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Nigerian Undergraduates' Perception of Media Laws in an Era of Citizen Journalism

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Abstract:

No society can develop without the existence of laws and mores. However, the rise of citizen journalism has posed a serious challenge to the observance of media laws owing to the fact that citizen journalists (both in Nigeria and other climes), with the aid of any digital device write, copy, download and upload as well as post pictures, information and videos as much as they want on the Internet. This study therefore deals on "Nigerian Undergraduates' Perception of Media Laws in an Era of Citizen Journalism." Using the survey research design and the questionnaire as the research tool, a sample of 278 undergraduates from the department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria Nsukka were purposively chosen and studied. The findings reveal an increased level of awareness of media laws (87%) among Nigerian undergraduates leading to considerable level of familiarity of media laws. The findings indicate that Nigerian undergraduates observe media laws in posting stories in new media but do not observe the laws in posting pictures and downloading videos. The study among other things recommends concerted effort by all stakeholders in the new media era including the Nigerian Communications Commission, Internet Service Providers, GSM operators and mobile phone users to combat the erosion of media laws by citizen journalists.

Keywords: Nigerian undergraduates, citizen journalism, new media, perception, media laws

1. Introduction

One of the basic differentiating peculiarities of man and animal is that man tries to adopt and adapt to certain laid down principles for corporate and decent existence. Media laws therefore exist to guide media practitioners in their professional duties in every given society. It is therefore expected that members of the society would recognize and respect these laws as well as hold the media practitioners accountable. However, in this era of citizen journalism, where almost anybody can write and post anything in the new media, these media laws appear to have been neglected or relegated to the background. The venerable profession of journalism has indeed found itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves. These citizen journalists with the aid of any digital device write, copy, upload and post pictures, information and videos as much as they want and as long as they might care. Little wonder Flanagan and Metzger (2008, p. 13) posit that "network and digitization technologies, however, have lowered the cost of information production and dissemination, thus increasing the sheer amount of information available." This study would therefore give us the opportunity to have firsthand information from Nigerian university undergraduates on their thought regarding media laws in this era of citizen journalism.

1.1. Objective of the Study

Four objectives necessitated this study as hereunder specified:

1. To find out the extent Nigerian undergraduates understand what media laws are
2. To investigate how Nigerian undergraduates, perceive media laws
3. To find out the extent media laws are observed in citizen journalism
4. To find out if Nigerian undergraduates observe media laws as they engage in citizen journalism

1.2. Research Questions

1. What is the extent of Nigerian undergraduates' understanding of media laws?
2. How do Nigerian undergraduates perceive media laws?
3. To what extent do Nigerian undergraduates perceive that media laws are being observed in citizen Journalism?
4. To what extent do Nigerian undergraduates observe media laws as they engage in citizen journalism?

1.3. Citizens Journalism and the New Media

With the explosion of information in the new media as predicted by Marshall McLuhan, there seems to be a lack of control in the messages people give out or receive. The use of digital devices has made access to these messages a lot easier, which makes almost everyone a media creator, owner and actor instead of passive user (Ezeibe & Nwagwu, 2009, pp.65-66) cited in Talabi (2011, p.16).

Although there exists media laws and ethics in Nigeria which regulate the actions of journalists in Nigeria and "enable the journalist determine that certain actions or inactions are right or wrong and would therefore retard or advance the practice of journalism" (Nwanne, 2008, p.141; 2014, p. 34), these laws do not seem to apply to citizen journalists. There is more or less no professionalism involved in citizen journalism. In a study done by Odii (2013) it was revealed that citizen journalists are tilted more into political communication. The study revealed that citizen journalism has both negative and positive consequences for the Nigerian democracy. While in the positive sense, citizen journalism is seen to have contributed to the growth of Nigerian democracy; on the other hand, it spreads a lot of harmful lies and contributed to electoral violence in the country. Hence suggestions were made by respondents that Citizen Journalism should be regulated in Nigeria, advocating for the application of media law even in citizen journalism.

