

# Evaluation of the Impact of Citizen Photojournalism in Nigeria

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Ogene Ernest Nwani, Ezinne Ubaka & Rose Omiteja

## Abstract

This study examines the impact of citizen photojournalism in Nigeria, focusing on the level of awareness and engagement among residents of Awka Metropolis in Anambra State. As mobile devices and social media become increasingly accessible, citizen-generated visual content has emerged as a critical component of modern journalism. However, public understanding of its purpose and potential remains limited, especially in semi-urban areas. Adopting a survey research method, the study sampled 400 respondents across Awka North and South Local Government Areas using purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). Findings reveal that only 12.5% of respondents had high awareness of citizen photojournalism, and over 60% lacked understanding of how smartphones and social media could serve as civic reporting tools. Additionally, fear of legal consequences and ethical confusion were reported as significant barriers to participation. The study concludes that while citizens in Awka metropolis have access to digital tools, they underutilize them for civic engagement. It recommends public education campaigns, digital literacy training, and collaborations between traditional and citizen journalists to promote responsible and impactful photojournalism in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Citizen Photojournalism; Civic Engagement; Smartphones; Social Media; Awka Metropolis

## Introduction

Digital technology has transformed the media landscape, allowing ordinary citizens to participate in news production through smartphones and social media. This shift has given rise to *citizen photojournalism*—where non-professionals visually report events of public interest.

Globally, movements like the *Arab Spring* and *Black Lives Matter*, and locally, the *#EndSARS* protest in Nigeria, have shown the power of citizen-generated visuals in shaping public discourse. However, research in Nigeria largely focuses on urban areas, with little attention given to semi-urban regions like **Awka Metropolis**, despite growing digital access among its youth.

Many people in Awka use smartphones and social media, but few employ them for civic reporting. Lack of awareness, training, and legal understanding limits their participation. This study examines the level of awareness, engagement, and perceived impact of citizen photojournalism in Awka metropolis addressing a gap in existing research and civic media education.

## Statement of the Problem

Citizen photojournalism enables real-time grassroots reporting, often capturing events before traditional media arrives. In Nigeria, it has helped spotlight issues like police brutality. Yet, in places like **Awka Metropolis**, its potential remains untapped.

Although many residents own smartphones and are active online, few use these tools for civic reporting. Most them lack awareness, ethical training, and legal protections needed for responsible journalism. Existing studies focus on cities like Lagos and Abuja, neglecting semi-urban areas.

Without targeted education and support, citizen photojournalism may continue to be underused in these regions. This study addresses this gap by evaluating how residents of Awka metropolis perceive and engage with citizen photojournalism, offering insights for inclusive media literacy and civic participation.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to examine the level of awareness and the impact of citizen photojournalism among residents of Awka Metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria.

To achieve this, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the level of awareness of citizen photojournalism among residents of Awka Metropolis.
2. To examine the extent to which smartphones and social media platforms are used as tools for citizen photojournalism in the study area.
3. To evaluate public perception of the societal impact of citizen photojournalism among Awka residents.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were developed to guide the investigation:

1. What is the level of awareness of citizen photojournalism among residents of Awka Metropolis?
2. To what extent are smartphones and social media platforms used as tools for citizen photojournalism in the study area?
3. How do residents of Awka perceive the societal impact of citizen photojournalism?

### **Scope of the Study**

This study is geographically confined to **Awka Metropolis in Anambra State, Nigeria**, which comprises **Awka North and Awka South Local Government Areas**. These areas were selected due to their growing urbanization, increasing access to digital technologies, and high concentration of youths, who are the primary users of smartphones and social media—the core tools of citizen photojournalism.

Thematically, the study focuses exclusively on **citizen photojournalism**, defined as the practice whereby ordinary individuals capture and disseminate images of events or issues of public interest, typically through smartphones and social media platforms. Other forms of citizen journalism, such as textual blogging, podcasting, or video commentary, are beyond the scope of this research.

