The Clamour For Gates In The New Media: An Assesment Of Nigerian Journalist's Perception

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Abstract: Communication studies perceive gatekeepers as professionals, trained editors and reporters with professional news value. These people (especially in the conventional mainstream media setting) had power to set agenda for discussion in the public sphere through selection of what becomes news for the day. The gatekeeping practice unfortunately left the audience of the media only as passive receivers of news contents; having no much hand in selection of what becomes news. Eventually, the status quo somewhat changed with the arrival of the internet and the new media technology – alas! The passive news receivers at this instant become active news producers through the utilization of user generated technology. However, this transformation did not come without challenges - first, the gateless media had thrown open the gates, everything and anything could now pass through the "old sacred gate" without the traditional journalistic checks. Consequently, the effect of the un-checked influx of contents into the new and gateless media is that defamatory, seditious, salacious, fake and sometimes, explicit sexual contents find their way through the gate, hence the clamour for erection of new gates to check these trends. It is against the foregoing that this study tries to investigate the perception of journalists in Anambra State towards the clamour for gates in the new media. Whether they see the possibility of erecting gates for the present gateless new media? Using a census study and population of three hundred respondents (journalists in Anambra State) the researchers came up with the following findings: That journalist in Anambra State, (71.3%) perceives the gateless nature of the media as having positive, and at the same time negative effects on media environment. That though the present gateless nature of the media has helped journalists in their investigation and research, it has somewhat affected the interpretative and investigative angles of journalism. Finally, the study revealed that in the face of the clamour, majority of journalists in Anambra State believe that the erection of gates in the new media might not be really feasible (63.4%), while less significant number, (36.6%) were of the view that there is the possibility of erecting gates

Keywords: Clamour, Gate, Gateless media, Perception, Journalists

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication in human society has come a very long way - from the primitive era, through to the era of the mainstream media and recently the emergence of new media; what Nwanmmou (2016, p.88) calls "Communication through the Guttenberg to the Zuckerberg era." In these phases of technological transitions of communication development, one

thing has remained indisputable; the fact that communication remains the life wire of every society. Odii (2015, p.34) supports the above view when he notes that, "Irrespective of changes that have resulted from the development of media and communication over centuries, the society has continued to depend on it (the media) for a wide range of activities" Moreover, the dynamism in communication and its system have also resulted in the emergence of a new type of media

technology with astounding collaborative, participatory, democratic and user-generated-content features – this shift, has eventually precipitated wide range of transformations in the media environment. Among the avalanches of changes provoked by this emerging media technology environment is the "gateless" nature of the media. Surprisingly, while this situation appears to be among some of its modifications, eroding the gate-keeping function, it equally seems to be empowering the audience; turning them not only into content consumers, but producers.

However, this situation, as it were, has consequently raised a wide number of debates among the media scholars. Will the gate-keeping function still survive in an era where activities in the new media seem to be eroding the idea of gate-keeping? To what extent would the plethora of contents that flood, and or find their way into the media be controlled, like it was done in the conventional media era? Have the gates and its keepers finally collapsed or are there alternative ways of keeping the gate secured in the new media era of gatelessness? If the gates have been thrown down, is there need for alternative gate keeping mechanism to address the challenges that may arise from the absence of the gate keeping/gatekeepers? Has the gateless nature of the new media enthroned the much awaited media democracy? These and so many other issues had remained areas of curiosity in media scholarship and will somewhat form the bulk of this study.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The new media technology unarguably has influenced not only the way news is gathered, collated and reported, but other areas of media activities (Dunu. Ukwueze & Ekwugha, 2017). Before the advent of the new media, a reporter was given a lead, or went out to find a story, when these stories are scouted for and gathered, the same reporter, who also is a part of the gate keeping process takes time to transcribe, organise and more importantly, forwards his/her piece to the editor who eventually goes through the news items and consequently decides what news or materials make it to the news stand (Bruns, 2011). This gate keeping exercise most times does not stop at the sub editors or editor in-chief's table, but gets to other editorial teams, at some points, in other to protect the interest of media owners and or advertisers, stories naturally die, or are slanted at the gates; some stories, irrespective of how sensitive they are, are not given opportunity to see the light of the day (Burns, 201, p.12). This trend was grossly criticised over the years in mainstream or conventional journalism as strategic censorship, it was seen as governments/owners way of killing contents that affected their interest (Dunu. Ukwueze & Ekwugha, 2017). It might be instructive to point out here that the traditional role of the media gatekeeper revolved particularly around key persons who are involved in decision making process of news production. These people, Harold Lasswell said, "carried out the "surveillance function of the media, having close watch of what passed through the media gates" They filtered out what they think is bad, such things like: pornography, slander, defamatory statements and unwanted materials that may

possibly be injurious to the society, other individuals or organisations.