Maintenance of media laws and ethics has been seen to be effective in winning audience trust (Adeyemi 2013, p. 215) and as such the application of media laws cannot be over emphasized. As a result of the delicate nature of information, it is pertinent for the providers of information to be regulated. Media audience some times are keen to have factual information and tend to verify sources of information they see online as noted in the study done by El Semary and Al Khaja (2013). In their research, the duo noted that "The young people confirmed that they could not trust the information that comes through social networks and are keen to verify if it comes from reliable sources."

In a study by Nwokegi (2009, p. 26) the researcher stressed the need to regulate the media as a result of its delicate nature. A media void of ethics is a media without identity, bewildered and unbridled, and a chaotic field to disseminate unfounded news (Motamednejad, 2000) cited in (Babran & Ahadzadeh, 2010, p. 125).

1.4. Media Laws Observance in Citizen Journalism Practice in Nigeria

Nnanyelugo, Diri and Odii (2013) posit that citizen journalism has been on the increase in Nigeria as a result of the use of social media networks. Characteristically, citizen journalism offers opportunities to both professional and non-professional journalists alike to become active participants in the creation of news content. Thus, members of the public are no longer helpless passive consumers of news or mere spectators but have also become content creators thereby breaking the seemingly endless monopoly of the traditional media (Nnanyelugo et al., 2013; Odii, 2013; Ukwueze & Uche, 2015).

However, in view of one of the definitions offered by Nnanyelugo et al. (2013, p. 2) that "citizen journalism is simply the emerging brand of journalism in which the content is user-generated, unedited, uncensored and comes real-time." It presents from the onset its inherent confrontational stance to media laws. Little wonder, the trio identified some of the problems inherent in its practice to include trivializing issues of national importance including national calamities. "There was an outcry; especially by national leaders against the conduct of citizen journalists during the Dana Airline crash of June 03, 2012. It was said that while rescue operators were sweating profusely to see if there could be any survivors, citizen journalists were busy taking and uploading gory pictures to their friends" (Nnanyelugo et al. 2013, p. 6).

Onyebuchi (2010) in a study of post graduate mass communication students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka found that 79.2 percent of the sample believed that the future of citizen journalism practice would be one where there would be beneficial information posted online while 12.5% respondents on the other hand felt that it could be a future where people would invade the privacy of others. He also posits that the growth of citizen journalism throws up the challenge of credibility of news sources and content.

It is perhaps the incidence of pseudo or outright non-observance of media laws by citizen journalists that could have led to Ukwueze and Uche (2015, p. 13) lamentation that "while the rate at which Nigerian citizens have embraced the New Media technologies is commendable, it is regrettable though, when such technologies are abused."

1.5. Theoretical Framework

This study has a number of theories that can apply to it. Some of these theories include: The Libertarian; Democratic Participant; the information society; technology determinism as well as Uses and Gratifications Theories. However, among the relevant theories, the study was anchored on two, namely: the libertarian theory of the press and the information society theory.

1.6. The Libertarian Theory

It is one of the normative theories of the press. According to McQuail (1987) as cited in Okunna & Omenugha (2012, p. 197) the normative theories of the press are: the authoritarian theory, the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory, the soviet-communist theory, the development media theory and the democratic-participant media theory.

Among these theories, the libertarian theory is the most relevant to the present study and therefore constitutes its theoretical framework. This is because in Nigeria, the book publishing industry operates in an atmosphere that can be described as total freedom with little or no regulation from the government.

The tenets of libertarian theory as adapted from Okunna & Omenugha (2012, pp. 202-203), include:

- The media should be liberated from government control
- People are rational beings capable of thinking for themselves and distinguishing truth from falsehood
- The mass media should be owned by anybody who has the means and the desire to do so
- The media should provide a free market-place of ideas for the enlightenment of the people
- People should be exposed to all kinds of information and opinion

This theory is a complete opposite of the authoritarian theory which saw the masses as incapable of thinking for themselves or being able to distinguish truth from falsehood (Okunna & Omenugha (2012, p. 197).

Citizen journalism therefore operates within the tenets of the Libertarian theory. This is because the citizen journalists write, upload and publish what appeal to them or rather what they assume should be of interest to cyberspace and her netizens. There are no pre-determined qualifications or conditions to be met; all that is required to become a citizen journalist is to acquire what Dare (2011) refers to as “new media tool kit”.