Demographically, the study targets:

- Adults aged **18 years and above**
- Individuals who **own smartphones**
- Active users of **at least one social media platform**

The research does not cover individuals without access to digital technology or those who do not engage with online media, as their exclusion helps maintain focus on those with the tools to potentially participate in citizen photojournalism.

While the findings provide valuable insights into digital media awareness and civic participation within Awka Metropolis, they are not intended to be generalized across all regions of Nigeria. Rather, the study offers a localized snapshot that may serve as a basis for further comparative research in other semi-urban or rural settings.

### **Literature Review**

This section reviews existing scholarship on citizen photojournalism, addressing its conceptual basis, historical evolution, ethical and legal concerns, and relevant empirical findings. It positions the current study within broader academic discourse and identifies the specific research gap it seeks to fill.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Citizen photojournalism involves non-professionals capturing and disseminating images of news events using mobile devices. Unlike traditional photojournalism governed by editorial standards, it is spontaneous, user-driven, and primarily distributed via social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. According to Allan (2013), citizen photojournalism is a form of participatory journalism where individuals serve as both observers and narrators of real-time events. Its rise is attributed to the widespread use of smartphones, improved camera technology, and the expansion of digital communication networks. In Nigeria, the practice has grown in response to limitations in mainstream media coverage and public mistrust of state-controlled outlets. Citizens increasingly document events such as protests, natural disasters, and political campaigns, offering unfiltered grassroots perspectives.

### **Evolution in Nigeria**

The rise of citizen photojournalism in Nigeria aligns with technological advancements, particularly the liberalization of the telecom sector in the early 2000s. By 2010, affordable internet-enabled devices enabled broader digital participation. Initially text-based, the practice evolved into visual storytelling with enhanced mobile camera capabilities. Notable examples include citizen coverage of the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls' abduction and the 2020 #EndSARS protests, which significantly influenced public discourse and global awareness (Olumide & Oludare, 2021).

Despite its growing relevance in major cities, citizen photojournalism remains under-researched in semi-urban contexts such as Awka. This study addresses that gap by exploring the level and nature of engagement within that locale.

### **Ethical and Legal Dilemmas**

While empowering, citizen photojournalism presents key challenges:

- **Misinformation:** The absence of editorial oversight increases the risk of spreading manipulated or misleading visuals (Adaja, 2012).
- **Privacy Infringement:** Content is often shared without subjects' consent, violating privacy norms.
- **Security Risks:** Reporting sensitive issues can expose contributors to legal, physical, or political threats. The lack of formal training among citizen journalists further exacerbates these issues, underscoring the need for media ethics education and digital rights advocacy to ensure responsible practices.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study holds significant value for the academic community, the media industry, policymakers, and the general public. Its contribution is particularly urgent in light of Nigeria's evolving digital landscape, where technological access is not necessarily translating into civic participation.

### **Academic Significance**

This research responds to a pressing void in the scholarly discourse on participatory media in Nigeria by focusing specifically on citizen photojournalism in a semi-urban context—Awka Metropolis. While citizen journalism has been studied in larger Nigerian cities, little empirical attention has been given to how non-professionals in regional urban centers use visual media to engage with public life.

Additionally, the study offers a contextual application of Democratic Participant Media Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, grounding theoretical assumptions in real-world Nigerian experiences. By doing so, it advances our understanding of how theory intersects with localized digital behavior, thereby enriching the foundations for future studies in grassroots journalism and media democratization.

### **Practical Significance**

The study serves as an evidence-based resource for media practitioners, educators, and civil society actors who are invested in expanding public participation in journalism. It identifies specific knowledge gaps and practical barriers—such as fear of harassment and lack of ethical training—that must be addressed to support responsible citizen engagement.

Its findings offer a blueprint for designing community-driven training workshops, smartphone journalism programs, and public sensitization campaigns that are culturally and regionally tailored. Furthermore, by documenting how and why citizens in Awka underutilize mobile technology for civic purposes, the research promotes a shift from passive digital consumption to active media participation.