However, with the arrival of the internet and the new media there appeared changes on the way the media business was done - the gatekeeping process was not precluded. Dutton and Blank (2012, p.122) underscores the benefits that arrived with the new media this way: "The arrival of social media made communication interactive and participatory, more essentially, the platform encouraged the user generated contents, which resulted in the emergence of group of people known as the "*prosumers*" These people, Dutton & Blank continued, "were not only involved in media content consumption, but also became active producers of contents of the media" Oddi (2015) also lends his voice to this transformational power of the new technology thus:

The emergence of this new media platform subsequently opened the closed system that characterised the mainstream media" Nevertheless, while the public were yet to settle from the euphoria precipitated by the shift engendered by the new media - the perceived democratisation of the media environment, a rousing debate sparked off on the challenges of the new but gateless media.

Prominent among the challenges that arose from the gateless nature of the media is the "un-controlled and unregulated nature of the platform. Ukwueze, (2015, p.105) captures the above predicament this way:

everyone in the gateless era of journalism has become a potential journalist, contents are sent online indiscriminately and with reckless abandon, these contents are often allowed into the platform un-edited, allowing for expressions that are not only grammatically wrong, but most times, sending unconfirmed stories.

That said, it becomes clear, as posited by some schools of thought that irrespective of the seemingly perceived benefits associated with the new form of journalism there appears to be need for regulation on the social media - they urgent need for restoration of the gates and their keepers (Vos, 2009). Conversely, some other different schools of thought argue that: the emergence of the new media with its present reformations seems to be the foreseeable future for media democratisation that has been anticipated over the years, they are of the view that there is no need to re-erect the type of gates which characterised the conventional media in the new media era, arguing that this will somewhat amount to going back the way things were done in the old and conventional media. Interestingly, it is within the dust raised by these debates that this study becomes relevant. There is however, no denying the fact that journalists remain one of the main actors in the issue under discourse, they are to a large extent directly or indirectly affected. Bearing this in mind, the study sought to examine Nigerian journalist's perception of this clamour for gates in the new media. Is there need for gates? If there is, can these gates be erected, and if they can, how? This forms the bulk of the problem the study intends to investigate.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to examine the Nigerian journalists' perception of the clamour for gates in the

new media. However, in more specific terms, the study sought the following objectives
- ✓ To determine the effect (positive and negative) that the Nigerian journalists perceive the gateless nature of the new media as having.
- ✓ To examine the advantages and disadvantages that the Nigerian journalists perceive as potential result of the introduction of gates in the new media.
- ✓ To examine how feasible the journalists perceive introduction of gates in the new media.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:
- ✓ What effect (positive and negative) do Nigerian journalists perceive the gateless nature of the new media as having?
- ✓ What advantages and disadvantages do Nigerian journalists perceive as the potential result of introduction of gates in the new media to their profession?
- ✓ How feasible do the journalists perceive introduction of gates in the new media to be?

II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. THE NEW MEDIA: NEW GATEKEEPERS

The digital age no doubt created wide range of opportunities and challenges for virtually all professions (Dunu, Ukwueze & Ekwugha, 2017). In the case of journalism, these various effects have at times been accepted, negotiated and at other times, contested, depending on the level of adoption and adaptation to technology. Harmans, Vergeer & Haenens (2009) points out that "the arrival of the new media changed the ways journalists work around the world" One of the areas that witnessed this change is the traditional gatekeeping function of the media. The new media as it were, has spurred a powerful new space; where large numbers of bloggers gather to share insights, experiences, views and news. These new gatekeepers contents perform almost similar roles as their peers in the traditional media; they read and filter thousands of media reports, re-write and post their own version although without editorial skills or accountability required by the mainstream journalism (Rheinbold , 2007). The new media gave rise to such terms like civic and public journalism, meaning that everyone in the new dispensation has right to disseminate information, censored or uncensored.