1.7. Information Society Theory

The second theory for the study is Information Society Theory. According to McQuail (2010, p. 104) the term ‘**information society**’ along with the term ‘communications revolution’ has now almost come to be accepted as an objective description of our time and of the type of society that is emerging. Citing Melody (1990, pp. 26-27), McQuail (2010, p. 104) describes information societies as those that have become dependent upon complex electronic information networks and which allocate a major portion of their resources to information and communication activities. The term ‘information society’ seems to have originated in Japan in the 1960s (Ito, 1981) though its genealogy is usually traced to the concept of ‘post-industrial’ society (McQuail 2010, p. 104). The information society theory indicates the rise of a new kind of society, quite distinct from mass society, one characterized by complex interactive networks of communication (McQuail 2010, p. 136). Some of the major information society theory’s propositions are:

- ❖ Information work replaces industrial work
- ❖ Production and flow of information accelerates
- ❖ Society is characterized by increasing interconnectivity
- ❖ Disparate activities converge and integrate
- ❖ There is increasing dependency on complex systems
- ❖ Trends to globalization accelerates
- ❖ Constraints on time and space are much reduced
- ❖ Consequences are open to alternative interpretations, both positive and negative
- ❖ There is increased risk of loss of control (McQuail 2010, p. 107)

However, Hassan (2008) as cited by McQuail, believes that the information society idea is essentially ideological and supportive of the neo-liberal economic project that benefits most from global interconnectivity. Adding his voice to the features and developments that necessitated the ideology of information society, Van Cuilenburg (1987) specifies the main characteristic as the exponential increase in production and flow of information of all kinds, largely as a consequence of reduced costs following miniaturization and computerization. McQuail (2010) also pointed out that reductions in terms of transmission costs have continued to fuel the process of exponential growth and that there is a continually decreasing sensitivity to distance, cost as well as a continually increasing speed, volume and interactivity of possibilities for communication (p. 105); thus, paving way for citizen journalism.

2. Methodology

This study adopted the survey research methodology. Undergraduates of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria Nsukka were purposively chosen. The choice of undergraduates of mass communication is because they are assumed to be well informed about Mass media laws, new media as well as citizen journalism. These undergraduates are mostly young people whose age bracket is between 15 and 20 years. This set of individuals can be described as Internet champs, cyber stars, cyber nymphs, cyber stalkers, online fellows and citizens of the now. Other descriptions include the “Net-Generation”, “Millennium Generation”, “Cyber Citizens”, “Digital Natives” or “Netizens” (Tapscott, 1998; Prensky, 2001; Flanagin & Metzger, 2008, p. 6; Mesch 2009, p. 50). Students of University of Nigeria are drawn from several parts of the country since it is a Federal University and of course the first full-fledged indigenous and first autonomous University in Nigeria. The undergraduates studied were selected through purposive sampling while the questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection.

2.1. Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the researchers present the result from data collected and analyzed in tables showing frequencies and percentages as well as mean and standard deviation (St. D) in line with the objectives of the study.

Out of a total of 278 copies of questionnaire distributed, 261 were returned leaving out 17 copies. This gives a response rate of 94% from the data collected.

| S/NO | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|--|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Sex: Male | 131 | 50.2% |
| | Female | 130 | 49.8% |
| 2 | Age: 15 – 20 years | 135 | 52% |
| | 21 – 26 years | 90 | 34% |
| | 27 – 32 years | 36 | 14% |
| | 33 – 38 years | - | 0% |
| | 39years and above | - | 0% |
| 3 | Level as undergraduate: 1 st year | 38 | 15% |
| | 2 nd year | 70 | 27% |
| | 3 rd year | 67 | 25% |
| | Final year | 86 | 33% |
| | Total | 261 | 100 |

Table1: Distribution of responses showing the demographic data of respondents in the study

The results in table 1 (above) show that there is a slight difference between the numbers of male respondents 131 (50.2%) as against that of the female respondents 130 (49.8%).

