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REACHING THE UNHEARD VOICES AND HINTERLANDS IN THE DIGITAL ERA: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RE-ENGINEERING OF NEWSGATHERING IN AFRICA

Historically, Africa is known to be backward in adoption of technology. History has it that Africa trailed behind in the use of new technology for newsgathering. Africa is the 2nd largest continent after Asia with over 60% of its population living widely dispersed in hinterlands whose insecure terrains, inaccessibility, and distance from cities, make it impossible for journalist and media broadcasts to cover their socio-economic, cultural and political activities. In addition to these factors, scarcity of journalists, costs and conflicts, inability of media industries to train and/or recruit enough journalists, government indifference and pro-urban communication policy made newsgathering in African hinterlands almost impossible. However, the evolution and reign of Internet-based technologies, which enable citizens to contribute to news-making, and information gathering and exchange became a solution. Nevertheless, it is confronted with pro-urban middle class relevance due to epileptic power, poor network, low level of education and technology skills, and lack of formal framework for newsgathering in the hinterlands. This paper, therefore, explores the dynamics of newsgathering in the technologically-driven internet era, with a view to identifying inherent limitations in African hinterlands, and therefrom offers profitable recommendations. Geographically, the study considers African rural communities. Thematically, the paper is an investigation into the acquisition and use new information technologies particularly phones with internet facilities to generate and circulate news from African hinterlands, factors hindering the practice and possible ways of enhancing it. Periodically, the study covers the 21st century i.e. 2000 to date, which has witnessed ICTs massive penetration of the hinterlands and their use as primary medium of communication. In exploring the digitalisation of communication in rural Africa where majority of the population lives without regular or formal connection to organs and channels of governance and events in the entire world, this paper is significant to the extent that it assess and exposes the challenges modernisation is facing in trying to provide solution to the scenario. It explores areas of investments in media and communication in rural Africa, and attempts to provide viable alternatives to the problems hindering internet-mediated-technologies approach to newsgathering in rural Africa. It provides approaches to the democratisation of newsgathering and circulation, which opens up rural Africa to the global community and for participation in e-governance, global dialogue and discussions in every aspect of human development, rights and politics. This paper adopted logical inquiry, survey of literature and *ex post facto* methods of data gathering. Central to these methods, extensive literature review was primarily adopted as data gathering processes. This is because of the wealth of literature, debates and criticism available on the new media, newsgathering, and the African experience particularly the hinterlands. This will explicate new areas of investments in communication technologies and provide valid framework for newsgathering across Africa, which will inevitably advance globalisation into and enhance development in African hinterlands.

Key words: *Newsgathering; Hinterlands; Africa; Internet-based technologies; Globalisation; development.*

INTRODUCTION

It is substantiated in the literature that technological revolution and modernisation, which led to media globalisation and liberalization, changed the communication landscape in Africa since the beginning of the 21st century (*Hydén et al., 2002; Njogu and Middleton 2009; Wasserman, 2011*). The era has being characterised by upsurge and establishment of public and private digital media institutions such as online newspapers and magazines, radio and TV stations, and cable networks. Undisputedly, this facilitates national and transnational flows of information or news and entertainment (*Böhme, 2013*). Equally, it led to the emergence of a series of new and more inde-

pendent media actors in the areas of newspaper, radio, and TV news production/circulation (*deWitte, 2011; Saul and Austen, 2010; Englert and Moreto, 2010; Ugwuanyi, Gever, & Ojiro, 2019*). This is accelerated and sustained by increasing availability and appropriate new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The scenario tends to heal major problems confronting media and communication in Africa. The continent is characteristically the world's largest and most populous only next to Asia. Over 60% of this population are living in widely dispersed hinterlands whose terrains are mostly inaccessibility and very far away from the cities and the seat of government. Their terrains are infested with hostilities/

conflicts, banditry, under-development and poor/no network connection that renders them incommunicado. They are not heard, no information about their socio-economic, cultural and political activities; and they do not hear either from their government, the cities and the global communities. Researchers attributed this to scarcity of journalists that would have covered those hinterlands in search of news, the costs of sending journalists, conflicts and the risks of death and kidnap, inability of media industries to train journalists (Cloudry & Derher, 2007; Hess, 2013; Wogu; Ezeah, Geve, & Ugwuanyi, 2019), government indifference to rural plights, and pro-urban communication policy of most governments in African.

