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Blogging, civic engagement, and coverage of political conflict in Nigeria: A study of *nairaland.com*



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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to analyze and ascertain several aspects of the coverage of issues of political conflict covered by the weblog, *Nairaland*, as well as gauge the level of civic engagement on the part of *Nairaland* users. The method used by the researchers was content analysis and four research questions were raised and answered to ascertain certain aspects of the coverage of issues of political conflict as well as the level of participation of the audience which consisted of *Nairaland* users. The results found that issues of political conflict were prominently placed, usually on the front page of *Nairaland*. It was also observed that the subject matter with the highest amount of coverage, as well as participation, was the conduct, comportment, and activities of elected political officials in Nigeria. Furthermore, the level of civic engagement was affected by the prominence given by the moderators of the *Nairaland* blog site to the stories that were published and this was measured by examining the number of views in relation to the prominence of the stories published. The study recommends that prominence be given to other aspects of Nigerian society as opposed to focusing inordinately on political officials. The study also suggests that inasmuch as misdemeanors, misappropriations, and questionable activities must be addressed by the media, it is equally important to acknowledge and commend the activities and events that are undertaken or embarked on to engender social change and development in Nigerian society.

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Introduction

The advent and popularization of blogging has generated wide discussion of the meaning of blogs to interpersonal relationships, popular culture, and political participation. Users have adapted blogs to a vast array of uses, resulting in a diverse set of practices subsumed under the rubric of 'blogging'. Though blogs cannot be sorted into perfectly distinct categories, it is safe to say that the blogs dedicated to commentary on political issues and current

events have established themselves as a relatively discrete genre (Park, 2009).

Although the term 'blog' (which refers to a regularly updated personal web site with posts appearing in reverse chronological order) has been around since 1997, political blogging seems to be a more recent phenomenon. Blogs have quickly become prominent parts of the Internet landscape. Attention has largely been focused on a small subset of blogs—the politically-oriented filter blog (Okorie, Oyedepo, & Usaini, 2012; Park, 2009; Wallsten, 2005; Zeri, 2014).

The emergence and growth of the political blogosphere may force those interested in policy making to re-conceptualize how issues arrive on the political agenda. Indeed, because political blogs provide easily accessible and

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frequently updated information about the attitudes of politically active citizens, journalists are increasingly relying on them as a shortcut for determining whether an emerging political issue is worth discussing (Wallsten, 2005).

Scholars have dedicated a large amount of attention to political blogs. Some have examined the political implications of the technical aspects of blogging, treating the blog as a technology (Park, 2009; Wallsten, 2005). The steadily rising number of political blogs in cyberspace has led to the question of whether the practice of political blogging can be classified as a form of political participation or of political expression.

Whether political blogging is, in fact, a form of political participation, of course, depends primarily on the definition of political participation that one is working with. In the political science literature, political participation is usually defined as "action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and social values" (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Wallsten, 2005). These scholars maintain that what determines whether or not a political blogger is engaging in political participation are the motivations for undertaking political commentary or discourse on these blog sites. If the motivation behind the practice of blogging is a distribution of goods and values, then it indicates that the purpose is political participation. Conversely, if the activity is motivated by a desire to articulate or communicate one's views with the blog's online public, then this is discourse.

Scholars such as McKenna and Pole (2004) hypothesize that the act of political blogging influences the level of participation in other forms of political participation such as voting, attending rallies, and engaging in political protest. Furthermore, they maintain that this influence is not limited only to the online audience but also extends to the political bloggers responsible for publishing the political commentary or news items.

This is a valid proposition based upon the premise that an authoritative and credible political blogger must have a solid and substantial knowledge base acquired not merely on theoretical grounds but also from active political participation in the nation's political undertakings.

Scholars such as Habermas (1989) and Huckfeldt, Beck, Dalton, and Levine (1995) assert that exposure to diverse viewpoints is theorized as central for creating an effective, deliberative democracy. Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs (2004) maintain that such exposure stimulates individuals to search for information more thoroughly and to examine issues and alternatives with greater scrutiny. Exposure to diversity also helps individuals to comprehend the rationale and motivation of different perspectives, which increases political understanding and tolerance (Garrett, 2009; Mutz, 2002; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002).