B. NEW MEDIA: AN OVERVIEW

The new media technologies often referred to as the Web 2.0 encompass a wide variety of web-related communication technologies. These technologies include: blogs, wikis, online social networking, virtual worlds and other social media forms. It might be important to note, for the purpose of clarity, that variations exist in the use of terms describing the new technologies that revolutionized the process of information gathering and dissemination. Such terms like "social media", "new media" or "ICT" are used interchangeably to describe these new technologies in communication industry (Odii, 2015). Until the 1980's, the media relied primarily on print and analog broadcast models such as those of television, radio and newspaper etc. The last twenty five years however, saw the rapid transformation of the media which are predicated upon the use of digital technologies, such as the internet and video games. The arrival of digital computers transformed the old and conventional media (Shapiro cited in Croteau & Hoynes 2003).

New media are platforms with highly accessible digital technologies such as blogs, podcasts, social network, Wikis, micro-blogs and message boards that can be used by the general public for interactions across distances. They are products of globalization and scientific innovations which stem from the expansion of information and communication technologies. The concept of the new media has been defined and given different explanations by its users, ICT experts and authors. Nwabueze (2009, p.146-147), though notes that, "it is somewhat still difficult to accurately state what comprises the new media" According to the author, "New media refers to products of the ongoing information technology revolution which has separated the old communication technologies, basically, those used prior to the advent of computer (land line telephone, electronic news gathering camera, analogue radio and television, video text, wireless, intercom system etc" Today, the Internet and World Wide Web constitute major components of the new media. Nwabueze (2009, p.123) further reveals that "the new media facilitates channels which have redefined journalistic information sharing and dissemination with a more interactive sender - receiver relationship in a mass communication" Asemah (2011, p.204) however, describes the new media as "A broad term that emerged in the later part of the twentieth century to encompass the amalgamation of traditional media such as film, images, music, spoken and written words with the interactive ability of the computer and communication technology" The new media Asemah (2011) further argues, "holds a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere and on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content" According to him, "new media are disparate set of communication technologies that share certain features, apart from being new, made possible by digitization and being widely available for personal use as a communication device" The new media are not only concerned with the production and distribution of messages, but also with processing, exchange and storage (Hanson 2005). From the foregoing, it is quite clear that one common feature in the definitions new media; is the fact that it is usually based on user generated participation. It is this opportunity to enjoy user to user interaction that mainly distinguishes the new media from the traditional media (Ukwueze, 2015). Another attribute of the social media that distinguishes it from the conventional media is the choice it accords to its users. Choice enables people to access the information they like to learn about, through the social media eliminating the gatekeeper role of the traditional media. On one hand, the choice offered by the social media reduces the

shared experience that viewers of particular traditional media usually have and on the other hand creates a network of individuals with like interest and similar preferences (Auwal, 2015).It might be interesting to note that in the present day America, more than half of American teens and young adults use social networking sites to send messages, assess, and at other times, package news items. In Nigeria however, over ten million people who are connected to the internet, engage in activities that are enabled by the use of the social media (Auwal, 2015). Most people who make use new media tools access them mainly through computers and mobile devices like phones and tablets. From a more practical point of view, the new media includes web-based and mobile-based technologies that revolutionized the process of communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organisations and communities. Examples of these platforms include, but not limited to the following computer mobile applications: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, iTunes, Second Life, Whatsapp, Yahoo messenger, Blackberry messenger and MySpace. These tools are referred to as media because they can also be used for storage and dissemination of information. Unlike the traditional media such as the radio and the television, the social platforms allow their users to interact, add, share contents like photographs and videos among others. With the arrival of the social media, people who had been all the while at the receiving end of the one way communication are now increasingly likely to become producers and transmitters (Ukwueze, 2015). The implication of the above is that the mass media news outlets appears to be consequently struggling with the changing gate-keeping standards due to the interactive contents produced by the audience themselves (Creeber & Martin, 2009). In the present era propelled by the new form of media, ordinary citizens now are empowered to report on their experiences, while being held to high standards of information quality and community values. In the long run, Bennett & Sergerberg (2011, p.34) argue, "this might be the most revolutionary aspect of the new media environment" Commenting on the distinguishing features of the new media from the old one, McQuail (2006) notes, "One of the main feature that distinguish the mew media from the old are: their interconnectedness, accessibility to individuals, users as senders, and or receivers, their ubiquity and delocatedness" Idiong (2012, p.109) supports McQuail's position when he adds that, "the characteristics of the new media include following terms, digitality, interactivity, virtuality and hypertextuality"