In the face of these problems, Africans' privileged access to new media technologies and the digitalisation of communication in the 21st century became mediating factors between the dispersed audiences in the hinterlands, spaces and communication hazards (see Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Freedman & Shafer, 2012). This mediation, which is a synthesis of media liberalization in various domains, created new spaces for individuals, locals, and unhindered participation in information generation and circulation, its creation and participation in processes of governance (Allan, 2009; Shipley, 2009). People became consumers and producers of information as well as their circulators. Without formal appointment, remuneration, and or harassment by government authorities, individually they engage themselves in gathering information about socio-cultural, political, and economic activities in the hinterlands together with their developmental needs, and circulate same through ICT mediated communication channels such as the internet and/or social networking sites (Agbodike, 1992). Example of such networking through which text messages, photos, audio, video and information are generally and increasingly exchanged include platforms like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Online Communities, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google Plus, Quantcast, Instagram, VK, Flickr, Vine Rank, Meetup, Tagged, Ask.fm, and ClassMates etc (Dominick, 2013; Tomno, 2012). Either for disparaging the government or exposing what the government is doing (good or bad), or promoting rural ingenuity and culture, and economic activities, the dwellers circulate rural information on these platforms with delight.

This incites new sensational effects, lays the background for and facilitates a new practice or form of newsgathering, which blurs the existing boundaries between censored/official practices and popular/pro-liberal practices (Meyer, 2010; Förster, 2002). Essentially, it has become a good alternative to perceived doctored news gathered or nationally produced content by journalists in the employ of government controlled and/or owned media institutions (see Spitulnik, 2002). Such nationally produced contents have hidden agendas, advances political interests, and are couched to circumvent legal sanctions. In the available alternative, the suppressed and unheard voices of the rural and uneducated people are heard; events, problems and development in the rural areas become public knowledge, while external news and information are made available to the rural dwellers. It enables the rural dwellers to engage in interactive dialogue on virtually all socio-economic, political/governance, religious, and cultural issues that characterise the new media regime (Joseph, 2013). On their part, national and international media institutions do not solicit for information concerning rural events neither does they need to recruit, train and send their journalists into the hinterlands to gather news or information. They only need to create websites and links through which information can be received from rural inhabitants or engage internet experts to surf for rural news

if they choose to. On the part of rural dwellers, they need only Smart or Android phones, active batteries, the skill on how to use them, good network connection, data, and security against robbery.

Nevertheless, this use of internet-mediated-technologies such as Smart or Android phones, satellite devices, SW (short wave) and FM transmitters, or internet streams (Larkin, 2004) by dwellers in African hinterlands to gather and circulate information has being greatly and negatively affected by its pro-urban middle class relevance and use, poor or epileptic power supply, poor or no network connection, low level of education and technology skills, and lack of formal framework for newsgathering in the hinterlands. Consequently, newsgathering in rural Africa has continued to be in the hands of conventional journalists, who visit and engage rural areas only during major calamities and festivals, though in a distorted form with excessive pro-government bias. Effective newsgathering in the rural area requires that the reporter should live with, most times be direct, unobtrusive and participant observer, and understand the rural people and the dynamics of their culture, interactions, and environmental peculiarities (Brooks et al, 1980; Dennis and Ismach, 1981; Nwosu, 1986). Such must display unalloyed commitment for development and better living conditions.

Considering the fact that over 84% of Africans use Mobile phones that have internet inclusiveness (Gicheru, 2014), the rising tides of social networking and internet-mediated-technologies approach to newsgathering with multiple advantages, and the prevalence of orthodox or conventional approach to newsgathering, which usually produces national content with its deformities, this paper explores the dynamics of internet-mediated-technologies approach with a view identify its limitations in rural Africa. It is therefore the goal of this paper to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Are majority of African rural dwellers Internet users, and do they generate and circulate information/news through the internet platforms?
2. Has the emergence of new information technologies affected the process, the quantity and quality of news gathering in rural African communities?
3. What are the major problems hindering the effective adoption or application of internet-mediated-technologies approach to newsgathering in rural Africa?

REVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

We are currently in the digital media era where information and communication technologies are playing critical roles. The role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in generating and disseminating information known as new media has being extensively discussed in the literature (See Wirsy and Shafack 2002 in Bappah, 2010; Pavlik, 2001; Deuze, 2008). One of the essential part of the digital media era is social media. Social media is defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). It is a new form of media designed to enhance mass communication, the formation of social ties and social interactions among geographically dispersed population, which is driven by new information and communication technologies (Donath, 2004; Harrison and Barthel, 2009). This form of media is "...principally about participating rather than about passively receiving information" (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 37). It is a medium of communication that is characteristically participatory, open, interactive, communal, and easy connectivity in nature

(Hermida, 2011). It allows for the free creation and accessible exchange of user-generated contents (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Hardey, 2007), and for continual sharing of contents under status updates, links, photos, and videos, news, information, and comment on current realities (Gillmor, 2006; Goldfain & Van der Merwe, 2006; De Vries, 2008; Holcomb et al., 2011).