In view of the fact that blogs have become an integral part of the changing face of journalism, an analysis of its annual coverage of Nigeria's political affairs is imperative. However, since the Nigerian political sphere encompasses numerous facets, this research involved the analysis of stories pertaining to political conflict in Nigerian society. This study helped to identify whether news items

containing political conflict are covered on the Nairaland blog, how they are covered, areas of emphasis, and the most dominant slant of this coverage. It also helped in ascertaining the level of civic engagement of the *nairaland.com* online community.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To determine the level of prominence given to issues of political conflict on Nairaland
2. To assess which area of the Nigerian political sphere is given more coverage
3. To identify the tone/slant of the political news items covered
4. To examine the level of civic engagement on political issues

Research Questions

1. What is the level of prominence given to issues of political conflict on Nairaland?
2. What area of the Nigerian political sphere is given more coverage?
3. What is the tone/slant of the political news items covered?
4. What is the level of civic engagement on political issues?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Democratic-Participant Media theory. The main thrust of this theory lies in its insistence that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down, to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers (Folarin, 2006).

Democratic-Participant theory reflects public disillusionment with both of its predecessors—Libertarian and Social Responsibility theories—because of their failure to deliver the social benefits expected of them. It reflects public "reaction against the commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media and against the centralism and bureaucratization of public broadcasting institutions, established according to the norms of social responsibility" (Kunczik, 1988, p. 49; McQuail, 1983, p. 98).

Democratic-Participant theory advocates media support for cultural pluralism at the grassroots level. Media are to be used to stimulate and empower pluralistic groups (Baran & Davis, 2006). Furthermore, the scholars assert that this theory differs from the Social Responsibility theory because it calls for development of innovative "small" media that can be directly controlled by group members.

In the place of monopolization, it calls for pluralism; in place of centralism it advocates decentralization and localism. It insists that media conglomerates be replaced or at least juxtaposed with small-scale media enterprises. It

calls for 'horizontal' in place of 'top-down' communication, a concern for feedback in social-political communication and an acknowledgement of the feedback so as to realize the 'completed communication circuit'. In essence, the theory accords priority to the 'associational' mode over the 'command' mode, and even the 'service' mode, of socio-political communication (Folarin, 2006). This author holds that the Democratic-Participant theory is based upon the premise that the mass media have become too socially important to be left in the hands of professionals and that the theory may be regarded as the press world equivalent of 'grassroot democracy'. This pluralism, which is the foundation of this theory, is what has given rise to the popularity of online media and thus, the blogging phenomenon.

Literature Review

Traditionally, centralized news-gathering and distribution is being augmented (and in some cases will be replaced) by what is happening at the edges of increasingly ubiquitous networks. People are combining powerful technological tools and innovative ideas, fundamentally altering the nature of journalism in this new century. There are new possibilities for everyone in the process: journalist, newsmaker and the active "consumer" of news who isn't satisfied with today's product—or who wants to make some news, too (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

Citizen journalism is a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their communities. It is news of the people, by the people, and for the people (Banda, 2010). Gillmor (2006 as cited in Banda, 2010, p. 27) posits that citizen journalism is a people-centered, largely online movement of the so-called 'we the media'.

Citizen journalism involves private people engaging in the practice of sourcing, gathering, and disseminating news and information whether in the form of text, pictures, audio, or video without having undergone professional journalism training (Okorie et al., 2012). The Internet is the principal instrument of citizen journalism because the practice exists as a derivative of the emergence of the Internet; hence, citizen journalism would not be possible or practicable without the existence and evolution of the Internet and online community. It is often referred to as participatory journalism.

According to Bowman and Willis (2003) participatory journalism is a bottom-up, emergent phenomenon in which there is little or no editorial oversight or formal journalistic workflow dictating the decisions of staff. Instead, it is the result of many simultaneous, distributed conversations that either blossom or quickly atrophy in the Web's social network.

Citizen journalism has been criticized because of the tendency of citizen journalists toward unprofessional practices that are a blight upon the practice of journalism and reflect abysmally on the ethics and standards of the profession. Such misdemeanors on the part of the citizen journalist have called into question the credibility of the practice as well as its implications for the journalistic ethos.

Daniel (2012) postulates that citizen journalism kicked off to provide equal opportunity for the citizens of the world to freely interact without fear or letdown and that it was initiated in the spirit of the free marketplace of ideas where all will have equal broadband access, an equal platform, and liberty to source, upload, download, and publish without the stringent measures imposed by the media gatekeepers. Moreover, Daniel (2012) has reservations as to whether the contents of this journalism (social platform) appear reasonable or fair describing the media space as being hijacked by amateurs and youths who are not trained for journalism bemoaning the current state of the media now awash with complaints of invasion of privacy, character assassination, bastardization of information, sensationalized reports, scandals, propaganda, and the manipulation of communication contents (especially videos), as well as publications that are offensive to good taste.