C. THE CONCEPT OF GATES IN COMMUNICATION

The term gate-keeping was originally used by Kurt Lewin in his Human Relations study (1947) to refer to (1) the process by which a message passes through various gates of the media, as well as the people or groups who allow message to pass (gatekeepers), these may be individuals or a group of persons through whom a message passes from sender to the receiver. A camera person is a vivid example of a gatekeeper, who selects certain area for photographing, which is then shown to the viewers. Editors of newspapers, magazines and publishing houses are also gatekeepers as they allow certain information to get through, while they filter pieces information they feel

are not news or newsworthy . According to Narhon Barzilai (2009, p.1) "Gate-keeping is a process through which information is filtered for dissemination, whether for publication, broadcasting, the internet or some other form of communication"

The academic theory of gate-keeping is founded on multiple fields of study, including communication studies, journalism, political science and sociology. Throwing light on the historical development of the gatekeeping process Livingstone & Lance Bennett (2003, p.12) note that, "The concept of gatekeeping was identified in literature as early as 1922, though at this point, it had not received a theoretical name." The concept however was identified in Kurt Lewin's (1934) publication *Forces behind the Food Habits and Methods of Change*. Explaining the ideas behind the publication, Melvin & Magerate (2009) note:

Working during the world war two, Kurt Lewin conducted field research initially among Midwestern housewives to determine how to effectively change their families' food consumption during this time of the war. Lewin recognised that for food to go from a garden to the store and dining table there were various decision making process it had to pass on the way there. At a time when men were taught to control all household decisions, Lewin found that food does not move by its own impetus, entering or not entering, and moving from one section of the channel to the other are affected by a gate-keeper. The gatekeeper in this case was typically a housewife or sometimes a maid in more affluent households. Lewin was able to demonstrate that not all the members of the household have equal right in making household food decisions and that the wife, who usually shops and prepares the food controls the gates based on variety of considerations.

In 1950 however, David Manning White, a journalism professor at Boston University dcided to look at the factors an editor puts into consideration when deciding which news will make the paper and which will not. In order to do this, White consulted an editor, a man in his mid 40's, but with 25 years of experience. He calls this man "*Mr. Gates*" Mr. Gates was the wire editor of a morning newspaper in Mid West City of 100, 000 people that had circulation of 30, 000. During the study, Mr. Gates retained all the copies of news contents that he rejected from the paper for a week. At the end of his shift, he made notes on why each story was rejected, startlingly, White found out at the end of the week that nine tenths of the wire copy got rejected and that the process in which they were rejected were highly subjective (not objective) - based largely on the editors set of experiences, attitudes and expectations. At the end of the study, White remarks rather disappointedly that "the reasons for rejecting news stories from press associations most of the time were highly subjective, and based on gatekeeper's set of experiences, attitudes and expectations." More than fifty years after Whites study, Shoemaker, Martin Eichholz, Eunyi, Kim &Brenda Wrigly (2000) studied the forces in news gate-keeping in relation to covering of congressional. They found out that only news worthiness had significant effect on the amount of coverage given to a bill than personal characteristics. Singer (2000) further studied how the internet was changing the process of gatekeeping for newspapers; she explains that "the power of the gatekeepers

seems to gradually diminish in a modern information society" With the emergence of the internet and the arrival of the new media along with the 2.0 environment, users began playing greater roles in producing and (re) distributing on line news items via online social networks like Twitter and Facebook and this somewhat altered thr traditional gatekeeping process (Singer 2000). Interestingly, studies have shown in corroboration of the above views that in the new media era, the audience has began to "gate-keep" what Shoemaker & Vos (2011) theorises as the "audience gate-keeping" The authors argue that audience gate-keeping is a process in which users pass along already available news item, and comment on them based on the user's own criteria about the news worthiness. Peter & Wallberge (2015) however argue that "Gate-keepers choice is complex web of influences, preferences, motives and common values."

Doris (2009, p.122) clearly outlines the five criteria which gate-keepers look at when choosing a story, she notes:

Journalists rely on five criteria when choosing a story. The first criterion is strong impact. Local stories impact the public more than the international events. Violence conflict or disaster is the second criterion. Topics such s murder, shooting, Hurricane, captivate the attention of the audience. Familiarity is the third criterion; news stories gain more attention if they have issues pertaining to the public or include familiar situations concerning large audience. The fourth element is proximity, people prefer that which is local and finally the fifth element is timeliness and novelty. News should be that which does not occur every day.

Doris (2009, p.122) notes that "Gate-keeping is inevitable, and in some circumstances can be helpful and or useful. At other times, gate-keeping can also be dangerous; since it can lead to abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and that which will pass."

D. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study will proceed within the framework of the theory of diffusion of innovations. This is "a theory that seeks to explain how, why and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures" (Lewis, 2009). Though its origin could be credited to contributions from different scholars across diverse fields, the theory was popularised by Everett Rogers, a professor of rural sociology in his 1962 book *Diffusion of Innovations*. He describes diffusion as the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. Summarising the essentials of the theory, McCarthy (1998, p.78) writes:

It originated in communication to explain how, over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The end result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behaviour, or product. Adoption means that a person does something differently than what they had previously (i.e., purchase or use a new product, acquire and perform a new behaviour, etc.). The key to adoption is that the person must perceive the idea, behaviour, or product as new or innovative. It is through this that diffusion is possible.

Furthermore, the diffusion of innovations theory posits that decision to adopt an innovation could be made and implemented voluntarily by an individual or be compulsively made. To this effect, three types of innovation-decisions have been identified by the theory:

✓ *Optional Innovation-Decision:* This decision is made by an individual who is in some way distinguished from others in a social system.
✓ *Collective Innovation-Decision:* This decision is made collectively by all individuals of a social system.
✓ *Authority Innovation-Decision:* This decision is made for the entire social system by few individuals in positions of influence or power.

Yet again, the theory acknowledges that adoption of a new idea, behaviour, or product (i.e., "innovation") does not happen simultaneously in a social system; rather some people are more likely to adopt an innovation faster than others. In other words, individuals in a society have varying degrees of flexibility towards adopting innovations. Thus, Rogers (1962, p.150) posits that there are five different "adopter categories" as follows: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

In a nutshell, the theory of diffusion of innovations holds that new ideas spread within the society as long as certain conditions are in place. These conditions include that the idea must be seen as acceptable, relatively advantageous and that proper channel exists for its propagation. Viewed from the underlining assumptions of the diffusion of innovation theory, it becomes imperative to note that journalists who are part of the technological changes heralded by the new media become early adopters of this transformation so that they come to terms with its gateless nature of the new media.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research methodology to sample the views of registered journalists in Anambra State under the umbrella of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). According to NUJ, Anambra State Chapter, this population is 345 in number. Given the smallness of the population of this study (345), the researcher settled for census study. The census approach is a method where the researcher selects everyone of a given population that could be reached in the course of data collection (Adepoju, 2003). Through this approach the researchers were able to select 309. In terms of instrument administration, copies of questionnaire corresponding to the number of registered journalists were distributed among them with the help of chapel presidents who assisted in administering them to their members. The instrument of data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire's validity and reliability were tested through a pilot study. The details of chapels with the population of registered journalists, copies of questionnaire distributed, number returned, which formed the active population/ sample size of the study is presented in Table 1.

A total of 309 journalists actively responded to the questionnaires and formed the bases for data analyses. Data generated from these responses are presented using major themes explored in the study.

A. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data analysed in the demographic section of the study shows that 66.7% (200) of the respondents are males, while 33.3% (100) are females. The implication of the above is that the distribution of the male respondents is a little higher than that of their female counterpart. Again, for the respondent's age, the data indicated that 54.00% of the journalists fell within the ages of 24-29, this is followed by 20.3% of them who fell within the age of 18-23. 15.7% of them appeared within the age range of 35 and above, while 10.7% fell within the age bracket of 30-35. It was clear from the data that the younger age bracket (24-29) of the respondents had the largest percentage distribution while people who are (30 and above) had the lowest age distribution. From the analysis of the educational qualification of the respondents, the data showed that 46.3% of the respondents posses OND/NCE educational degree, 33.0% of them have First degree, 10.7% posses Post graduate Degree, while only 10% of them hold SSCE certificate. From the foregoing, it is quite clear that the OND/NCE degree holders have the highest percentage of respondents. This is followed by First degree holders, P.G and SSCE.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE: WHAT EFFECT (POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE) DO NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS PERCEIVE THE GATELESS NATURE OF THE NEW MEDIA AS HAVING?

