Influence of Smartphone Ownership on the Practice and Growth of Citizen Journalism among Uyo Residents

Ifeanyi Martins Nwokeocha[1], Victoria Udofa Etim[2]

[1]Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

[2]Department of Mass Communication, Paul University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism among residents of Uyo metropolis, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Adopting a descriptive survey design, data were collected through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews administered to adult respondents. Findings reveal near universal smartphone ownership (95.3%), with a substantial proportion of residents (77.5%) engaging in citizen journalism practices such as capturing, sharing, and commenting on news events. WhatsApp (65.2%) and Facebook (57.3%) were identified as the dominant platforms used for dissemination, while major challenges included misinformation, harassment, high internet costs, and concerns over credibility. Statistical analyses confirmed a significant relationship between smartphone ownership and participation in citizen journalism, with education emerging as a strong predictor of engagement. The study concludes that smartphones have democratized news production in Uyo, empowering ordinary citizens to participate actively in the media ecosystem, albeit with persistent ethical and infrastructural challenges. It recommends digital literacy campaigns, affordable internet policies, protective legal frameworks, and collaborations between professional and citizen journalists to enhance credibility and sustainability. This research contributes to scholarship by addressing a notable gap in the literature concerning smartphone-enabled citizen journalism within Uyo, providing both theoretical and practical insights for media policy, governance, and civic empowerment.

Keywords

Smartphone, Ownership, Practice, Citizen Journalism, Uyo

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped how people communicate across the world. Among these innovations, the smartphone stands out as one of the most influential tools of the twenty-first century. Initially designed for voice calls and text messaging, the device has evolved into a multipurpose platform that integrates internet access, multimedia features, and direct links to social media networks [1]. As a result, individuals are no longer confined to being passive consumers of news but can also actively generate, share, and debate information in real time. Recent reports from the Pew Research Centre (2019) confirm that smartphone usage has grown dramatically on a global scale, with Africa experiencing accelerated adoption due to more affordable devices and expanded mobile broadband coverage. This transformation signals a gradual shift from media systems dominated by traditional organizations to a more participatory communication model, where ordinary citizens play significant roles in shaping public discourse [2].

In Nigeria, this trend is especially visible. The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, 2020) indicates that the country is one of Africa's largest mobile markets, with subscriptions exceeding 180 million. Internet penetration, mostly driven by smartphones, has widened citizens' access to news and interactive platforms. At the same time, dissatisfaction with mainstream media has been rising, as they are often accused of political bias, elite influence, and inadequate reporting of grassroots concerns. These shortcomings have created an opportunity for ordinary Nigerians, particularly young people, to embrace smartphones as channels for civic engagement, self-expression, and alternative news production. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (now X) have consequently become central to the citizen journalism movement in the country [3].

Citizen journalism refers to the active involvement of non-professional individuals in the gathering, analysis, and dissemination of news and information. With the aid of smartphones, citizens can document unfolding events instantly and share them widely. This has proven crucial in situations where professional media are constrained by ownership, censorship, or delays in coverage. The #EndSARS protest of 2020 remains a vivid example, where citizen journalists, empowered by their smartphones, played a pivotal role in broadcasting events and mobilizing both domestic and international attention [4]. Such cases demonstrate the disruptive potential of citizen journalism in challenging official narratives and demanding accountability.

Within this global and national trend, Uyo-the capital of Akwa Ibom State-offers a distinct setting for exploring the subject. The city has undergone rapid urban growth, a youth-driven population boom, and increasing access to affordable mobile technology. For many residents, smartphones serve not just as personal devices but also as indispensable tools for information sharing. WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, and community forums in Uyo frequently serve as spaces where local residents exchange updates on security issues, political developments, and everyday happenings. However, the growing popularity of these informal reporting channels has also sparked debates about misinformation, credibility, and the absence of ethical guidelines. This dual reality makes Uyo an important case for understanding how smartphone ownership and citizen journalism intersect, as well as the benefits and risks that come with it.