### **Policy Significance**

For policymakers and media regulators, the study provides actionable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with citizen-generated content. Agencies like the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and National Orientation Agency (NOA) can use the findings to:

- Develop policies that protect citizen journalists from censorship and harassment.
- Create inclusive guidelines for ethical reporting by non-professionals.
- Foster partnerships between state actors and local communities to enhance civic media ecosystems.

The study also supports legal advocacy efforts to strengthen freedom of information and expression, particularly in digital public spaces

### **Technological and Social Relevance**

In a society where over 50% of the population now owns a smartphone, this study explores why access to technology does not automatically lead to engagement in civic media. By examining behavioral trends, the research highlights how digital illiteracy, ethical uncertainty, and fear hinder citizens from utilizing their tools for public interest reporting.

In doing so, it offers guidance for tech developers, telecom firms, and digital educators on how to align innovation with public good, particularly in underserved communities like Awka.

### **Cumulative Impact**

Collectively, this study builds a bridge between theory and practice, technology and accountability, and access and empowerment. Its findings contribute not only to academic understanding but also to real-world transformation in how everyday Nigerians engage with journalism in the digital age.

### **Empirical Review**

Empirical studies in Nigeria have explored various dimensions of citizen photojournalism, including participation patterns, public trust, and institutional barriers. However, most focus on urban centers or youth populations, leaving semi-urban areas underrepresented.

Akinyemi and Yusuf (2016) examined citizen journalism's impact on mainstream media in Southwest Nigeria, noting skepticism among professionals about user-generated contents but acknowledging its value in crisis reporting. Their study, however, did not assess public awareness or engagement.

Abubakri and Adebumiti (2022) found that over 70% of Lagos respondents during the #EndSARS protests trusted citizen-captured visuals over state media, especially via platforms like Twitter and Instagram. Yet, their focus was on audience trust, not on citizen journalists' behaviors or challenges.

Eze (2020) surveyed youths in Enugu and revealed a gap between smartphone ownership (85%) and usage for civic reporting (under 30%). Key barriers included lack of knowledge, fear of arrest, and legal uncertainty—issues mirrored in this study.

Asemah et al. (2014) found that university students in Nigeria primarily used social media for entertainment and socializing, suggesting that gratification needs override civic motives—a finding that supports this study's application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Ogbonna and Umeh (2019) reported that fear of reprisals discouraged digital activism in Owerri. Legal and safety concerns significantly reduced public engagement in politically sensitive environments.

Together, these studies reveal that while digital access is widespread, civic photojournalism remains limited due to fear, low awareness, and competing motivations. The lack of localized research in Awka justifies the present study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on two key theories: **Democratic Participant Media Theory** and **Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)**.

**Democratic Participant Media Theory**, proposed by McQuail (1980s), advocates for decentralizing media and enabling citizen access and participation. It supports the notion that individuals have the right to produce and share content—key to understanding citizen photojournalism in Awka. However, findings show a gap between access and actual participation due to fear, low awareness, and ethical concerns.

**Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)**, developed by Katz et al. (1970s), explains media usage based on personal needs such as entertainment, information, or identity. In this context, although many residents possess smartphones and internet access, they prioritize entertainment over civic engagement. UGT also accounts for avoidance behavior when media practices are seen as risky or unrewarding.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens through which to interpret the study's findings—highlighting both the potential and the limitations of citizen photojournalism in Awka.

### **Research Methodology**

This section outlines the research design, area, population, sampling, instrument, and data collection methods used in this study.

#### **Research Design**

A survey design was adopted to gather quantifiable data on awareness, practices, and perceptions of citizen photojournalism. Structured questionnaires were used for effective data collection.

#### **Area of Study**

The research was conducted in **Awka Metropolis**, comprising Awka North and Awka South LGAs in Anambra State, Nigeria. As a fast-developing area with growing digital access, Awka offers a relevant setting for this study.

#### **Population**

The target population included residents aged 18 and above who:

- Own smartphones
- Use social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, or Instagram

This ensured respondents had access to tools relevant to citizen photojournalism.