Consequently, social media has become an irresistible source of news and information for journalists and media institutions because it allows for consumer-generated contents (Pew Research, 2010; Reece, 2009b; Moses, 2009). The media is focused on the logic of "sharing" - i.e. exchange of information, comments/views, messages, photos and videos (Gerlitz, 2011; Boyd, Ellison, 2007). Thus, it has been effectively used as instrument for propagating and covering socio-cultural, development and political activities/events by individuals, groups, public and private institutions (Kaid, 2009; Veglis, 2012). Specifically, social media is dominantly used for sharing information/reporting news, seeking information or gathering news, and for the development and sustenance of friendly relations (Bonds-Raacke and Raacke, 2010; Veglis, 2012).

New Media and Newsgathering

Different social media sites such as Myspace, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Spotify, Foursquare, Facebook, WhatsApp, Flickr, and Twitter etc. have being devoted to gathering or seeking and disseminating information since the beginning of the 21st century across Africa (Hendricks, 2013). This enables journalists to generate information or news from widely dispersed and long distant areas, and to circulate information also to millions of people easily (Joseph, 2013). Their users post stories and events from their locations (Drew, 2013; Liz Heron, 2014).

Clearly, the new media has restructured journalism, the manner of newsgathering and distribution, their consumers and modes of consumption (Lee-Wright, 2010; Kovac & Rosenthal, 2001). It allows the people or users to pick and choose news at their own pace and time whereas information flow is regulated in the mainstream media through censorship. Due to technology, newsgathering and dissemination is driven by non-professional journalists who are disinfested with corporate interests (Adams, 2006). Their number outweighs that of professional journalists while unlike the professionals, they engage in newsgathering and dissemination without any form of corporate empowerment or payment (Flew, 2009). Many call this citizen journalism (Adams, 2006).

In citizen journalism, people formerly known as 'the audience' or media consumers now use the tools they have in their possession such as phone to gather news and inform others about it through networked platforms (Picard, 2014; Rosen, 2008). Although professional journalists are critical of their role or participation (Heinonen, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2005) due to lack of required skills and "software familiarity" (Brannon, 2008; Matsiola, 2008; Spyridou, 2009), and perceived undermining of journalists' authority and ideals (Chadwick and Collister, 2014; Hermida, 2012; Quinn and Quinn-Allan, 2005), they become active participant in the construction of news and its gathering (Newman, Dutton, and Blank, 2012; Siaper, Papadopoulos, and Archontakis, 2014).

Instead of investigating the place of new media in newsgathering in African hinterlands, most scholars concentrated on its use by professional journalists who are urban based and elitist in nature. For instance, Mchakulu (2007) investigated the impact of new technologies on the professional practices of Malawian journalists, their use of new technologies and its impact. He observed that in

spite of financial limitations, the use of new technologies improved and mobilised Malawian journalists' professional practice. Similarly, Mudhai (2004) and Kupe (2003) noted that the interactive nature of the new technologies enables journalists in Africa to move closer to engaging with news consumers, and alters news production processes.

Other scholars focus on the generation of news content by citizens using mobile phone. Verclas & Mechael (2008) observed that individuals with mobile phones and other media tools are able to capture 'news' in real time more than professional journalists; and normally circulate such immediately using text messaging function (Moyo, 2009). In this sense, it is posited that mobile phone facilitates or allows citizens to participate in the process of newsgathering and dissemination (Verclas & Mechael, 2008). In essence, it has turned journalists into individualised and unprofessional people. Many scholars like Foss (2008) and Goldfain and van der Merwe (2006) have criticised this development because there is no quality control, and such individuals are not under any professional obligation to honour the ethics of journalism such as accuracy and balance.

Generally, different scholars have demonstrated the effectiveness of new technologies in bolstering newsgathering (Johnston and Forde, 2011; Hultin and Skog, 2011; Brautovic, 2009) although it tend to eliminate journalists exclusivity to assignment materials and interactive learning opportunity for younger journalists. Thus, many scholars, having seen the advantages and roles of citizens' journalism in connecting the hinterlands to the cities and the world in general are engaging themselves with inquiries and analysis of factors that influence or moderate it. See also Ettema et al. (1997), McNair (1998), Lowrey (2006), Obieng-Quaidoo (1986), McNair (1998), Espipisu and Kariithi (2007).

Castells (2001: 247) identified the peculiar factors that influence the application of new technologies in citizens' journalism as "the...difficulty for people without sufficient education, knowledge and skills to appropriate the {technologies} for their own interests and values." Complementing these factors, the disproportionate distribution of electricity; total absence of energy supply particularly in the hinterlands, poor and unreliable telecommunications infrastructure; connectivity challenges and content issues, undermine the application of new technologies in newsgathering by residents in African hinterlands. It can be observed that the literature is limited in its exploration of the impact of digitalisation, satellite system, and the emergence of alternative sources of energy such as solar and use of electric generators on these problems. This paper explores these areas.