Aware of effect of gateless nature of the new media in gatekeeping	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	YES	222	74%
	NO	78	26%
	TOTAL	300	100
Flooding of the media with inaccurate information			
	YES	243	81.0%
	NO	57	19.0%
	TOTAL	300	100%
Increase in defamatory and slanderous contents in the media			
	YES	183	61.0%
	NO	117	39.0%
	TOTAL	300	100%
Increase in plagiarism			
	YES	188	62.7%
	NO	112	37%
	TOTAL	300	100%

Has Enriched media discourse	YES	214	71.3%
	NO	86	28.7%
	TOTAL	300	100
Has democratised media landscape			
	YES	189	63%
	NO	111	37%
	TOTAL	300	100%
Opportunity for greater feedback			
	YES	246	82.0%
	NO	54	18%
	TOTAL	300	100
Made information gathering easier for journalists			
	YES	222	74.0%
	NO	78	26.0%
	TOTAL	300	100%

Table 1

Table one above shows that 74% of the respondents (222) indicate that they are aware of the effect of the gateless nature of the new media to the gatekeeping function of the media, while 26% of them indicated otherwise, the implication here is that the journalists are gradually coming to terms with the fact that the gatekeeping function of the media is increasingly changing. Furthermore, 61% of the journalists also noted that as a result of the gateless nature of the new media, there seems to be flood of inaccurate pieces of information in the media while only 19.5% of them had a dissimilar view. In addition, greater percentage, 61.1% of the respondents are of the view that plagiarism has increased in the media as a result of the while only 39.0% of them hold a different view. Responding to the positive effects that the gateless media has caused majority, (71.3%) say the gateless nature of the news media has helped in enriching media discourse, while only a meager number 28.7% said it has not, 63.0% of the respondents were of the view that the gateless nature of the new media has democratized the media landscape, while only 37.0%nhad a disparate view. The data also revealed that 82.0% of the respondents are of the view that the gateless nature of the new media has caused an increased feedback in the media, while only 18% said it has not. Similarly, 74.0% of the journalists are of the view that the gateless nature of the new media has made information gathering much easier for them, while only 26.6% had an opposing view. Based on the above data, it became clear that journalists in Anambra State perceive the gateless nature of the new media as having such negative effects like: allowing inaccurate contents into the media increase of defamatory and slanderous statements in the media. Plagiarism Iwas also identified as one of the negative effects of the gateless nature of the new media to the media. On the other hand, it is also clear from the foregoing that the gateless nature of the media has to a large extent engendered

some positive effects; like: enrichment of media discourse, democratisation of the media and made much more, made information gathering and dissemination easier for the journalists. It is against the foregoing that the researcher concludes that the Nigerian journalists perceive the gateless nature of the media as having a positive and at the same time negative effects on the media.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: WHAT ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES DO NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS PERCEIVE AS THE POTENTIAL RESULT OF GATELESS NATURE OF THE NEW MEDIA TO THEIR PROFESSION?

Helped in investigation and research	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	YES	190	63.3%
	NO	110	36.%
	TOTAL	**300**	**100**
Encouraged varieties of news			
	YES	214	71.3%
	NO	86	28.7%
	TOTAL	300	100%
Created more access to news stories			
	YES	243	81.%
	NO	57	19%
	TOTAL	300	100%
Affected Interpretative and investigative journalism			
	YES	222	74%
	NO	78	26.%
	TOTAL	300	100%

Table 2

From the table 2 above majority of the journalists was in agreement that the gateless nature of the media has helped them in investigation and research (63.3%), while only 36.0% disagreed. Interestingly, a greater percentage of the journalists (71.3%) were of the view that the gateless nature of the media has also encouraged the forage of varieties of news from divergent social media platforms, while only 28.7% of them have a different view. Furthermore, 81% of the journalists indicated that the gateless media has helped them in having more access to news stories, while only 19.0% of them hold a different view. However, majority 74% of the journalists were of the view that the art of interpretative and investigative journalism is suffering as a result of the gateless nature of media. It is against the foregoing that the researcher concluded that the gateless nature of the media has helped the journalists in investigation research into news stories. It has also encouraged them to search for varieties of news from

divergent social media platform. Conversely, that in the presence of the gateless nature of the media the many journalists seems to be losing the interpretative and investigative art of journalism

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE: HOW FEASIBLE DO NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS PERCEIVE INTRODUCTION OF GATES IN THE NEW MEDIA TO BE?