Conversely, other scholars opine that citizen journalism serves as the media for the masses and is now an intrinsic part of their daily routines. Glaser (2006 as cited in Lasica, 2003, p. 1) states that the idea behind citizen journalism is that people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment, or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others.

This implies that citizen journalism is also regarded as a check on the activities on the outlets of the pre-existing journalism mainstream media as well as other citizen journalists by providing more information on current reports, shedding light on more perspectives or aspects of news items, supplementing these reports with new facts, and identifying inaccuracies in order to ensure that verifiable information is presented as news.

The venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as the gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves. Armed with easy-to-use Web publishing tools, always-on connections, and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the online audience has the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information—and it's doing just that on the Internet (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

Citizen journalism is a precipitously growing practice that is fraught with controversy. However, it should be noted that the implications of this phenomenon on the media landscape, whether detrimental or advantageous, are contingent on respective standpoints; proponents and opponents of citizen journalism both put forward valid arguments to support their positions.

Methods

The method adopted for this study was content analysis, a quantitative method that examines the existing records, detects a pattern or patterns and arrives at some conclusion regarding the attitude of the writer of the records or the originators of the messages contained in those records. For this study, the content categories developed by the researchers were employed as units of analysis. Each category

was analyzed for the frequency of posts, comments, slant of political news published, prominence, and magnitude of results obtained. The viability of the implementation of content analysis as a research method lies in its ability to ascertain the denotative meaning of the recorded message; thus it was implemented in the course of this research to evaluate the level of political coverage on Nairaland as well as to gauge the level of civic engagement on the part of the audience. A quantitative content analysis of the Nairaland blog was carried out and the presentation records the subject matter, prominence, and civic engagement by the users. The analysis of these categories was from August 30, 2014 to December 30, 2014. The researchers analyzed: Posts (300), Comments (746), Likes (546), and Views (1,818,399).

The sampling technique employed was the purposive sampling technique to accomplish the objectives of the study. This sampling technique was used because the researchers selected published stories that were relevant to the study; stories that were politically related. The purposive sampling technique also helped to reduce the large number of reports published on the site. The weblog, Nairaland was selected for the study because: (1) it is comparatively less sensational than many similar blogs on the Nigerian political blogosphere; (2) it is a weblog known for vast coverage of issues in the Nigerian political sphere (Agboola, 2013); (3) it comprises frequent uploading of news items and updating of previous information; And (4) it provides a group-based discussion forum for the audience to supply feedback (Agboola, 2013).

The content categories of this research included: **Stories**—news stories pertaining to political issues which were published on the blog site; **Comments**—responses of the audience to the published news stories which serve as an indicator of their level of participation; **Views**—the number of times that a particular story is viewed by Nairaland users; and **Likes**—also a response of members of the audience to a story that has been published. It was used to gauge the level of civic engagement.

The frequency of coverage was determined by adding the total number of stories and the total number of comments. To determine the type of prominence of the stories published, the following distinction was made: **Very important**—implies that the stories in this category were placed on the front page and thus were seen by the moderator of the blog site as having a high value or significance; **Important**—implies that the story had a significant number of pages despite not having appeared on the front page in its entirety. Such stories often had headlines appearing on the front page but details which appeared on primary pages other than the first page of the blog site. **Less Important**—included the political stories that neither appeared on the front page nor had a significant number of pages attributed to them on the blog site and these stories were found on secondary pages and often appeared as links on inconspicuous areas of pages containing important stories.

In order to analyze the slant or tone of the stories published on *nairaland.com* as well as that of the comments, specific categories were developed: **Unfavourable**—stories and comments that expressed criticism or disapproval regarding events pertaining to politics;

Favorable—stories or comments that indicated or expressed approval concerning a particularly salient political issue; **Informative**—stories or comments providing extensive information about a politically-related issue of public interest; **Neutral**—comments and stories that were neither favorable nor unfavorable.

Results

This study analyzed the political stories involving conflict that were published on *nairaland.com* between the months of August and December 2014. Thus, the news stories involving political conflict were sampled to determine the frequency of posts and comments, as well as the different slants of the posts.