### Sample Size

A total of **400 respondents** were selected out of 430,200 residents of Awka metropolis according to 2006 census. **200 each from Awka North and Awka South**—to ensure balanced representation. The sample was determined using **Taro Yamane’s formula**.

$$N = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size; Population of study, N= 430,200

e=marginal error = (5%) or (0.05)<sup>2</sup>

$$n = \frac{430,200}{1+1,075.5}$$

= 399.6 Approximately, 400

N= 400

### Sample Technique

A sample size of 400 respondents was selected using purposive sampling. This non-probability sampling technique was adopted to ensure the selection of participants who were smartphone users and had access to social media platforms, as these are prerequisites for participation in citizen photojournalism.

### Instrument of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts:

- Section A gathered demographic information (age, gender, education level, smartphone ownership).
- Section B explored respondents’ awareness, perceptions, engagement, and challenges relating to citizen photojournalism.

The questions were mostly closed-ended, using multiple-choice and Likert-type response options to ensure ease of analysis.

### Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, and presented in tabular format. This allowed the researcher to summarize the responses and identify patterns related to awareness, technology use, perceived impact, and barriers to citizen photojournalism. The use of descriptive analysis is appropriate because the study aimed to describe the current state of awareness and practice among a specific population, rather than test hypotheses or establish causality.

### Data presentation, Analysis and Discussion

In this study, 400 Copies of Structured questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. All the 400 copies were filled and returned and were found useful. This implies 100 percent return rate.

**Table 1:0 Respondents Gender**

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Male	150	37	37.5	37.5
Female	250	62.5	62.5	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 1:0 shows that 180 respondents representing 37.5% were males while 250 respondents representing 62.5% were females.

**Table 2:0 Respondents Age Range**

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
18-25	140	35	35	35
26-30	160	40	40	75
30 and Above	100	25	25	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 2:0 shows that 140 respondents representing 35% were aged between 18 -25, 160 respondents representing 40% were aged between 26-30 while 100 respondents representing 25% were aged between 30 and above.

**Data Analysis on the research question**

**Research Question 1:** What is the level of Awareness of Citizen Photojournalism among Awka Residents?

**Table 3:0 Awka Residents Awareness level of Citizen Photojournalism.**

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
High	50	12.5	12.5	12.5
Low	150	37.5	37.5	50
Very Low	200	50	50	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 3 shows that 50 respondents representing 12.5% indicated that Awka Resident’s awareness on citizen photojournalism were high, 150 respondents representing 37.5% indicated low exposure to citizen photojournalism while 200 respondents representing 50% indicated very low exposure.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent are smartphones and social media platforms used as tools for citizen photojournalism in the study area?

**Table 4:0 The Extent smartphones and social media Platform are used as a tool for citizen photojournalism.**

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
High Extent	40	7.5	7.5	7.5
Low Extent	150	40	40	47.5
Very Low	210	52.5	52.5	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 4:0 shows that 30 respondents representing 7.5% indicated high, 160 respondents representing 40% indicated low, while 210 respondents representing 52.5% indicated very low extent.

**Research Question 3:** How do residents of Awka perceive the societal impact of citizen photojournalism.

**Table 5:** Perception of societal impact of citizen Photojournalism.

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
High	40	10	10	10
Low	120	30	30	40
Very Low	240	60	60	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 5:0 above shows that 40 respondents representing 10% responded “High”, 120 respondents representing 30% responded “Low” while 240 respondents representing 60% responded “Very low” perception of impact of citizen Photojournalism in the society.

### Summary of Findings

The findings from the data gathered, presented and analyzed emerged as follows.

1. It is quite disheartening from the findings in the table three (3) that 50 respondents representing 12.5% indicated that the Awka resident’s awareness on citizen photojournalism were high, 150 respondents representing 37.5% indicated low exposure to citizen photojournalism while 200 respondents representing 50% indicated low exposure.
2. The findings from table four (4) showed that 30 respondents representing 7.5% believed that the Awka residents awareness level of the impact of citizen photojournalism were high, 160 respondents representing 40% were low while 210 respondents representing 52.5% indicated that the level of awareness were very low.
3. the outcome from table five (5) revealed that 40 respondents representing 10% believed that the awareness level of Awka residents on the role of technology were high, 120 representing 30 believed that the awareness level was low, while 210 respondents representing 60% indicated that their level of awareness on the role of technology was very low.