Framework of Analysis

This study was anchored on the theory of mediamorphosis. The critical postulation of the theory is that media and indeed journalism has undergone several changes in scope and performance. The theory is largely attributed to Kurt Blaukopt who is considered as the founding protagonist of the theory. Kurt used the theory to explain the changes that have taken place in the media as a result of advancements in information and communication technologies (Blaukopt, 1992; Sperlich, 2006). Roger Fidler made use of the theory to explain changes that have taken place in communication as a result of the digital media era. (Fidler, 1997). According to Fidler (1997), the theory has six fundamental principles, namely: These principles are:

a. Coevolution and coexistence: This places attention on the need for harmony between the old and the new media options.

b. Metamorphosis: This implies that the new media came out from the old to remain independent.

c. Propagation: The new media reveals the essential features of the old media.

d. Survival instinct: This entails that there is the need for both the new and the old media to get use to changes so as to remain relevant.

e. Opportunity and Need: This reveals that the new media is conditioned to meet the need of people.

f. Delayed adoption: The level at which people will accept and make use of new media platforms may not be fast.

Considering these principles, the theory enables the paper to seek for and explain expected delay or problems associated with the adoption of ICTs in newsgathering, and to explore how the new media is serving the current needs of people living in rural Africa, and the emerging new trends therefrom. These make the theory applicable and relevant.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted logical inquiry, survey of literature and ex post facto methods of data gathering. Central to these methods, extensive literature review was primarily adopted as data gathering processes. This is because of the wealth of literature, debates and criticism available on the new media, newsgathering, and the African experience particularly the hinterlands.

Methods of Data Collection

The methods adopted for gathering data used library documents (both private and public) wherein published materials such as books, journals, workshop and lecture papers, and government publications are preserved. The research equally explored available and relevant works and documents found online in the internet at different websites.

Method of Data Analysis

Trend analysis was adopted for purposes of inference. The method here was to determine which applicable variables and their indices will be analysed; thereafter their empirical indices were determined. In this case, these include ICTs, newsgathering, news circulation. Once these variables and their empirical indices were identified and/or selected, their relationships and causative interactions were examined and determined, inferences were reached or drawn. Based on the findings, the researcher then attempted to predict the direction of newsgathering using the internet-mediated-technologies approach and the requirements thereof for its effectiveness.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Are majority of African rural dwellers internet users, and do they generate and circulate information/news through internet platforms?

ICTs revolution and the Western drive to consolidate its hold of African market have led to massive mobile phone penetration into the continent (*Vodafone, 2005*). Consequently, Africa has been experiencing an incredible increase or boom in the number mobile phone users since the beginning of the 21st century. In 2000, there were fewer than 3.6 million mobile phone users in the continent but today Africa is at the centre of a mobile revolution with over 900 million phone users. This growth can be explained by the fact that mobile phone emerged as the only available, accessible, low-cost, gender and status free medium of communication. This was enhanced by the huge economic potential that mobile phones carry particularly in the socio-economically backward hinterlands of Africa. It was found

useful in all aspect of people's lives and activities such as farming, information transmission, education, health and natural crises etc particularly in the isolated rural areas.

However, the nature of activities and degree to which people use these mobile phones for depend on their ingenuity and the type or capacity of the phones. Certain type of phones can only transmit voice calls and send text messages, while others perform additional functions of taking and transmitting picture, recording and transmitting videos, connecting to satellites and cables, etc. The later type is generally known as Smartphones/Android phones. It is only through this type of phone that people are connected with the world through the internet.

According to data published by Internet World Status, ITU, Facebook, and other trustworthy information sources, the total number of African internet users as at September 2019 stands at 522,809,480. This represents 43.6% of the population. Details and the countries of origin of the internet subscribers are hereby presented in table 1 as follows.

It is considerably impossible to find out the number and percentage of the 522,809,480 African internet Users as at 30th June 2019 that are resident in the hinterlands, and their use of phones to generate and disseminate news/information. However, evidences or experiences during two categorical historic internet driven crises in Africa (i.e. the Arab Spring and the Kenya election) and other national bound experiences like Zimbabwe's general elections, and the Nigerian 2011 and 2015 general elections, equip us to make valid inference here.

During the 2011 Arab Spring, opposition to authoritarian rule was a collectively consistent action across the North African region. Social movement leaders employed the instrumentality of the new media to connect with leaders of democratization movements and civil liberty organisations in each of the countries involved and other countries outside the region particularly Europe and America. Citizens of their countries, irrespective of their locations are also connected with them and with themselves via the new media. Thus, the new media was a necessary and sometimes sufficient cause of the Arab Spring or democratization struggle that took place in the region.