Research question one: What is the level of prominence given to issues of political conflict?

For the purpose of contextual clarity, the level of prominence was categorized into very important, important and less important. Posts published solely on the front page were termed very important, those with headlines on the front page but with the details of the story on primary pages of the Nairaland blog site other than the front page while the stories termed less important were published on secondary or auxiliary pages of the Nairaland blog site.

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the political posts published on *nairaland.com* within the duration of time analyzed, consisted of stories that were prominently placed on the front page of the blog. It was observed that 56.7 percent of the stories analyzed in the sample were prioritized by the administrators as being very important, closely followed by the prioritization of 42.3 percent of the stories published as important; these stories had a considerable number of pages dedicated to their coverage.

Table 1 also indicates that the percentage of political stories published which the weblog administrators considered less important was a negligible 1 percent in comparison to those regarded as very important and important. Therefore, this means that there was considerable attention given to the coverage and reporting of issues pertaining to political conflict on *nairaland.com*.

Table 2 shows that the Nairaland administrators placed the political stories pertaining to the conduct of elected officials more prominently than any other subject matter affiliated with political conflict which was published on the website.

There was high prominence given to political issues relating to terrorism in the country as well as the upcoming elections in comparison to other subject matter published on *nairaland.com*. Conversely, the table above also shows that the number of stories pertaining to political conflict

Table 1
Prominence of Nairaland posts

Prominence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very important	170	56.7
Important	127	42.3
Less important	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 2

Prominence of Nairaland political stories according to subject matter

Prominence	Economics	Corruption	Health	Elections	Education	Oil & gas	Security	Terrorism	Political officials	Other	Total
Very important	—	11	15	27	5	8	5	42	43	14	170
Important	1	6	10	25	6	4	5	14	40	16	127
Less important	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3
Total	1	17	26	52	11	12	10	56	83	32	300

which was considered less important is negligible and does not fall under any of the parameters established by the researcher in examining the subject matter.

Research question two: What area of the Nigerian political sphere is given more coverage?

From Table 3, it was evident that the aspect of the Nigerian politics which received the most coverage was news stories concerning conflict pertaining to political officials, closely followed by the issue of terrorism and the upcoming elections (27.7%, 17.3%, and 18.7%, respectively). This means that these three issues were topical and prevalent issues in the Nigerian society during the study period and thus, the administrators of the Nairaland blog site aligned their political news stories with the agenda set by society.

Table 3 also indicates that the issues least covered were political stories concerning the Nigerian economy, closely followed by issues of security and education (0.3% and 3.3%, respectively) indicating that these issues were not as salient as the political conflict stories pertaining to the imminent elections, terrorism, and the conduct of Nigerian political officials.

Thus, it can be deduced from the presentation of data above that the Nairaland stories published were largely focused on terrorism in Nigeria and the general conduct of the nation's elected individuals holding office.

Research question three: What is the tone/slant of most of the political news items covered?

Table 4 indicates that more than 50 percent of the political stories in the sample selected were reported or relayed in an unfavorable tone, while 28.3 percent were neutral in nature, indicating that the majority of the stories analyzed in the course of this research were reported and written with an unfavorable slant, largely critical of certain aspects of the stories that were analyzed by the researchers as opposed to being written in either neutral or favorable slants. Thus, during the period examined by the researcher,

political issues on *nairaland.com* were handled in a largely critical tone.

Table 4 also indicates that there were many stories about political conflict that were covered with a neutral slant, largely for the purpose of simply providing information to Nairaland users and not to criticize or commend actions or events that occurred.

From Table 5, the aspect of the Nigerian political sphere that had the highest proportion of reports during the study period was that pertaining to the general conduct of elected officials in Nigerian society, closely followed by issues of terrorism associated with politics in Nigeria. The data presented also show that stories published on *nairaland.com* concerning the elections and the controversy surrounding them were covered unfavorably in comparison to other aspects of the Nigerian political landscape. This suggests that the political stories published on *nairaland.com* relating to the conduct of elected officials, terrorism, and the upcoming elections were reported or recounted in such a way that the subjects of the stories were criticized and dissatisfaction was expressed.

Research question four: What is the level of civic engagement on political issues?

Table 6 indicates that the topics which consistently garnered the highest number of comments by Nairaland users were the general conduct of Nigerian politicians closely followed by the issue of terrorism in Nigerian society and then the coverage of events surrounding the upcoming 2015 elections. Thus, Nairaland users sought to make their voices heard and air their opinions concerning the conduct of the Nigerian political leaders, terrorism, and politics in the country, as well as commenting on the current events and salient issues surrounding the 2015 elections.