Also, there is a preponderance of respondents between 15-20 years (135 representing 52%), followed by those between 21 – 26 years (90 representing 34%). There were no respondents between ages (33 – 38) and (39 and above) while at the bottom of the table (on Age category) are respondents between (27 – 32) years (36 representing 14%) lastly, on their level of education (as undergraduates), the result shows that most of them (86 representing 33%) are in their final year (i.e. 4th year) while 70 (27%) are respondents in their second year. At the bottom of the table (on level of education category) are respondents in 1st year 38 (15%) and 3rd year 67 (25%) respectively.

| S/N | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Yes | 228 | 87% |
| 2 | No | 33 | 13% |
| | Total | 261 | 100 |

Table 2: Distribution of responses showing respondents level of awareness of media laws

From the result in Table 2 (above) a greater percentage 228 (87%) of respondents are aware of media laws as undergraduates while an abysmal 33 (representing 13%) of the respondents claim to be unaware of media laws as undergraduates.

| S/N | Variables | To a very large extent | To a large extent | To some extent | Not at all |
|-----|--------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|
| 1 | law of Defamation (Libel/Slander) | 133 (51%) | 64 (25%) | 58 (22%) | 6 (2%) |
| 2 | Law of Privacy (invasion of privacy) | 113 (43%) | 74 (29%) | 65 (25%) | 9 (3%) |
| 3 | Copyright law | 125 (48%) | 76 (29%) | 54 (21%) | 6 (2%) |
| 4 | Indecency/obscene law | 117 (45%) | 68 (26%) | 61 (23%) | 15 (6%) |
| 5 | Law of sedition | 121 (47%) | 56 (22%) | 60 (23%) | 21 (8%) |
| 6 | Disclosure of official secret | 131 (50%) | 67% (26%) | 35 (13%) | 28 (11%) |

Table 3: Distribution of Responses showing respondents' extent of familiarity with media laws

The results in Table 3 (above) indicate that respondents show familiarity "To a very large extent" more on "Law of Defamation 133 (51%), this is followed by "Disclosure of official Secret" 131 (50%) and "Copyright Law" which ranked third with 125 (48%) as shown in the result.

At the bottom of the table is "Law of Privacy (i.e. Invasion of Privacy)" with 113 (43%) and "Indecency/obscene law" which records 117 (45%), not forgetting "Law of sedition" which ranked fourth with 121 (47%) from the result.

| S/N | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Yes | 234 | 90% |
| 2 | No | 27 | 10% |
| | Total | 261 | 100 |

Table 4: Distribution of responses showing respondents' understanding of media laws

The result above (in Table 4) shows that majority of respondents 234 (90%) claim to understand what media laws are as undergraduates, while a negligible few 27 (10%) said they do not understand what media laws are (as undergraduates).

| S/N | Variables | SA | A | D | SD | U | Mean | St. D |
|-----|--|-----|----|----|----|----|------|-------|
| 1 | Media laws guide only those who work in the media | 107 | 51 | 41 | 33 | 29 | 3.67 | 1.403 |
| 2 | Media laws are laws that regulate media operations | 171 | 63 | 12 | - | 15 | 4.44 | 1.016 |
| 3 | Media laws guide everybody that is engaged in new media | 110 | 65 | 45 | 12 | 29 | 3.82 | 1.324 |
| 4 | Media laws guide everybody that is engaged in old media | 85 | 73 | 59 | 18 | 26 | 3.66 | 1.271 |
| 5 | Media laws guide people that work in publishing industry | 115 | 83 | 32 | 8 | 23 | 3.99 | 1.218 |
| 6 | Media laws regulate media operations and operators | 161 | 58 | 15 | 5 | 22 | 4.27 | 1.201 |

Table 5: Distribution of responses showing respondents' levels of understanding of the provisions of media laws

In the analysis of the results in table 5 (above), the researcher used "Limits of real numbers" as a benchmark for the decision rule for each item in the variables. These limits are given as follows:

- i) For "Strongly Agree" decision used mean scores between (5.100 – 4.45)
- ii) For "Agree" decision use mean scores between (4.44 – 3.45)
- iii) For "Disagree" decisions use mean scores between (3.44 – 2.45)
- iv) For "Strongly Disagree" decisions use mean scores between (2.44 – 1.45)
- v) For "Undecided" decisions use mean scores between (1.44 – 0.45)

Top of the list of respondent's level understanding of media laws in that "media laws are laws that regulate media operators" (mean = 4.44, St. D = 1.016) leading to "Agree" decision (as affirmed by 234 out of 261 respondents) (i.e. SA + A). This is followed by the understanding that: "media laws regulate media operations and operators (mean = 4.27, St. D = 1.201) and affirmed by 219 (out of 261) respondents (i.e. SA + A) leading to "Agree" decisions. In actual sense, all the variables in the list of respondents' levels of understanding of media laws had been scores between (4.44 – 3.45) leading to "Agree" decisions for all views

| S/N | Variables | SA | A | D | SD | U | Mean | St. D |
|-----|--|-----|-----|----|----|----|------|-------|
| 1 | Media laws protect individuals from being defamed | 189 | 29 | 22 | 3 | 18 | 4.41 | 1.145 |
| 2 | They ensure that peoples' privacy is respected | 163 | 53 | 16 | 3 | 26 | 4.24 | 1.255 |
| 3 | They ensure that writers enjoy the fruit of their labour | 145 | 54 | 30 | 3 | 29 | 4.08 | 1.310 |
| 4 | They ensure a decent society | 85 | 102 | 47 | 6 | 23 | 3.83 | 1.166 |
| 5 | They ensure an organized society | 83 | 100 | 55 | 3 | 20 | 3.85 | 1.117 |
| 6 | They ensure that what ought to be kept secret are secret | 67 | 103 | 47 | 6 | 38 | 3.59 | 1.296 |

Table 6: Distribution of responses showing respondents' perception of media laws

| S/N | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Yes | 198 | 76% |
| 2 | No | 63 | 24% |
| | Total | 261 | 100 |

Table 7: Distribution of responses showing respondents' view on the application of media laws to citizen journalism

| S/N | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | To a very large extent | 17 | 6% |
| 2 | To a large extent | 99 | 38% |
| 3 | To some extent | 59 | 23% |
| 4 | Not at all | 86 | 33% |
| | Total | 261 | 100 |

Table 8: Distribution of responses showing respondents' opinion on the extent to which they think media laws are observed in citizen journalism

| S/N | Variables | SA | A | D | SD | U | Mean | St. D |
|-----|--|-----|----|-----|----|----|------|-------|
| 1 | Media laws still exist in this era of citizen journalism | 118 | 85 | 34 | 3 | 21 | 4.06 | 1.164 |
| 2 | Media laws are being observed in new media | 105 | 64 | 54 | 17 | 21 | 3.82 | 1.253 |
| 3 | Those who write and post stories in new media observe media laws | 89 | 32 | 96 | 23 | 21 | 3.56 | 1.263 |
| 4 | Those who are posting pictures in new media observe media laws | 82 | 14 | 105 | 39 | 21 | 3.37 | 1.284 |
| 5 | Those who are uploading videos in new media observe media laws | 83 | 7 | 83 | 68 | 21 | 3.23 | 1.348 |

Table 9: Distribution of responses showing respondents' perception of media law observance in citizen journalism

The results in Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9 show respondents' perception of media law as well as its observance in the era of citizen journalism within the Nigerian context. For the results in Tables 6 and 8, the limit of real numbers rule will be used as a benchmark for the decision rule.

The limits include:

- i) For “Strongly Agree” decision we used mean scores between (5.00 – 4.45) as its limit for the real number (5)
- ii) For “Agree” decision we used mean scores between (4.44 – 3.45) as its limit for the real number (4)
- iii) For “Disagree” decision we used mean scores between (3.44 – 2.45) as its limit for the real number (3)
- iv) For “Strongly Disagree” decision we used mean scores between (2.44 – 1.45) as its limit for the real number (2)
- v) For “Undecided” decision we used mean scores between (1.44 – 0.45) as its limit for the real number (1)

The results in Table 6 shows all mean scores to be between (4.44 – 3.45) which implies that the decision rule for all of them is “Agree”. Hence, respondents affirm that:

- Media laws protect individuals from being defamed
- Media laws ensure that people’s privacy is respected
- Media laws ensure that writers enjoy the fruit of their labour
- Media laws ensure a decent society
- Media laws ensure an organized society
- Media laws ensure that what ought to be kept secret are secret.