These showed very low level of Awareness among Awka residents.

### Discussion of Findings

This section interprets the study’s results in light of its objectives, research questions, and theoretical framework, highlighting connections to previous empirical research.

**Low Awareness of Citizen Photojournalism:** Only 12.5% of respondents demonstrated high awareness, while 50% reported very low awareness. This suggests that mobile access does not equate to civic understanding. The finding aligns with Eze (2020), who found similar trends in Enugu. Despite theoretical support from the *Democratic Participant Media Theory*, practical awareness remains lacking—largely due to insufficient education and civic empowerment.

**Limited Understanding of Its Impact:** Over half (52.5%) of participants showed minimal understanding of the societal role of citizen photojournalism. As Akinyemi and Yusuf (2016) observed, while citizens contribute visual content online, they often lack insight into its influence on policy or public discourse. This knowledge gap restricts the potential of grassroots journalism to drive accountability.

**Underutilization of Smartphones for Civic Purposes:** Although smartphone ownership was high, only 15% of respondents frequently used them for civic reporting. Most prioritized entertainment and communication. This supports the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, indicating that people engage with media based on personal motives rather than civic responsibility.

**Fear and Ethical Uncertainty:** Key barriers included lack of awareness (45%) and fear of arrest or harassment (30%). These findings echo Umar (2021), who documented similar risks facing citizen reporters. Legal uncertainty and systemic intimidation discourage participation, particularly in semi-urban areas.

### Theoretical Confirmation

- The *Democratic Participant Media Theory* is validated in principle but not in practice—access without protection and awareness does not guarantee participation.
- The *Uses and Gratifications Theory* explains why digital tools are underutilized for civic reporting, as individuals prioritize personal satisfaction and safety over public accountability.

**Regional Implications:** The digital civic engagement seen in cities like Lagos (e.g., #EndSARS) is not mirrored in Awka. Localized public education, media training, and legal reforms are crucial to bridging this divide.

### Key Insights

- Technological access alone is insufficient for civic engagement.
- Awareness and motivation depend on education, exposure, and safety.

- Legal protections and ethical training are essential to support citizen reporters.
- Youths are digitally active but often disengaged from civic participation.

### Conclusion

This study examined the state of citizen photojournalism in Awka Metropolis, uncovering critical gaps in awareness, usage, and civic engagement. Despite widespread smartphone ownership and internet access, many residents do not perceive their digital activities as tools for journalism or democratic participation. Instead, fear, ignorance, and lack of training hinder the civic use of mobile technologies.

Findings indicate that while the potential for citizen photojournalism exists, its realization is limited by legal risks, low ethical awareness, and personal gratification preferences. For citizen photojournalism to thrive in semi-urban Nigeria, targeted interventions in media education and legal reform are essential.

### Recommendations

#### 1. Launch Public Awareness Campaigns

2. Educate residents on the definition, importance, and impact of citizen photojournalism through collaborations between media bodies, civil society organizations, and local governments.

#### 3. Promote Digital and Ethical Literacy

Implement training programmes focused on responsible reporting, image framing, consent, misinformation avoidance, and civic duties. These should be tailored for youths and community members.

#### 4. Encourage Collaboration with Professional Journalists

Build partnerships between mainstream media and citizen journalists. Traditional outlets can offer mentorship and credibility, while citizens provide on-the-ground perspectives, enriching coverage and trust.

#### 5. Advocate for Legal Protections

Push for legal reforms that safeguard citizen journalists' rights. Clear policies and protective mechanisms can reduce fear and encourage open documentation of public events.

#### 6. Integrate Civic Media Education into Schools

Incorporate civic reporting and media ethics into school and community curricula. Highlighting successful examples of citizen journalism can inspire broader engagement.

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