Conversely, the topic with the lowest number of comments was that of political issues concerned with the economy of the country closely followed by those affecting or related to the oil and gas industry as well as security issues not related to terrorism in the country.

From Table 7, the subject matter which garnered the highest number of views by Nairaland users was terrorism (within the range 1,000,000–1,100,000 views per story). It was also observed that most of the stories relating to the

Table 3

Topics of Nairaland political conflict coverage

Topic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Economics	1	0.3
Corruption	17	5.7
Health	26	8.7
Elections	52	17.3
Education	11	3.7
Oil and Gas	12	4.0
Security	10	3.3
Terrorism	56	18.7
Political officials	83	27.7
Other	32	10.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 4

Slant on political conflict posts

Slant/Tone	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Unfavorable	157	52.3
Favorable	58	19.3
Neutral	85	28.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 5

Slant of posts according to subject matter

Slant of posts	Subject matter of posts										Total
	Economic	Corruption	Health	Elections	Education	Oil & gas	Security	Terrorism	Political officials	Other	
Unfavorable	0	10	13	21	4	6	5	39	47	12	157
Favorable	—	—	5	13	2	1	3	8	16	10	58
Neutral	1	7	8	18	5	5	2	9	20	10	85
Total	1	17	26	52	11	12	10	56	83	32	300

Table 6

Users' comments on political conflicts according to subject matter

Topics of posts	Comments of users						Total
	0–100	101–200	201–300	301–400	501–600	601–700	
Economic	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Corruption	16	1	—	—	—	—	17
Health	26	—	—	—	—	—	26
Elections	45	3	1	2	—	1	52
Education	10	—	—	—	—	1	11
Oil and gas	9	2	1	—	—	—	12
Security	8	2	—	—	—	—	10
Terrorism	48	5	2	1	—	—	56
Political officials	72	7	1	2	1	—	83
Other	28	3	1	—	—	—	32
Total	263	23	6	5	1	2	300

comportment of individuals holding office obtained views within the range 0–100,000 views on *nairaland.com*. The subject matter of the imminent elections also garnered a considerable number of views, implying that Nairaland users took an avid interest in these three areas of the Nigerian political sphere.

Discussion

Blogging is widely practiced by numerous members of the online community and has become an asset in the current information society driven by remarkable advancements in the development of information and communication technologies. This study examined the use of *nairaland.com* and its coverage of salient issues pertaining to political conflict in Nigerian society. The study was necessitated as a direct result of the rapid growth and prevalence of blogs on the Internet landscape. Importantly, four research questions were raised and answered in this study.

The first research question looked at the level of prominence given to issues of political conflict on *nairaland.com*. The findings showed that there was considerable attention given to the coverage and reporting of

issues pertaining to political conflict on *nairaland.com*. The findings supported Drezner and Farrell's (2004) study conducted on blogs, politics, and power as it affected public choice. Those two scholars examined the augmented use of blogs by members of the online community as well as extensively exploring what the authors referred to as a dearth of relevant data in the existing literature; minimal circumstantial evidence was used by the authors which strongly suggested the importance of blogs in the political sphere. The authors found that elite bloggers were more prominent in the Internet landscape and inevitably wielded more influence in the political sphere.

The second research question ascertained the areas of the Nigerian political sphere that were given more coverage. From the findings, Nairaland stories largely focused on terrorism in Nigeria and the general conduct of the nation's elected individuals holding office. In essence, the rising wave of terrorism in Nigeria has become a perennial issue that has generated debate and discussion among blog users because terrorism seems to spread very rapidly in Nigeria due to the advent of a terrorist group popularly known as *Boko Haram*. Scholars agree that *Boko Haram* has been causing havoc on an almost daily basis in the nation's capital

Table 7

Users' viewership on political conflicts according to subject matter

Number of views per story	Subject Matter of Posts										Total
	Economic	Corruption	Health	Elections	Education	Oil & gas	Security	Terrorism	Political officials	Other	
0–100,000	1	16	26	50	11	12	9	54	82	32	293
100,001–200,000	—	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
1,000,001–1,100,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	1	—	4
Total	1	17	26	52	11	12	10	56	83	32	300