In summary, this background situates the research within a global shift toward participatory journalism made possible by digital technologies. By focusing on Uyo, the study aims to provide insights into how smartphone ownership affects citizen journalism practices at the local level, and what this means for democratic participation, social accountability, and community empowerment.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

While smartphones provide valuable opportunities for communication and civic participation, they also pose notable challenges. In Uyo, reliance on smartphones has created a vibrant yet unregulated media space where citizen journalists increasingly compete with established media houses [5]. This has diversified news flows, but it has also raised critical questions about accuracy, objectivity, and ethics. Unlike professional journalists, many citizen reporters lack training in news verification, balance, and fairness. Consequently, the public is frequently exposed to misinformation, sensational headlines, and unverified claims. At a time when "fake news" is a growing global concern, this situation threatens trust in information sources and undermines social cohesion.

Moreover, smartphone ownership does not always translate into active participation in citizen journalism. While nearly all residents own smartphones, only a fraction engage in active news reporting or content generation. This uneven involvement raises concerns about the motivations behind participation and the extent to which smartphones are used for civic purposes versus entertainment and private communication.

Another dimension of the problem is the limited scholarly research that focuses explicitly on Uyo. Although citizen journalism has received significant attention at national and African levels, few studies investigate how the practice unfolds in this city with its unique socio-cultural and political dynamics. Without localized evidence, assumptions about citizen journalism in Uyo remain speculative [6]. Hence, this study seeks to provide empirical insight into the relationship between smartphone ownership and citizen journalism in Uyo, the challenges involved, and its broader democratic implications.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research is to investigate the relationship between smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism among residents of Uyo metropolis [7].

The specific objectives are to:

Evaluate how many Uyo residents own smartphones.

Analyze how residents participate in citizen journalism using their smartphones.

Identify the motivations driving residents' participation in smartphone-enabled citizen journalism.

Explore the challenges and ethical issues associated with citizen journalism in Uyo.

Evaluate the implications of smartphone-enabled citizen journalism for local democracy and community empowerment.

1.2.1 Research Questions

What is the extent of smartphone ownership among Uyo residents?

To what degree do Uyo residents practice citizen journalism?

What motivates residents to engage in smartphone-enabled citizen journalism?

What challenges and ethical dilemmas accompany citizen journalism in Uyo?

How does citizen journalism via smartphones contribute to community empowerment and democratic participation in Uyo?

1.2.2 Research Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism among Uyo residents.

H0: There is no significant relationship between smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism among Uyo residents.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conceptual Review

Citizen journalism has become an important trend in today's communication system. It simply means the involvement of ordinary people in reporting news, sharing stories, and analyzing events outside the structures of traditional media. Unlike professional journalism, which follows strict routines and editorial checks, citizen journalism is driven by the availability of digital platforms and the ease of creating user-generated content [8]. This practice reduces the monopoly of mainstream media in controlling public conversations.

In Africa, citizen journalism has grown because of increased access to mobile phones and dissatisfaction with state-owned media. Bosch notes that citizen journalists often report issues that mainstream media ignore, such as protests and grassroots challenges. A striking example is the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, where citizens used smartphones to document police brutality, mobilize support, and challenge government narratives. This shows that citizen journalism not only provides alternative voices but also holds authorities accountable.

However, there are criticisms. Many argue that citizen journalism sometimes promotes misinformation, bias, and unethical practices, since most contributors are not trained in journalism. While it empowers people, it also raises serious concerns about credibility.

2.2 Smartphone Adoption

Smartphone adoption is one of the major factors fueling citizen journalism today. Globally, smartphones are no longer seen as just communication devices but as multipurpose tools with internet, social media, photography, and video capabilities. In sub-Saharan Africa, their use is expanding rapidly due to cheaper devices and growing internet access [9]. Nigeria is among the leaders in this trend. Reports from the Nigerian Communications Commission (2020) confirm that over 90% of Nigerians use mobile phones, with smartphones making up most of the internet connections.

In Uyo, smartphones have become central to how people get news and share information. Beyond social use, residents rely on them to capture live events and broadcast them instantly. Westlund (2015) describes this as "always-on connectivity," which allows users to share unfolding events in real time [10].

Still, access is unequal. While many urban residents can afford smartphones and data, others are excluded because of cost or poor literacy levels. This raises questions of inclusivity and whether smartphone-enabled journalism truly gives everyone a voice, or only those who can afford it.

2.3 Social Media Platforms

Social media provides the main stage for citizen journalists. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok dominate Nigeria's digital environment. Each platform has its own advantage: Facebook is good for broad reach and discussions, WhatsApp supports fast private sharing, Twitter is used for real-time updates, while Instagram and TikTok are more visual and appeal to younger audiences.