Out of all the above affirmed responses, the belief that “media laws protected individuals from being defamed” ranked highest with mean score of 4.41 and St. D = 1.145 and had the highest “SA” response 189 (out of 261). From table 7 (above) the results indicate that 198 (76%) respondents believe that media laws apply to citizen journalism as against 63 (24%) who do not share the same view.

On the other hand, Table 8 contains responses on the extent to which respondents believe that media laws are observed in citizen journalism. The result showed that most of the respondents 99(38%) believe that “To a large extent” media laws are observed in citizen journalism as against 86 (33%) who say that media laws are not observed in citizen journalism at all. The remaining 59 (23%) and 17 (6%) believe that media laws are observed in citizen journalism “to some extent” and “to a very large extent” respectively.

Table 9 contains results on respondents’ perception of the observance of media laws in citizen journalism. The result shows that respondents perceive three (3) out of the five (5) to be true within the Nigerian context.

These include: “Media laws still exist in this era of citizen journalism” with the highest mean score of 4.06 and standard deviation of 1.104 (which falls between the limit for the real number 4) leading to “Agree” decision. The same applies to the view that: “media laws are being observed in new media” (mean = 3.82, St. D = 1.263). Conversely, the remaining two (2) view were perceived negatively by the respondents as their mean scores fell between (3.44 – 2.45) which is the limit for the real number = 3, leading to “Disagree” decision. These views are: “Those who are posting pictures in new media observe media laws” (mean = 3.37, St. D = 1.284) and “Those who are uploading videos in new media observe media laws” (mean = 3.23, St. D = 1.348).

3. Discussion of Findings

In this section, the findings that emanate from this study are discussed in relation to the objective of study and based on how they provide answers to the proposed research questions in this study.

➤ Research Question One: To what extent do Nigerian undergraduates understand media laws?

The answer to the above research question can be found in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5. The results in these tables show level of awareness, extent of familiarity and level of understanding of media laws among Nigerian undergraduates. This is important because one cannot ascertain level of understanding without finding out awareness and familiarity. The result in Table 2 shows a preponderance of Nigerian undergraduates’ awareness of media laws 228 (87%). The result agrees with the result of the demographic data (see Table 1) where most of the respondents were found to be in 4th year mass communication 86 (33%) which imply that they must have been taught media laws in class.

Also, the results in Table 3 reveal that respondents’ extent of familiarity with media laws were found more “To a very extent” on “Law of Defamation” 133 (50%) as well as “Copyright law” 125 (48%). In all, more than 100 respondents are familiar “To a very large extent” with all the listed media laws. This result corroborates that of the earlier findings in this section.

On respondents’ understanding of media laws, the finding reveals that majority 234 (90%) of the respondents claim to understand media laws. When subjected to specifics to ascertain their level of understanding of media laws, it was found (in table 8) that all the items listed to test their level of understanding fell within the limit of the real number for “Agree” decision (i.e. 4.44 – 3.45) which implies that all the respondents understand the listed items used to explain what media laws are within the Nigerian context. These include: “Media laws guide only those who work in the media”, “they are laws that regulate media operations”, they guide everybody that engage in new media”, and “they guide people that work in publishing industry” as well as “they regulate media operations and operators.

➤ Research Question Two: How do Nigerian undergraduates perceive media laws?

The results in Table 6 provide answers on respondents’ perception of media laws within Nigerian context. The finding reveals a preponderance of respondents’ perception on “media laws protect individuals from being defamed” (mean = 4.41, St. D = 1.145) leading to “Agree” decision. This is followed by the perception that “media laws ensure that peoples’ privacy is respected” (mean = 4.24; St. D = 1.255). In fact, all the responses on respondents’ perception of media laws fell within the limits for the real number (4) (i.e. 4.44 – 3.45) which leads to “Agree” decision. The findings in respondents’ perception agree with that of their level of understanding of media laws. This is so because each of the items used for testing their level of perception of media laws were adapted from the items used to test their level of awareness, extent of familiarity and level of understanding respectively.

