop for us to do more interpretive journalism. That resulted into more sales for our newspaper because many people wanted to understand why the government decided to remove the fuel subsidy.*

Coverage of the activities of 'alternative' journalism practitioners during the Occupy Nigeria protests had economic implications for the mainstream media. Citizen engagement during the protests was not merely about Nigerians finding their 'voice' as citizens in a democratic dispensation; rather, the mainstream media viewed citizens' engagement with social media and other 'alternative' platforms as a commodity to be 'marketised'. An editor at *Guardian* explained:

*The Occupy Nigeria protests provided an opportunity for us as a newspaper organisation to include the audience in our coverage. Dedicating an entire page to publish the views of our readers during the fuel subsidy removal meant that many of them not only bought copies of our newspaper but also told their friends to. We saw this inclusion as a way of widening the gates and giving our readers a sense of belonging. Our coverage of the Occupy protests took a 'newszine' format which made it more interesting and appealing for people to read.*

Jodi Dean's (2008, 104) notion of communicative capitalism aptly captures this scenario. She notes that 'communicative capitalism designates that form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communication technologies'. Also buttressing the fact that journalists in recent times have adopted an interpretive style of reporting, Salgado and Stromback (2012, 146) note that 'interpretive journalism is journalism driven by themes ... reducing journalists to carriers and amplifiers of sources' messages'.

Journalists working for newspaper organisations identify with the impact the other 'alternative' media exert on their institutional practices. A senior journalist at the *Vanguard* disclosed:



*New media is the in-thing and everyone seems to be catching up with it. This is impacting on our journalistic practices especially in the way we report because we can't afford to report a story that has already flooded Facebook, Blackberry messenger as breaking news. New media is putting us on our toes more than anything because by the time our newspaper has gone to bed, a major story might have broken. However, alternative journalisms are helping to promote freedom of information in Nigeria by offering various platforms for news reporting. During the protests against fuel subsidy removal for instance, we incorporated reports from the people at the scenes of protests.*

The journalists interviewed also expressed an understanding of their functions within Nigeria's nascent democracy. Asked whether the 'alternative' media are negotiating spaces within the mainstream media, an editor at the *Nigerian Tribune* responded:

*Alternative media can only break the news while the mainstream media has the space, which for instance Twitter doesn't, to furnish the audience with information. Journalists were at an advantage during the protests because for many of our readers, the question of credibility and reliability of news sources remains important to them and as such, they would prefer to buy newspapers.*

The tendency for the audience to 'trust' the judgement of journalists working in mainstream media is evident in other countries, with Hermida (2011) stating that 'Canadians still trust mainstream media, despite the rise of social media'. Notwithstanding the decline in newspaper readership which has, for instance, pushed Canadian newspaper *Winnipeg Free Press* to devise other ways of stimulating the interests of young readers (European Journalism Centre 2012), journalists believe that the power structures within the mainstream media in Nigeria remain top-down. A senior reporter at *Punch* explained:

*Many people generalise events happening in the media sectors of other countries as if the situations are the same everywhere. Nigeria is a very peculiar country where many people still do not have access to electricity let alone the Internet. To then say that the activities of 'alternative' media are challenging our positions as professional journalists is baseless. Nigerians still look up to the press for their information needs. That is why journalists have a point of duty to report with integrity in order to strengthen the country's nascent democracy.*

Although journalists still follow institutional practices, the activities of other 'alternative' media channels still impact on how media agendas are framed and pursued. While they claim that alternative journalisms are simply 'complementary to what we do as journalists' (Fieldnotes from interviews, 2012), some junior reporters were charged with monitoring the different social networking sites so that they could identify newsworthy trends which might serve as scoops or pave the way for investigative journalism, thereby appropriating such media into the mainstream. It was also noted that senior journalists had several social networking sites open on their computers soon after arriving at their desks, in a bid to keep up with the plethora of information citizens are privy to. One journalist noted that '[e]veryone is working harder to become more current and be the first to break news', which explains why they have become 'gatewatchers' (to use Brun's term), along with everyone else. The dailies also had Twitter feeds linked to their websites where newsworthy tweets were incorporated into the news production process.

## Unpacking the news texts

The news texts analysed in this study were purposively sampled based on the inclusion of tweets and other citizen reports. A number of discourses are obvious from the selected news texts, and running through them all is an attempt at citizen inclusion in reports. *Vanguard's* online news for 10 January 2012 had the headline: 'Day 2: Citizens report protest across Nigeria.' This suggests that the 'former audience', who traditionally waited on journalists to feed them news reports, were now the ones relaying news about the protests from their locales. This news text also gives the impression that readers are being presented with the 'raw' information of what is happening across Nigeria, as seen through the eyes of 'citizen journalists': 'Nigerians who are either participating in the ongoing protest or who are onlookers sent in firsthand information of the protest as it were in their areas. Excerpts: [sic].' This was followed by reports from 11 'citizen reporters' who sent in their stories from 11 cities across Nigeria. The images and labels which the text uses are noteworthy: Richardson (2007, 49) argues that how 'people are named in news discourse can have a significant impact on the way ... they are viewed'. In this text, other than the by-lines of the individual writers (in some cases, only the writer's first name), they are collectively described as either participating in the ongoing protest or as onlookers. This reinforces the mainstream media's dominance over whose voices can be heard and how those voices are represented. Schudson (2003) observes that media organisations employ certain frames in news reporting that tend to give 'voice' to 'official' sources, and in so doing allow the status quo to go unchallenged.