In Uyo, WhatsApp and Facebook are the most commonly used platforms for sharing local news. WhatsApp spreads hyperlocal updates within small networks like families or religious groups, while Facebook provides a wider audience for civic discussions. Twitter has also played a role in mobilizing political action, especially during elections and protests [11].

However, social media also encourages the spread of rumours and misinformation. Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) argue that false news travels faster than verified information on these platforms [12]. This makes citizen journalism both powerful and risky, since it can inform or mislead communities at the same time.

2.4 Community Empowerment

Citizen journalism can be seen as a form of community empowerment. It gives ordinary people the chance to raise issues, highlight injustices, and take part in democratic conversations. In Uyo, this is especially relevant because mainstream media often ignore local concerns. Smartphones have enabled residents to bring such matters to the public space [13].

Community empowerment happens in different ways. Informationally, people gain access to alternative perspectives. Socially, communities come together around common challenges. Politically, citizen journalism pressures leaders to take action. For example, during floods and security problems in Uyo, residents have used smartphones to post real-time updates that prompt authorities to respond more quickly.

Still, empowerment is not equal. Those with access to technology and networks are more visible than marginalized groups. This shows that while citizen journalism can strengthen communities, it can also widen existing inequalities [14].

2.5 Ethics and Credibility

One of the biggest challenges in citizen journalism is ethics. Traditional journalists follow principles such as fairness, balance, and verification. Citizen journalists, by contrast, may not have such training and can sometimes spread unverified or sensational reports.

In Nigeria, fake news has been a recurring issue, with citizen journalists often blamed for helping rumours spread. Yet, they are also praised for giving alternative voices where mainstream media is silent [15]. In Uyo, while residents appreciate the speed and accessibility of citizen journalism, they remain cautious about the accuracy of reports. Ethical lapses-like invasion of privacy or use of inflammatory language-can reduce trust and even trigger conflict.

This shows why media literacy and fact-checking are essential if citizen journalism is to remain credible and impactful.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

UGT helps explain why residents of Uyo use smartphones for citizen journalism. The theory argues that people actively choose media to satisfy needs like information, entertainment, and social interaction [16]. In this case, smartphones are not just phones-they are tools for civic participation and self-expression.

3.2 Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DOI)

Rogers (2003) explains how new technologies spread through societies. In Uyo, smartphone adoption can be seen in this way: early adopters encourage others to join, and factors like cost, compatibility, and usefulness determine how fast people adopt them [17]. This theory also explains why not everyone adopts smartphones equally, since socio-economic factors play a big role.

3.3 Democratic Participant Media Theory (DPMT)

McQuail (2010) stresses that media should allow participation, access, and diversity. DPMT challenges the elitist model of communication, where only a few voices dominate. In Uyo, this theory supports the idea that citizen journalism decentralizes information, giving ordinary people the opportunity to contribute to public life [18].

3.4 Empirical Review

Several studies in Africa have shown that smartphones are transforming news production. Bosch (2017) found in South Africa that mobile phones empower youths to bypass traditional media and create their own narratives. Nyabuga and Booker (2013) observed a similar trend in Kenya, where citizen journalism expanded political debates.

In Nigeria, Ufuophu-Biri and Ojoboh (2017) confirmed that smartphones make participatory journalism possible but warned about ethical challenges. Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) showed how Twitter amplified political voices during elections. Oladapo (2021) emphasized its role during #EndSARS, while Ekwueme and Obayi (2012) found that mobile technologies allowed rural dwellers to report issues ignored by mainstream media.

However, challenges remain. Ojebuyi and Adekoya (2019) pointed out the problem of misinformation, while Adeyanju and Haruna (2020) noted that lack of training affects credibility. In Uyo, evidence suggests that WhatsApp and Facebook are popular for local news, but systematic studies are still lacking. This gap justifies the present study.

3.5 Summary and Gap

From the reviewed literature, it is clear that smartphones and citizen journalism are reshaping media landscapes globally and in Africa. Smartphones empower people to share news, while social media platforms provide the means for rapid distribution. Theories like UGT, DOI, and DPMT help explain user motivations, adoption patterns, and democratic implications. Empirical studies confirm the importance of citizen journalism but also highlight problems of ethics and misinformation [19].