The findings in this study on respondents' level of knowledge of media laws corroborated that of Udoakah et al (2014) where they found that the "Law of Defamation" ranked highest in respondents' knowledge level (100%) (i.e. all the respondents know and understand law of Defamation).

Also, it agrees with the finding on copyright law (which ranked third in this study) scoring 98% level of knowledge among their study units.

- **Research Question Three:** To what extent do Nigerian undergraduates perceive that media laws are being observed in citizen Journalism?

The answer to the above research question is found in Table 7 and 8 of this study.

The findings (in Table 7) reveal that majority of the respondents 198 (76%) believe that media laws are applied in citizen journalism within the Nigerian context.

On further investigation (see Table 8) on the extent to which their claim is true or can be proven, it was found that 99 (38%) respondents affirm it to be true "To a large extent", 59 (23%) also affirm it "To some extent" and 17 (6%) affirm it "To a very large extent".

However, the findings reveal 86 (33%) respondents who claim that it is not true at all that media laws are applied to citizen journalism within the Nigerian context.

- **Research Question Four:** To what extent do Nigerian undergraduates observe media laws as they engage in citizen journalism?

The result in Table 9 provides answer to the above research question as the respondents' observance of media laws were put to test in their engagement in citizen journalism.

The findings reveal that the respondents observed media laws in new media (mean = 3.82 and St. D = 1.253) and in writing and posting stories in new media (mean = 3.56 and St. D = 1.263) both of which resulted to "Agree" decision.

But on a further scrutiny, it was found that media laws were not observed in two areas of citizen journalism: "posting pictures in new media" (mean = 3.37 and St. D = 1.284) and "uploading videos in new media (mean = 3.23 and St. D = 1.348) all leading to "Disagree" decision.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This study is an assessment of Nigerian undergraduates' perception of media laws in an era of citizen journalism. The study sought to ascertain Nigerian undergraduates' level of knowledge of media laws; their perception of media laws; their perception of how media laws are observed in citizen journalism and their observance of media laws as they engage in citizen journalism. The survey research design was employed and the questionnaire was the instrument used in gathering data from a sample of 278 respondents. The findings reveal a connection between "awareness of media laws" and "extent of familiarity with media law" as well as "level of knowledge of media laws" with 87%, 51% and 90% respectively. In Nigerian undergraduates' observance of media laws in citizen journalism, the study found that media laws were observed in new media in areas connected with posting stories online but were not observed in posting pictures and uploading videos.

Based on the findings that emanated from this study, the researchers conclude that "awareness" influences the "extent of familiarity" which goes a long way in determining "level of knowledge" on issues of interest to citizens. It is obvious from the distinctiveness of citizen journalism that a new media ecosystem is gradually evolving where there is little or no control instead media gatekeepers are kept at bay or sidelined while the citizen journalists publish with little or no filtering. It can therefore be said that there is a tendency to violate laws when one's identity is hidden than when such is known. This has resulted in media laws infringement and contravention! Little wonder in this era, several hate speeches, privacy invasion, plagiarism, passing off, pornography and such like have become a common scenario. Therefore, it calls that all hands must be on deck to curtail this menace that has become a reality of our time.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion drawn from this study, it becomes imperative to make the following recommendations:

1. There is need for a concerted effort by all stakeholders in the new media era including the Nigerian Communications Commission, Internet Service Providers, GSM operators and mobile phone users to combat the erosion of media laws by citizen journalists.
2. In this era of citizen journalism, the knowledge of media laws is a sine-qua-non. Therefore, the educational policy should be revised to include not just ICT education but legal education that centers on Media laws as they relate to new media. In like manner, media laws should be included in the curriculum of Basic Education in Nigeria to cater for individuals who engage in citizen journalism without tertiary education.

6. References

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