The organising activists, which may belong to the United States' trained and sponsored group (*Gaouette and Greeley, 2011*), using these digital media frameworks in creative ways located or identified each other, build solidarity around shared grievances, and identify collective political goals. It progressed through their use of the internet platforms to capture and circulate some inciting incidents, which state-controlled mainstream media ignores as cover-up. This stimulated public or mass anger against their governments, which led to street protests that were digitally coordinated and circulated across the whole world. The mobile phone generated video clips and recording of the protests, incidents of government clashes with the protesting trains, and other draconian actions against the leading activists were posted from different locations both rural and urban, which inadvertently drew the attentions of international governments, global Diasporas, and especially overseas news agencies into the movement (*Howard and Hussain, 2013*). The character of the ensuing protests in most of these North African countries made it difficult for states to respond. The demonstrations were rancorous while the demonstrators are relatively leaderless with little or no influence from unions, existing political parties, any form of defined political ideologies, or religious fervor. These culminated in some rulers conceding to the public pressure and meet public

Table 1: Internet Users Statistics for Africa as @ September 26, 2019

AFRICA	Population (2019 Est.)	Internet Users 31-Dec-2000	Internet Users 30-June-2019	Penetration (%) Population)	Internet Growth % 2000 - 2019	Facebook subscribers 31-Dec-2018
Algeria	42,679,018	50,000	25,428,159	59.6 %	50,756 %	19,000,000
Angola	31,787,566	30,000	7,078,067	22.3 %	23,493 %	27,400,000
Benin	11,801,595	15,000	3,801,758	32.2 %	25,245 %	920,000
Botswana	2,374,636	15,000	1,116,079	47.0 %	6,455 %	840,000
Burkina Faso	20,321,560	10,000	3,704,265	18.2 %	36,942 %	840,000
Burundi	11,575,964	3,000	617,116	5.3 %	20,471 %	470,000
Cabo Verde	560,349	8,000	352,120	62.8 %	4,302 %	240,000
Cameroon	25,312,993	20,000	6,128,422	24.2 %	30,542 %	2,700,000
Central African Rep.	4,825,711	1,500	256,432	5.3 %	16,995 %	96,000
Chad	15,814,345	1,000	1,027,932	6.5 %	102,693 %	260,000
Comoros	850,910	1,500	130,578	15.3%	8,605 %	120,000
Congo	5,542,197	500	650,000	11.7 %	129,900 %	600,000
Congo, Dem. Rep.	86,727,573	500	7,475,917	8.6 %	1,495,083 %	2,100,000
Cote d'Ivoire	25,531,083	40,000	11,953,653	46.8 %	29,784 %	3,800,000
Djibouti	985,690	1,400	548,832	55.7 %	39,102 %	180,000
Egypt	101,168,745	450,000	49,231,493	48.7 %	10,840 %	35,000,000
Equatorial Guinea	1,360,104	500	356,891	26.2 %	71,278 %	67,000
Eritrea	5,309,659	5,000	71,000	1.3 %	1,320 %	63,000
Eswatini	1,415,414	10,000	665,245	47.0 %	6,552 %	170,000
Ethiopia	110,135,635	10,000	20,507,255	18.6 %	204,972 %	4,500,000
Gabon	2,109,099	15,000	1,307,641	62.0 %	8,617 %	620,000
Gambia	2,228,075	4,000	442,050	19.8 %	10,951 %	310,000
Ghana	30,096,970	30,000	11,737,818	39.0 %	39,026 %	4,900,000
Guinea	13,398,180	8,000	2,411,672	18.0 %	30,046 %	1,500,000
Guinea-Bissau	1,953,723	1,500	150,000	7.7 %	9,900 %	110,000
Kenya	52,214,791	200,000	46,870,422	89.8 %	23,335 %	7,000,000
Lesotho	2,292,682	4,000	682,990	29.8 %	16,975 %	310,000
Liberia	4,977,720	500	4,028,418	80.9 %	805,584 %	4,028,418
Libya	6,569,864	10,000	3,800,000	57.8 %	37,900 %	3,500,000
Madagascar	26,969,642	30,000	2,643,025	9.8 %	8,710 %	1,700,000
Malawi	19,718,743	15,000	2,717,243	13.8 %	18,015 %	720,000
Mali	19,689,140	18,800	12,480,176	63.4 %	66,284 %	1,500,000
Mauritania	4,661,149	5,000	969,519	20.8 %	19,290 %	770,000
Mauritius	1,271,368	87,000	803,896	63.2 %	824 %	700,000
Mayotte (FR)	266,380	n/a	107,940	40.5 %	n/a	71,000
Morocco	36,635,156	100,000	23,739,581	64.8 %	23,640 %	15,000,000
Mozambique	31,408,823	30,000	6,523,613	20.8 %	21,645 %	1,800,000
Namibia	2,641,996	30,000	1,347,418	51.0 %	4,391 %	570,000
Niger	23,176,691	5,000	2,368,658	10.2 %	47,273 %	440,000
Nigeria	200,962,417	200,000	123,486,615	61.4 %	61,643 %	17,000,000
Reunion (FR)	889,918	130,000	480,000	53.9 %	269 %	420,000
Rwanda	12,794,412	5,000	5,981,638	46.8 %	119,532 %	490,000
Saint Helena	4,096	n/a	2,200	53.7 %	n/a	1,700
Sao Tome & Principe	213,379	6,500	63,864	29.9 %	882 %	52,000
Senegal	16,743,859	40,000	9,749,527	58.2 %	24,274 %	2,900,000
Seychelles	95,702	6,000	67,119	70.1 %	1,018 %	61,000
Sierra Leone	7,883,123	5,000	1,043,725	13.2 %	20,774 %	450,000
Somalia	15,636,171	200	1,500,000	9.6 %	749,900 %	1,100,000
South Africa	58,065,097	2,400,000	32,615,165	56.2 %	1,259 %	16,000,000
South Sudan	13,263,184	n/a	2,229,963	16.8 %	n/a	180,000
Sudan	42,514,094	30,000	13,124,100	30.9 %	43,647 %	2,600,000
Tanzania	60,913,557	115,000	23,142,960	38.0 %	20,024 %	6,100,000
Togo	8,186,384	100,000	1,011,837	12.4 %	912 %	560,000
Tunisia	11,783,168	100,000	7,898,534	67.0 %	7,798 %	6,400,000
Uganda	45,711,874	40,000	18,502,166	40.5 %	46,155 %	2,600,000
Western Sahara	582,478	n/a	28,000	4.8 %	n/a	24,000
Zambia	18,137,369	20,000	7,248,773	40.0 %	36,144 %	1,600,000
Zimbabwe	17,297,495	50,000	8,400,000	48.6 %	16,700 %	880,000
TOTAL	1,320,038,716	4,514,400	522,809,480	39.6 %	11,481 %	204,304,118