Can the gateless media be regulated?	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	YES	110	36.6%
	NO	190	63.4 %
	TOTAL	**300**	**100**

	Response	Frequency	Percentage
If yes how?	Resort to legal actions and enforce technology agreements to block certain kinds of contents	40	36.4%
	Vetting controversial user generated contents through social media platforms	25	22.7%
	Pass regulations that should check free speech and contents online	25	22.7%
	Block accounts that send hate speeches, pornographic contents defamatory and slanderous statements	20	18.2%
	TOTAL	**110**	**100%**
If no why?	Will make the media landscape more participatory		
	Create a level playing ground where there will be interactive journalism		
	Will make a mess of the notion of freedom of expression	140	73.6%

	Take the media back to the old gatekeeping process which has been criticised as censorship	50	26.4%
	TOTAL	**190**	**100**

Table 3

The table 3 above shows the journalist's perception of the introduction of gates in the new media. A total of 190 respondents, representing 64.4% are of the view that the gateless nature of the new media cannot be regulated, in other words they perceive the introduction of gates in the new media as not being feasible, while lesser number, 110 of them representing (36.6%) say that it can be regulated. Interestingly, out of the 190 (63.3%) journalists that are of the view that the social media cannot be regulated, 76.6% of them say that creating a new gate for the new media will make a mess of the notion of freedom of expression and media democratisation that the gatelessness brought about, while a meagre number of 26.4% note that it will take the media back to the old gatekeeping process which has been criticised in the past as a type of censorship. On the other hand, for the journalists who perceive the introduction of gates in the new as very feasible 110 (36.4), 34.6% said that this can be possible through legal actions, while enforcing technology agreements to block certain kinds of contents. 27.2% said that it will be possible by vetting controversial user generated contents through social media platforms; another 22.7% added that this could be done through blocking accounts that send hate speeches, pornographic contents defamatory and slanderous statements, while 20% of them are of the view that regulations that should check free speech online should be passed. Based on the foregoing analysis, it is clear that journalists in Anambra State perceive the introduction of gates in the new media as not being feasible.

E. DISCUSSION FINDINGS

Having carefully analysed the data carefully generated from the study, the following core findings were manifest: That the gender pattern of Nigerian journalists is still skewed in favour of men as 66.7% are males and only 33.3% being females. This finding, interestingly, is in tandem with that of Dunu, Ukweze & Ekwugha (2017). The study also revealed that the level of awareness (74%) of journalists on the effect of the gateless media on the traditional media landscape, a significant number of the journalists are aware of the effect present gateless nature of the media on the mainstream media. This corroborates the evidence in literature (Shoemaker & Vos 2009; Yeung 2004). What the above finding goes to show is that the gatekeeping process appears to be increasingly changing from what it used to be in the past. The study also found out that there are some negative effects that accompanied the new gateless media, in other words, the researchers were able to establish that the arrival of the social media and its gateless nature brought about flooding of the media with inaccurate media contents (81.1%), increase in slanderous, defamatory and salacious contents (61%),

plagiarism (62%). This finding is in congruence with Shoemaker & Vos (2009), who argue that as a result of the low professionalism associated with the audience, who has become not only consumers of media contents, but producers and gatekeepers easy a large chunk of unwanted materials find their way into the media. On the other hand, the gateless nature of the media was also linked to such positive effects like, enriching media discourse (71.3%), providing opportunity for greater feedback from the audience, who now have become active content producers and no more passive receivers (63.0%). This somewhat has democratised the media landscape, which had before the arrival of the new media been controlled by mainly media professionals (63.0%), making the work of news gathering easier for the journalists (74.5%). The above findings are also in line with McQuail (2006), who argues that the new media has altered a number of areas in journalism, while advancing others. Against the above discoveries, the researchers came to conclusion that the Nigerian journalists perceive the gateless nature of the media as not only having quite a number of positive effects but also negative ones.

The second research question had another major finding. It indicated that journalists in Anambra State perceive the gateless nature of the new media as being accompanied by a number of advantages, prominent among these advantages they note, are: that the gateless nature of the new media has to large extent helped the journalists in their investigation and research (63.3%), encouraged a variety of news (71.3%), created more access to news stories (81.1%). However, the study made a striking finding; it revealed that the presence of the gateless media has among other challenges affected or seem to be affecting investigative and interpretative journalism. Surprisingly, the above view seems no to be in line with Kayode and Abimbola (2014), who argue that "the gateless nature of the media had rather helped in investigative journalism" They are of the view that this platform has opened a large number of areas that the journalists can check while carrying out investigation of their stories.