Abuja and many parts of the States in the Northern Nigeria. Meaningful developments in such areas have been put on hold due to the menace of *Boko Haram* in Northern Nigeria. It was also observed that there was attention given to issues of political officials in Nigeria. This is not surprising due to the issues of corruption and scandal that trail a number of political officials in Nigeria. For example, Mrs. Stella Oduah, who was the former Minister of Aviation, was alleged to have embezzled large amounts of money from the aviation sector in Nigeria. Scandals and negative reports also trailed Mrs. Okonjo-Iweala, who was the former Minister of the Economy. It was reported that she mismanaged the economy of Nigeria, when she was in office. Invariably, Nigerians are greatly concerned about their political leadership and the state of insecurity caused by terrorism in the country. Several media outlets and bloggers have applied the agenda-setting function to give more coverage to issues of terrorism and political officer holders.

The third research question looked at the tone/slant of the political news items covered on *nairaland.com*. From the findings, a majority of the stories analyzed in the course of this research were reported and written with an unfavorable slant, largely critical of certain issues that affect the Nigerian political landscape. The findings support Wallsten's (2007) study on agenda setting and the blogosphere. The method Wallsten used was quantitative content analysis of 10 A-list political blog sites as well as 50 other less popular political blog sites, spanning five months. That study found that a preponderance of the issues had a critical slant or tone in the report.

The fourth research question examined the level of civic engagement affected by the coverage of political issues. The findings showed that the highest number of comments by Nairaland users was on the general conduct of Nigerian politicians, which was closely followed by the issue of terrorism in Nigerian society. Thus, Nairaland users sought to make their voices heard and air their opinions concerning the conduct of the Nigerian political leaders, terrorism, and politics in the country as well as commenting on the current events and salient issues surrounding the 2015 elections. These findings support the key tenets of the democratic-media theory, which calls for 'horizontal' in place of 'top-down' communication, a concern for feedback in social-political communication and an acknowledgement of the feedback to realize the 'completed communication circuit' on issues of national development. Furthermore, the available literature indicated that the use of weblogs in the coverage and reporting of news has become widespread practice, especially because it provides an avenue for feedback for members of the audience. Finally, scholars agreed that a significant number of blogs gave prominence to stories that affected the political landscape of the country (Agboola, 2013; Okorie et al., 2012).

Conclusion

From the data collected and examined by the researchers, it was apparent that blog sites are a functional medium in the dissemination of information as well as receiving feedback from the receivers of the message. Thus, blogs are useful, not only to the disseminators in sending

out information but also for the audience in providing feedback and airing their varying and often dissenting views and opinions concerning the information that is published periodically.

In addition, the weblog medium appeals to users because there are no stringent requirements that must be met in order to participate in discussions generated or initiated by the stories that are uploaded by the blog site administrators and thus, it is easier and convenient for users to participate in discourse and express their views regardless of geographical location, class, or other societal barriers and distinctions. In essence, blogs can promote buoyant conversation and build relationships among the participants especially the younger population who, prior to the emergence of social media, were less inclined toward civic engagement. Definitively, it is apparent that the phenomena of blogs and civic engagement are closely interwoven because the emergence of blogs has paved the way for widespread civic engagement by members of the Internet community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been put forward by the researchers as a contribution to previously existing research findings concerning the Nigerian blogosphere as well as the nation's political landscape:

- a. Blog publishers should apply the agenda-setting function to give prominence to new angles of an issue of national interest. Bloggers should try to develop and build on stories that have generated interest among users, to frame the issues to promote civic engagement
- b. Furthermore, issues that affect security and national development should be prominently published on the front pages of blog sites to engender political discourse. Bloggers can enlighten and educate individuals about the country's insecure situation as well as suggest transformational solutions for national development
- c. The slant of stories should be constructive and development-centered by acknowledging commendable actions, decisions, or government programs as opposed to being largely unfavorable or critical. One is not suggesting that negative elements, poor decisions, and repercussions pertaining to matters affecting the general public be sugarcoated or trivialized, but that the opposite actions also need to be acknowledged and commended.
- d. In addition, it would be expedient for weblog administrators to publish stories from reliable sources and to provide supplementary material to validate the news or information published on the blog. A discernible shortage of supplementary material was observed in the course of this research and despite considerable civic engagement on the part of Nairaland users, a higher level will be garnered if there were more supplementary materials attached to the stories covered; doing so would also give the information more credibility.

Conflicts of Interest

None.

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