However, most studies focus on Nigeria at large, with little attention to Uyo specifically. Given Uyo's fast urban growth, youthful population, and increasing smartphone penetration, it is important to study how residents engage in citizen journalism within this local context. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by focusing directly on Uyo.

4. Research Design

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. A survey design was deemed most appropriate because it enables the researcher to systematically collect data from a representative sample of a population and to describe existing conditions without manipulating variables [20]. The descriptive nature of the study allowed for the identification and measurement of patterns in smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism among residents of Uyo. Such a design is suitable for social research that seeks to document opinions, practices, and attitudes, and it provides a foundation for both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Furthermore, survey research is particularly valuable when studying communication practices in community settings, as it allows respondents to provide insights into their lived realities, which may not be easily observable through experimental or purely qualitative designs.

4.1 Area of the Study

The area of study is Uyo metropolis, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Uyo is a rapidly growing urban centre with a population estimated at over half a million people. The city is characterized by a mix of students, civil servants, business people, and artisans, creating a socially and economically diverse population. Over the last decade, Uyo has experienced significant growth in mobile telecommunication infrastructure and internet connectivity, making it an ideal site for investigating the role of smartphones in citizen journalism. In addition, Uyo is home to various tertiary institutions, which contribute to a vibrant youth population that frequently engages with digital platforms for both entertainment and information sharing [21]. This context provides fertile ground for understanding how smartphones mediate the flow of news and information in a subnational urban setting.

4.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of adult residents of Uyo aged 18 years and above. This choice was informed by the fact that individuals within this age bracket are legally recognized as adults and are more likely to own smartphones, engage with news content, and participate actively in civic communication. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), a significant proportion of Uyo's population falls within the youth and young adult categories, which aligns with research suggesting that young people are the most active adopters of mobile technologies and social media platforms [22]. The accessible population therefore included men and women from diverse occupational backgrounds such as students, professionals, traders, and artisans residing in the metropolitan area.

4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size for this study was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The formula is expressed as: $n = \dfrac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population, and e is the level of precision. Applying this formula ensured that the sample size was adequate and representative of the target population. To enhance representativeness, the study employed a stratified random sampling technique. The stratification was based on geographical areas within Uyo metropolis and socio-demographic characteristics such as age and gender. Stratified sampling was chosen to ensure that subgroups within the population were proportionately represented, thereby increasing the generalizability of the findings [23].

5. Research Instruments

Two primary instruments were used for data collection: structured questionnaires and key informant interviews.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed with both closed-ended and Likert-scale items to capture quantitative data. It was divided into sections covering socio-demographics, smartphone ownership, patterns of citizen journalism practice, perceived challenges, and the impact of such practices on community life. Questionnaires were chosen for their efficiency in gathering data from a large sample within a short time frame.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): In addition to the questionnaires', semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected informants such as local journalists, community leaders, and media practitioners. These interviews provided qualitative depth, enabling the researcher to capture nuanced perspectives that complemented the quantitative findings. The combination of instruments allowed for methodological triangulation, thereby improving the validity of the research.

5.1 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the **validity** of the instruments, drafts of the questionnaire and interview guide were subjected to expert review by scholars in communication and social research. Their feedback helped refine the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Pilot testing was also carried out with a small subset of respondents in Uyo, and their responses informed further adjustments. For reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire items was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. An alpha value of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable, in line with conventional standards [24]. This ensured that the measurement scales were stable and consistent across respondents.

5.2 Data Collection

The actual data collection involved the administration of questionnaires and the conduct of key informant interviews. The questionnaires were distributed by trained research assistants who were familiar with the local language and culture, thereby increasing response rates and reducing misunderstandings. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the forms, and follow-ups were conducted to maximize retrieval. For the interviews, appointments were scheduled in advance, and with the consent of participants, discussions were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