The third research question sought to identify how feasible journalists in Anambra State perceive the introduction of gates in the new media. In other words, this research question to some extent addressed the core area of the study. Data from the research question shows that 63.3% of the journalists were of the view that the new media cannot be regulated, while about 37. 7% of them, a smaller number had an opposing view. They say that the new media can be regulated. In order to effect this regulation, 36.4% of the respondents argue it can be done through legal actions and enforcing of technology agreement to block certain kinds of content, 22.7% of them said it could be achieved through vetting controversial user-generated contents, another 22.7% of the journalists noted that such is possible through regulations that should check free speech online and 18.2% of them are of the view that this regulation can become possible through outright blockage of accounts that are known to send hate speeches, pornographic contents, defamatory and slanderous write ups etc. On the contrary, for the minority of journalists who see no possibility in creating gates for the new media, they are of the view that gates will make a mess of the freedom of expression, which the gateless nature of the new

media has created. This view is also in line with Penjored (2005) who argues that "creation of gates in the new media would somewhat remove the freedom that this new trend in media content dissemination has brought" As an alternative, Penjored notes that "such messages or contents which might be unacceptable to the public should often be ignored and or receive very little response" This practice Penjure calls "natural censorship" And which apparently is better than government censorship; the form seen today in such countries like China and Libya. Against the foregoing, it is obvious that journalists in Anambra State perceive the introduction of gates in the new media as not feasible. However, when this finding is viewed against the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which is the theoretical standpoint for this study, it becomes pertinent that journalists who are by the nature of their professions a part of the new media dynamism begin to gradually conform to the transformation heralded by the new media. This conformity will no doubt help them come to terms with the gateless nature of the new media.

F. CONCLUSION

Without doubt, from the examination of the above data one can conclude that the new technology has not only changed the manner things are done in the communication world, but immeasurably revolutionized journalistic activities (Basen, 2011; Simmonds, 2011). Prominent among the areas that this transformation seemingly, has remained grossly noticeable is the gatekeeping process and function of the media. This suggests a redefining of the gatekeeping theory online (Chin-Fook & Simmonds, 2011), by this very nature, unlike what obtained in the traditional gatekeeping era of the media, (where the power to determine what makes news remained the exclusive reserve of the media officials and owners), any individual armed with digital technology determines what is news and what is important (Basen 2011). The study again revealed that in the digital era, contrary to the wide held view that the gatekeeping function is gradually dying, there are new dimensions that the gatekeeping process has taken, this is vis-à-vis the way individuals use it (Basen 2011; Vos, 2015). Moreover, from the finding in our study, there is clear evidence that journalists in Anambra State are not oblivious of the fact that there is an avalanche of changes occurring in the area of media gatekeeping as a result of the gateless nature of the new media. It is also evident from the analysis of our data that as a result of the gateless nature of the media, the journalists in Anambra State perceive the gateless nature of the media as having some negative and positive effects. Also vital to the finding of the researchers is the fact that a significant number of journalists in Anambra State perceive the introduction of gates in the new media as not possible, while a very insignificant number feels it might not be a difficult task.

At this point it becomes obvious that irrespective of the clamour for gates in the new media, a significant number of journalists feel that there shouldn't be need for new gates in the new media. Their argument revolve around the fact when gates are erected in the new media, it will make a mess of the notion of freedom of expression and also take the media back to the old gatekeeping process, which has been hideously

criticised as censorship" This line of thought more so, appears to be in tandem with Grosheck (2017) who argues:

That journalist in the past used to reject the input from their audiences due to various reasons, but mostly because such rejection of audience feedback was consistent with protecting journalists' editorial autonomy and protection of governments' owners' and advertiser's interest" In the new media era, this trend seems to be giving sway and the audience gradually gaining power.

G. RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:
- ✓ There is no doubt that the gateless media has to a large extent given individuals who are armed with new media technological devices power to become content producers, hence creating a more democratic media environment. The fact however that this freedom has been abused so unprofessionally remains a challenge. It is in the view of the researchers that while the government and the media finds a way to encourage these new breed of gatekeepers, professional journalists and media houses should maintain strong presence in the new media as a way of countering fake news and misinformation arising from the activities of non-professionals who capitalize on the gateless nature of the internet.
- ✓ Users of new media themselves need to have the moral responsibility to post content that is not defamatory or untrue. To this end, there becomes a grave need for media literacy among users of the new media to empower individuals play their role, partly being proactive and reporting/flagging fake news, and also being more selective about the content they share.

Once more, this study should be repeated with the view to improving on its shortcomings. The scope of the new study could be expanded by integrating a larger area of study (rather than limiting it to a State. Also, the sample could be enlarged while more variables not accommodated in the present study included.

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