Source: Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2019

demands in Egypt and Tunisia, and a form of protracted stalemate in Libya.

In Nigeria, the use of mobile phones to gather and disseminate information has being a veritable platform for political activities in rural and urban areas such as electioneering, political participation, news gathering and dissemination. Millions of Nigerian citizens (rural dwellers inclusive) "surf the web, creating their own account profiles and sharing information online, (and making) a substantial amount of data becomes available" (Ceron, Curini, and Iacus, 2015: 1). The social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Google, and YouTube has prevailed as the major channel of information gathering and dissemination among Nigerians. It has being a platform for all forms of interaction, activism, campaign and mass mobilization (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2012; Ceron, Curini and Iacus, 2013; Ceron and d'Adda, 2015). It became a platform for unlimited and continuous free interaction among the masses/users where common response to socio-economic and political issues such election results are shared (Suntai and Targema, 2015).

The list and details of people's use of ICTs such as mobile phones to generate or gather news/information across Africa and disseminate same through social media platforms is endless. Zimbabwe and South Africa are other good examples. In Zimbabwe, the media is heavily dominated by state owned and controlled communication institutions, and it only serves as a means to spread the ruling Zanu PF government policy and stifle dissenting voices (Kelley and Donway, 1990; Ronning, 2005). The few existing private press seems to have signed a pact with government to "hear no evil", "speak no evil" and "see no evil" regarding its affairs' (Chari, 2009: 10). To this point, there were no freedom of speech and expression; people use fake names for security reasons due to dictatorship.

However, through the instrumentality of mobile phones and social media, opposition activists established powerful groups and movements through posting of video clips, pictures, and actions of government that are anti-public interests. Like Africans in the North, they created contacts and relations among themselves, the masses, Zimbabweans in Diaspora, and the rest of the world. The synthesis of their pressures and activism was the establishment of synergy between the people, activists, the armed forces; Europe and America that led the emergence of strong opposition, which eventually forced the long reigning dictator, Robert Mugabe, to step down from office. It is therefore innocuous to aver that majority of Africans, rural dwellers inclusive, are internet users who use to generate and circulate information/news through internet platforms.

Has the emergence of new information technologies affected the process, the quantity and quality of news gathering in rural African communities?