Although in theory the idea of networked journalism suggests that content from the audience is included in mainstream media news reports, the dominance of the mainstream is still at play. Mumby (1997, 346) concurs that this domination occurs 'precisely in the struggle between various groups over interpretive possibilities and what gets to count as meaningful that the hegemonic dialectic of power and resistance gets played out'.

*Punch*, in its online news of 8 January 2012, pursued a similar path of including snippets from the social media. Published under the headline 'Social media protesters display Jonathan, Mark, others' phone numbers', this news text suggests that journalists understand how social media can be used to mobilise participants during protests (Matheson and Allan 2010, 179). However, Nigerians are here referred to as 'protesters' who have perhaps defied the rules of privacy by 'displaying' the mobile numbers of two key politicians: that of President Goodluck Jonathan and of the Senate President, David Mark. Despite this headline appearing as a way of informing readers about how social media were used during the protests, it suggests subtle disapproval for the act of publishing these numbers, as the text continues: 'These personalities were perceived to either have a hand in the policy or have links with President Goodluck Jonathan.'

*Punch* included tweets in this report, with direct reference to the names of those tweeting: 'one Omodunbi also tweeted, I am something, when I was young I had no shoes but now I eat with N3m every day. What am I?' During the protests the social media were awash with riddles and jokes made by Nigerians trying to find comic relief in the situation. The above quote alludes to the President's suffering as a youngster

without shoes, to the affluent life he enjoys as president, ‘eating’ about three million naira (approx. £12 000) a day. Incorporating this sort of tweet in the news text creates the impression that the newspaper’s editor understands and shares the grievances of the protesters. However, when it comes to actually publishing the supposedly ‘displayed’ telephone numbers, the news text reported thus: ‘President Jonathan switched off his GLO number. This is his Zain line, call him – 080230020\*\* ... Direct Action! Obasanjo rigged himself in, and imposed a sick Yar’Adua and clueless Jonathan. Now we pay for it. Call him on 080550000\*\*# Occupy Nigeria [sic].’ The way in which these tweets are included in the news text reveals more than meets the eye: it reveals the mainstream media’s resistance to Negroponte’s ‘Daily me’ journalism, by censoring the tweets prior to publication and especially by being discreet with the telephone numbers. Including tweets in the news text also reinforces the assumption that ‘editorial independence is both furthered and challenged by the increasing role of real-time publishing through platforms such as Twitter’ (Bradshaw 2011, 14), making it more difficult for journalists to ignore whatever information audience members are sharing amongst themselves. This writer of the news text ended the piece as follows: ‘Abubakar, a Nigerian wrote “Goodluck Jonathan is our new Fuel Haram”.’ Incorporating this particular tweet at a time when the activities of Boko Haram continue to be a security threat, is one example of how the mainstream media create the impression that they have their fingers on the pulse of the citizens, when in fact a critical look at the discourse within the text reveals a leaning towards resistance. Carpentier and Cammaerts (2007, 966) succinctly put it that ‘the journalism profession ... [is] a field of struggle, where the hegemonic values of objectivity, neutrality or detachment are contested by counter-hegemonic journalistic projects’.

As such, the thesis of networked journalism as transcending ‘collaboration between professionals and amateurs’ to bring about ‘a shift in the balance of power between news providers and news consumers’ (Russell 2011, 1–2), can be debated here. Despite newspapers in Nigeria being aware that citizens’ activities cannot be ignored in the news production process, there is still allegiance to the status quo in the way news is reported. Fairclough (1995, 204) aptly paints a picture that the products which the mainstream media sell, are ‘the outcomes of specific professional practices and techniques’.

These news texts generally suggest that Nigerian newspapers, in reporting the Occupy Nigeria protest, provided an illusion or a façade of inclusivity, in order to ‘marketise’ their commodity – the news. They, as producers of news, sought ‘new’ or different angles for marketing what they produce, hoping that it would appeal to the consumers (readers) who, according to one of the journalists interviewed, ‘had a sense of satisfaction seeing their names in print and even encouraged their friends and families to buy the newspaper’, thus boosting sales. Newspaper publishers and editors might therefore not necessarily be inventing ‘a journalism without journalists’, as Deuze and Fortunati (2011, 165) argue, where hierarchies between journalists and ‘the former audience’ are flattening out.

## Conclusion

Despite narratives about the potential of the Internet and particularly the social media being able to help citizens resist the dynamics of news production and dissemination in both government and privately-owned media institutions (Loader and Mercea 2011, 759), the findings discussed above show that this might not necessarily be the case in Nigeria. This study has shown that 'alternative' journalism can negotiate spaces within the mainstream media by providing a 'forced agenda' for them (mainstream media) to run with, as with the *Punch* story. However, the 'alternative' voices might not necessarily produce the dominant discourse, because when they do, they too become part of the problem of having staff to pay, which might imply a dependence on advertisers and politicians, in some cases. Thus, this presents a complex picture of what social media and other 'alternative' journalisms mean for Nigerian's mainstream media and the country's nascent democracy.

Although it was through 'alternative' media platforms that the Occupy Nigeria protests – a first in Nigeria's political history – saw the light of day, celebrating social media as the saviour might be premature. Liking a Facebook posting or tweeting/retweeting a post does not necessarily allude to active citizens' engagement – especially in a country such as Nigeria, where its 28 per cent Internet penetration is reflective of economic and social welfare distribution. The question remains whether networking 'alternative' journalisms within mainstream media will help develop Nigeria's democracy or create new forms of citizenships. The possibilities of Africa – and Nigeria in particular – 'tweet[ing] its way to democracy' remain problematic. This is a topic that requires on-going research.

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