5.3 Data Analysis

Data collected through the questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize demographic information and general patterns [25]. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and Pearson correlation analysis, were applied to test the research hypotheses and examine relationships between smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism. Data from the key informant interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, where recurring themes and insights were identified and interpreted in relation to the research questions. The mixed-methods analysis provided both statistical rigor and qualitative richness.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered strictly to established ethical principles for social research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose, scope, and potential benefits of the study before giving their consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by ensuring that no identifying information was included in the final report. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes [26]. Special care was taken to respect cultural sensitivities and to avoid harm or discomfort to participants. Ethical clearance was also sought from the relevant institutional review board before fieldwork commenced. Voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality were maintained.
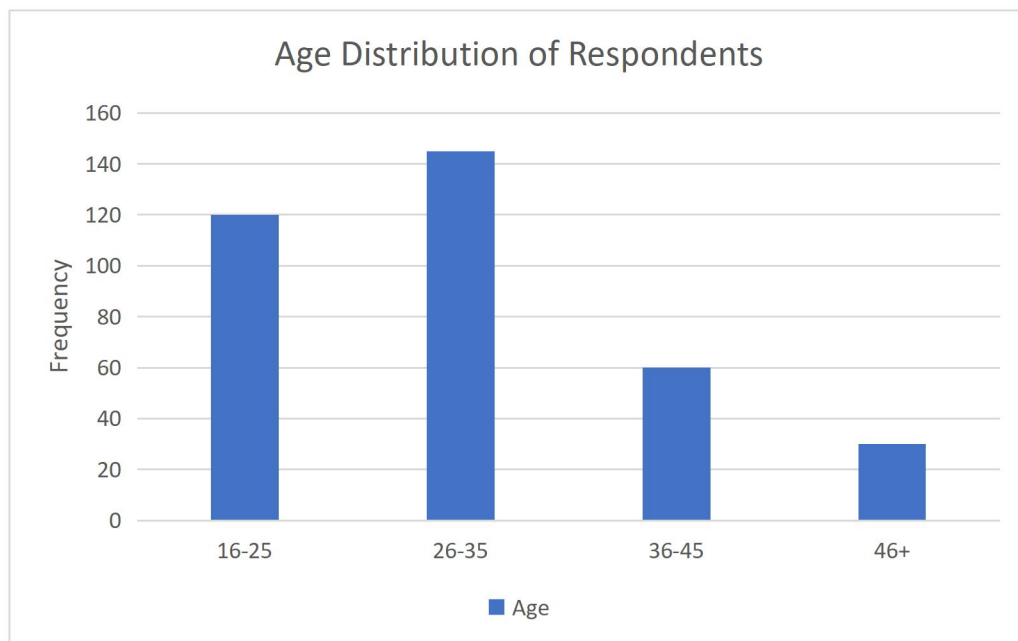
6. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

6.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 384 questionnaire copies were distributed, in line with the sample size derived from Yamane's formula. Of these, 360 were retrieved and found usable, representing a response rate of 93.8%. The demographic data collected included gender, age, educational attainment, and occupation.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 360)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	185	51.4
	Female	175	48.6
Age	18-25 years	122	33.9
	26-35 years	148	41.1
	36-45 years	60	16.7
	46+ years	30	8.3
Education	Secondary school	65	18.1
	Tertiary education	243	67.5
	Postgraduate	52	14.4
Occupation	Student	110	30.6
	Civil servant	84	23.3
	Trader/business	95	26.4
	Others (artisan etc.)	71	19.7

The table 1 indicates a fairly balanced gender representation. The age distribution suggests that the study population is predominantly young adults, with the majority (41.1%) between 26-35 years. Educational attainment is relatively high, with 67.5% having tertiary education, reflecting Uyo's urban and academic environment.