The need for efficient, reliable and affordable communication system is essential. This is because it provides unique opportunity for African rural dwellers to contact and relate with their relations, neighbours, and acquaintances living in distant locations in the hinterlands and urban areas. With it, they engage in socio-cultural, political, and economic relations, transactions, and activities without any obstacle or barriers and at lesser costs (Mishra, 2016; Debora, 2012; Behnke, 2010).

Consequently, its emergence dominated and changed the character, mode, processes and interaction patterns among rural dwellers. These are more individualised, informal, unprepared with less emphasis on physical meetings while news are no longer solicited for before they are generated and spread. No law or principle guides

news gathering and dissemination neither does it consider or require the interest of would be consumers. All take place at the instance and pleasure or interest of the individual who is experiencing the events that constitute the news. Due to its individualised nature, all interests and status are accommodated by citizens' journalism in this era of new media. Thus, an analysis of its impact reveals the enthronement of cultural flux, alteration of state media monopoly of news gathering and dissemination theatre, and public opinion formation (Uwakwe, 2012). It has drastically changed the life style of youths, pattern and processes of mobilisation, and opened new channels of economic and business enterprises (Udeze, 2012).

Specifically, the introduction of new media and its tools, which have user friendly interface as well as internet penetration through mobile phones has democratized the media space and allow dwellers in the rural areas to reach out to the masses every day to share their experiences across multiple platforms, circumventing mainstream media and government censorship/hindrances (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). It tends to amplify news from rural communities or hinterlands by filling the gap created by mainstream media inability to cover activities in such areas to a larger more audience. News/information from rural communities is gaining increasing attention in the urban areas and beyond their respective regions and countries to the entire world due courtesy citizen journalism (Konieczna & Robinson, 2014; Prado, 2017). The inhabitants of the rural areas have showcased their willingness to report news that matters to them and their community development, security, and peace without the consideration of government policy and political interest. It has tremendously changed the way people gather information and their distribution options, and the nature of its relationship with the mainstream media (Serra, 2013).

What are the major problems hindering the effective adoption or application of internet-mediated-technologies approach to newsgathering in rural Africa?

The literature is perverse with challenges facing citizens' journalism or the use of mobile phones and other technologies by rural residents or people residing in African hinterlands to generate and disseminate information. Apuke (2016) and Okon (2001) observed that the new information and communication technologies and its associated media forms are alien to most residents of African hinterlands. This is as a result of their level of education, age, and complete lack of requisite knowledge and skills to use the phenomena. Most of them find it difficult, if not impossible, to adopt and adapt to state-of-the-art phones/equipment in gathering, processing, packaging and disseminating news and other relevant information to the public.

In addition to the above challenge, many areas in the hinterlands are very remote that government and communication industries find it less important and economically unattractive to establish or locate ICTs facilities such as communication Masks in such areas. Many towns and villages in rural Africa do not have access to internet services. This renders the news or information captured by residents through mobile phones useless as they could not be dispersed or circulated due to lack of accessible network. Such people cannot also access news gathered by distant neighbours and the world at large. Thus, citizen journalism is highly limited in the hinterlands where there is no communication Masks and network.

Poverty and the character of rural economy where over 90% of rural inhabitants are peasant farmers are primary factors challenging citizen journalism. First, they do not

have enough to take care of 'essential needs' such as food, shelter and clothing. Adjunct to the above, high cost of ICTs products such as phone and its accessories, data, and airtime pose a serious challenge to citizen journalism. Consequently, they are not considering the purchase of mobile phones, airtime, and data as essential even if they know how to use them. Secondly, they are tightly committed to farming and market activities that they hardly enjoy leisure time, which would have enabled them to connect frequently to internet for information or news circulation.

Citizen journalism in rural Africa is also faced with the challenges of news duplication, circulation of rumours or false information, and wrong misleading information. Although one has to acknowledge that mainstream media is not bereft of the same crime but that of citizen journalism is enormous. At times, they generate and circulate propagandas with the intention to annoy or cause anger, promote injustice or even create enmity among the targeted audience. For instance, during the 2015 Nigeria general elections, most of the news circulated through social media were propagandas and false fermented to ensure that Dr GoodLuck Ebele Jonathan - a Southerner and Christian - did not win a second term as president. Similar news dominated the social media in 2019 general elections against Muhamadu Buhari's second term bid See also (Conradie & Jacobs, 2003; Taylor, 2004; *International Telecommunication Union*, 2001; Mwanjoka, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Innovations and inventions led to the emergence of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which has inadvertently altered and enhance the existing communication process and its contents. It expanded the frontier of communication channels to include online information services, cable networks, the internet and World Wide Web, among others. This, which has been termed the new media, enhances the reach and understanding of mainstream media and inculcated untrained individuals participation in newsgathering and circulation known as citizen journalism across the world. Residents became consumers and contributors at the same time (Coudry & Dreher, 2007; Hess, 2013). By this, the world became smaller in terms of information generation and dissemination, while communication process became more rapid and highly cost-effective.