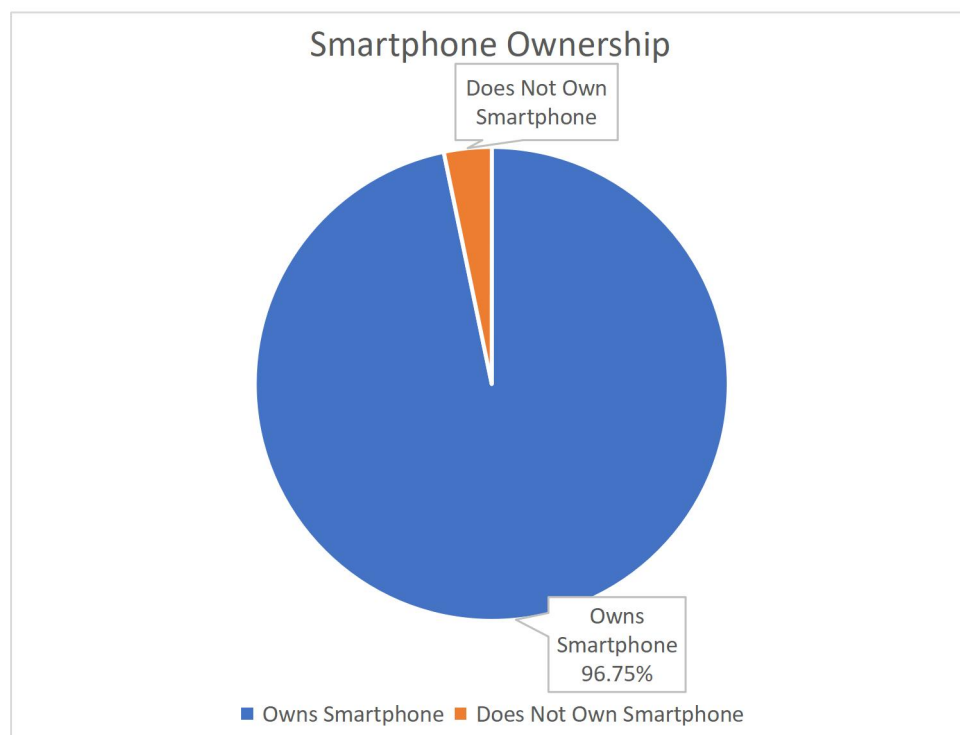**Figure 1.** Age Distribution of Respondents

6.2 Patterns of Smartphone Ownership

Findings revealed that smartphone penetration among respondents is nearly universal. Out of 360 respondents, 343 (95.3%) reported owning a smartphone, while only 17 (4.7%) did not.

Table 2. Smartphone Ownership among Respondents

Ownership Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Owns smartphone	343	95.3
Does not own	17	4.7

This result corroborates national statistics indicating high smartphone adoption in Nigeria's urban centres. The high ownership rate provides a strong foundation for understanding how mobile devices enable citizen journalism in Uyo.
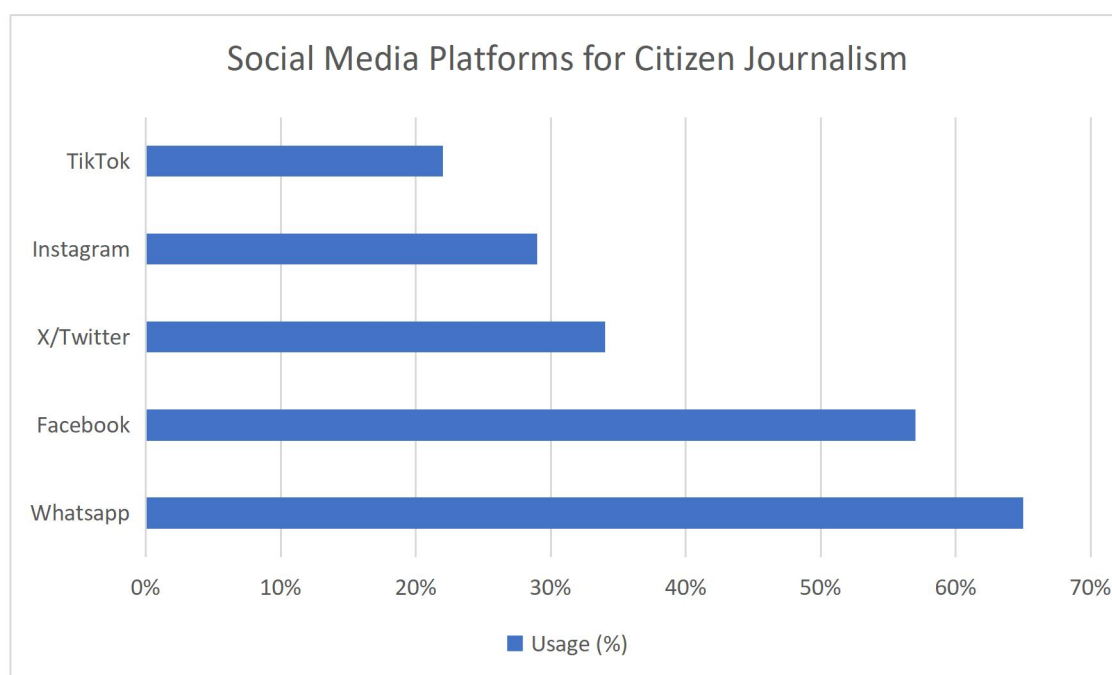

Figure 2. Smartphone Ownership

6.3 Practice of Citizen Journalism

Respondents were asked whether they have ever used their smartphones to capture, share, or comment on news events in their community. Results show that 279 respondents (77.5%) engaged in citizen journalism practices, while 81 (22.5%) had not.

Table 3. Engagement in Citizen Journalism

Practice Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Engage in citizen journalism	279	77.5
Do not engage	81	22.5

Further analysis revealed that the most common platforms for disseminating citizen-generated content were WhatsApp (65.2%), Facebook (57.3%), X/Twitter (33.6%), Instagram (29.1%), and TikTok (22.4%). This finding aligns with previous studies showing WhatsApp and Facebook as dominant news-sharing platforms in Nigeria.
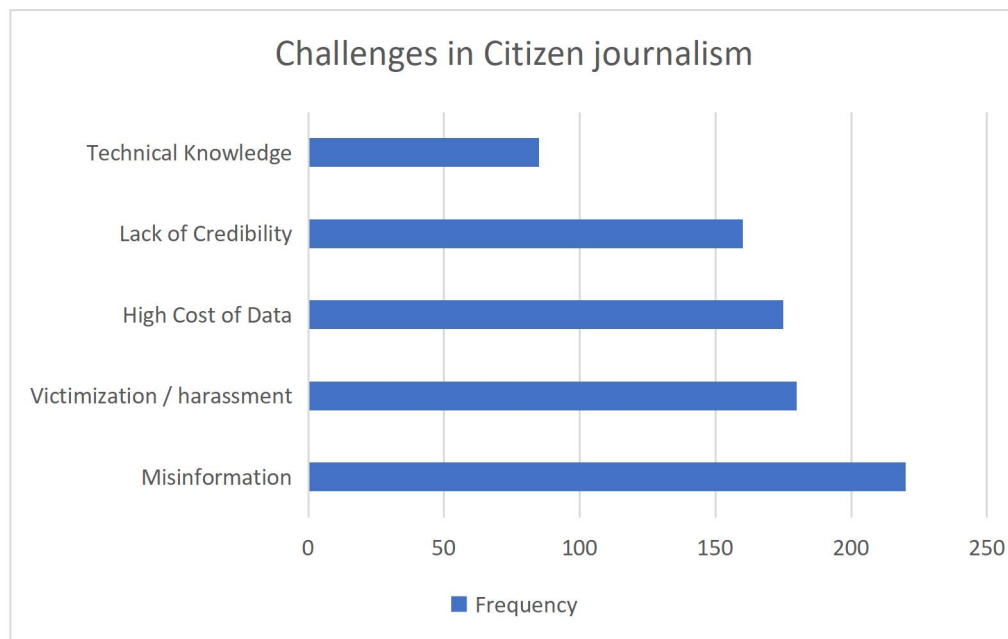

Figure 3. Social Media Platforms for Citizen Journalism Challenges of Practicing Citizen Journalism

Respondents identified several challenges in their use of smartphones for journalism-related purposes.

Table 4. Challenges Encountered in Citizen Journalism

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Risk of spreading misinformation	212	58.9
Fear of victimization/harassment	185	51.4
High cost of data	178	49.4
Lack of credibility/recognition	164	45.6
Limited technical knowledge	90	25.0

The most prominent challenges were misinformation and victimization, echoing concerns in the literature that citizen journalism in Nigeria struggles with ethical and security issues.

Figure 4. Challenges in Citizen Journalism

6.4 Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One (H1): There is a significant relationship between smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism.

Using chi-square analysis, χ^2 (1, N=360) = 21.45, p < 0.01.

Interpretation: The hypothesis is supported, indicating that owning a smartphone significantly predicts citizen journalism practices.

Hypothesis Two (H2): There is a significant relationship between socio-demographic characteristics (age, education) and the likelihood of engaging in citizen journalism.

Pearson correlation shows a positive correlation between education level and citizen journalism (r = 0.312, p < 0.01).

Age, however, showed a weaker negative correlation (r = -0.145, p = 0.08), not statistically significant at 0.05.

Interpretation: Education is a significant predictor of citizen journalism engagement, while age is less influential.