The emergence of citizen journalism has, thus, bridged the gap created by mainstream media in newsgathering and circulation. Inevitably, it empowered residents of rural areas or hinterlands in Africa as well as other continents not only to access news in their domain and the world in general but also to generate and circulate news from their environment using mobile phones and other ICTs. Fundamentally, this altered or changed the nature and processes of newsgathering and dissemination, news consumption, and neutralised the negative effect of state censorship on publicising mass opinion and raw information from rural communities. This opened up many new professional and economic opportunities in the hinterlands.

Nevertheless, citizen journalism in African hinterlands is confronted with numerous issues and challenges associated with ICTs as the central or primary channel of new media. factors ranging from lack of skills, poverty and the character of rural economy, costs of ICTs and the rapid changes in their models, none availability of communication masks and others tend to hinder the effectiveness of citizen journalism in rural Africa.

It is therefore recommended that:

a. Communication conglomerates or institutions

should pursue multiple construction of communication Masks across rural areas in Africa. Its implementation shall enhance easy access to network among residents.

b. ICTs Multipurpose Community Centres (MPCCs) should be established to provide free ICTs education and training in the rural areas in order to solve the problem of illiteracy and lack of skills. Such centres shall also respond to local demands or stimulate a demand for their services and job provision. According to Wellenius (2003), development will not be achieved if one relies solely on the profit driven private sector investments in the provision of ICT services. Consequently, this requires the intervention of NGOs, government agencies, international conglomerates and donor agencies.

c. Manufacturers of ICTs and mobile phone should develop low-cost products with internet feature with simple designs that can easily be understood and used by villagers in rural Africa. Such products shall be hotly contested for.

d. ICTs industries should embark on the production of solar powered mobile phones as a panacea for absence or lack of regular energy supply in rural areas.

e. In addition, communication networks should review the costs of their data plan and airtime downwards specifically for people living in the rural areas to enable them remain constantly connected online in spite of their poor economy. Simply put, they should promote an affordable universal access and universal services in ICTs for African hinterlands.

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УРАХУВАННЯ НЕПОЧУТИХ ГОЛОСІВ ТА ВІДДАЛЕНИХ РАЙОНІВ У ЦИФРОВУ ЕПОХУ: ОЦІНКА РЕІНЖИНІРИНГУ ЗБОРУ НОВИН В АФРИЦІ

Історично склалося так, що Африка відстає в засвоєнні технологій, у тому числі - в галузі мас-медіа. І хоч Африка є другим (після Азії) за територією континентом, понад 60% її населення живе в районах, віддаленість і небезпечність яких не дозволяють журналістам і ЗМІ повноцінно висвітлювати їх соціально-економічне, культурне і політичне життя. До переліку проблем слід додати нестачу кваліфікованих кадрів, надмірні витрати, внутрішні конфлікти, неспроможність медіа-індустрії навчати та/або запрошувати достатню кількість журналістів, байдужість урядової й муніципальної політики в галузі масових комунікацій. Частково вказані проблеми вирішуються за рахунок ініціатив місцевого населення, представники якого викладають новинний контент в Інтернет-мережах, але вони не можуть принципово зняти питання. Дана стаття присвячена вивченню динаміки надходження новин в епоху технологічно орієнтованого Інтернету для виявлення існуючих обмежень в африканських внутрішніх районах. Географічно дослідження орієнтоване на африканські сільські громади. В статті розглядаються шляхи набуття й використання нових інформаційних технологій, зокрема, мобільних телефонів з інтернет-можливостями, для генерування і розповсюдження новин з африканських внутрішніх районів. Виявлено фактори, що заважають такій практиці і шляхи їх усунення. Хронологічно дослідження охоплює XXI століття, тобто від 2000 року до тепер. Саме в цей період відбувалося масове проникнення Інтернету у внутрішні райони та використання його як основного засобу комунікації. Досліджуючи дигіталізацію комунікації в сільській Африці, де більшість населення живе поза регулярним або формальним зв'язком з органами і каналами управління, відірване від зовнішнього світу, автор визначає масштаб проблем, з якими стикається модернізація. Розкриваються технології підходів до збирання новин у сільській Африці, залучення її до участі в електронному управлінні, глобальному діалозі й дискусіях з усіх аспектів людського розвитку, прав і політики. Оцінюються життєздатні альтернативи інтернет-посередництва в галузі журналістики.

Ключові слова: збір новин; внутрішні райони; Африка; інтернет-технології; глобалізація; розвиток.

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