6.5 Summary of Findings

The analysis shows that smartphone ownership among Uyo residents is widespread, with nearly all respondents owning a smartphone. A majority engage in citizen journalism, primarily through WhatsApp and Facebook, underscoring the central role of mobile social platforms in contemporary news practices. Challenges identified include misinformation, fear of victimization, and high internet costs. Statistical tests confirmed that smartphone ownership and educational attainment significantly influence engagement in citizen journalism, while age has less predictive value [27].

These findings support the broader literature on mobile-mediated communication in Africa and highlight the unique role of education in shaping responsible citizen journalism in Uyo.

7. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined the relationship between smartphone ownership and the practice of citizen journalism among residents of Uyo metropolis, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The research employed a descriptive survey design, using both questionnaires and interviews to gather data from adult respondents. The following major findings emerged:

High smartphone penetration: An overwhelming majority (95.3%) of respondents owned smartphones, demonstrating near-universal access to mobile devices. This aligns with national statistics indicating widespread smartphone adoption in urban Nigeria.
Strong practice of citizen journalism: Over three-quarters (77.5%) of respondents reported engaging in citizen journalism practices, such as capturing, sharing, or commenting on news events.
Dominant platforms for dissemination: WhatsApp (65.2%) and Facebook (57.3%) emerged as the most commonly used platforms, followed by X/Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. These findings mirror other studies that highlight WhatsApp's dominance in grassroots communication across Africa.

Challenges to practice: The most critical challenges identified were misinformation (58.9%), fear of victimization or harassment (51.4%), high data costs (49.4%), and lack of credibility (45.6%). These issues resonate with broader scholarly concerns regarding ethics, security, and infrastructural barriers in citizen journalism.

Statistical relationships: Chi-square tests revealed a significant relationship between smartphone ownership and citizen journalism practices. Furthermore, educational attainment showed a strong positive correlation with citizen journalism engagement, while age had little statistical significance.

Overall, the findings underscore that smartphone ownership, combined with education and internet access, has transformed the media landscape of Uyo, enabling citizens to become active participants in the creation and dissemination of news.

7.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that smartphones are not only communication tools but also powerful instruments of participatory journalism in Uyo metropolis. The ubiquity of smartphones has empowered ordinary citizens to play the role of reporters, thereby democratizing information flow and challenging the monopoly of traditional media. However, this empowerment is not without limitations. Issues of misinformation, ethical credibility, harassment, and infrastructural constraints continue to undermine the full potential of citizen journalism.

Thus, while smartphones provide the technological foundation for participatory media, the sustainability of citizen journalism in Uyo depends on improved digital literacy, ethical practices, supportive legal frameworks, and reduced internet costs.

7.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Digital literacy campaigns: Civil society groups, NGOs, and academic institutions should develop programs that train citizens on fact-checking, content verification, and ethical reporting practices.

Affordable internet policies: Telecommunications providers and regulatory bodies such as the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) should prioritize affordable data packages to reduce the burden of high internet costs, which currently limit participation.

Legal and institutional protection: The government should enact policies that protect citizen journalists from harassment, intimidation, or unlawful arrests, while also establishing frameworks to discourage the deliberate spread of misinformation.

Collaborations between professional and citizen journalists: Traditional media houses should establish digital partnerships that amplify credible citizen-generated content while filtering out unreliable information.

Community-driven platforms: Local initiatives should encourage the creation of moderated digital forums where citizens can share verified news about their communities.

The findings of this study have important policy implications:

For government and regulators: There is a need for balanced media policies that safeguard press freedom while addressing misinformation. Policies should encourage citizen participation in news production as part of democratic governance.

For telecommunications providers: Collaboration with government and NGOs is necessary to reduce internet access costs and expand broadband penetration in urban and rural areas.

For media organizations: Integrating citizen journalism into newsroom practice can enrich coverage of grassroots issues, broaden perspectives, and strengthen democratic discourse.

For educational institutions: Curricula should incorporate modules on digital media literacy, equipping students with skills for responsible participation in online news ecosystems.

Suggestions for Further Research:

• Future studies could investigate the role of gender in shaping patterns of citizen journalism in Uyo and other Nigerian cities.
• Comparative research across different regions in Nigeria may uncover variations in smartphone adoption and citizen journalism practices.
• Qualitative approaches, such as ethnographic studies, could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of citizen journalists, especially regarding harassment and ethical dilemmas.

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