

# The Role of Online Information Journalism in Democratization of countries: A Case Study of Nigeria

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## Abstract

The role of online journalism in the democratization of Nigeria was the main trust of this paper. The paper was able to expose the concept of online journalism and the democratization. Survey method was adopted for the study, hence; four (4) media houses and 60 respondents were sample used for the study respectively. The response rate was high as the percentage of return was 99.8%. The study showed that online journalism plays important role in the democratization of every nation; hence it showed that online journalism affects democratization in Nigeria as it enables early report of election result, reporting or events as it happens, hence does not give room to manipulation of results etc, journalism in Nigeria are effective, the pace of accessing and using online journalism is slow. Sacrosanct to this study is that recommendations were revealed to cushion the mitigating online journalism in Nigeria.

## Introduction

The right to association, communication, movement, life etc is a divine natural gift to all persons irrespective of national, ethnic, religious affiliations. These include the right to acquire and sell information and also the right to be informed. Getting access to information by citizens of any state such as Nigeria is not an issue of debate, hence the passage of the freedom of information bill (FOI bill). This bill allow an unhindered access to either government or private activities or discussion by all persons, including the right to air (broadcast) or publishes such activities or discussions by journalists or media houses. Journalists are individual who trade (work) work their expertise in (television/ radio houses/ news paper publishing outfits) media houses and they are those who are in the profession referred to as journalism.

Journalism is referred to as the investigation and reporting of events, issues and trends to a broad audience. Though there are many variation of journalism, the idea is to inform the intended audience, this include covering organization and institutions such as government and business. Journalism also covers cultural aspects of society such as arts and entertainment. Evolving trends in the profession of journalism dictates that citizens and elites are engaged by journalist in the proposition and generation of content. Weinberg (2008) sees journalism as

the collection, analysis as processing of information contents and distributing it to the public. He opined that the field includes editing, photo journalism and documentary, all these put together makes journalism authentic and exciting. Journalism initially was instigated to act as mediator or translator between the public and policy making elites. The journalist as a middleman listened and recorded the information coming from the elite, refine it and pass it on to the public for consumption.

Collaborating this assertion Lee (2004), stated that “The journalist role was to inform the public of what the elites were doing”. Suffice to say that majority of the ordinary public is not smart enough to understand the complicated, political issues. Furthermore, the public are too consumed with their daily lives to care about complex public policy; hence they needed someone to interpret the decision or conclusion of the elite to make information plain and simple.

Interestingly in modern day society, news media have become the chief purveyor of information and opinion about public affairs, but the role and status of journalism, along with other forms of mass media, are undergoing changes resulting from the internet; hence the use of information graphics and time management techniques are revolutionizing the news rooms through the use of novel concept known as online journalism. Recent innovations have seen many news organization based in other media such as Nigeria guardian, Tribune, Daily and Sunday sun newspaper, punch, observer, channels TV, AIT television, and NTA television now broadcast or disseminate information content online via the internet.

Yelvington (2009) while buttressing the use of online by popular traditional news agencies stated that, NANDO owned by the N and O, evolved into the first serious, professional news site in the world wide web long before (NN, MSNBC and others follow). It originated in early 1990s as “NandOland”. Of a truth internet or online journalism challenges the existence of traditional news organizations in several ways as such, newspapers may lose classified advertising to websites. A research study by Pew research centre reported by Rich (2008) was of the view that 13% of American mainly the younger generation rely mainly on the internet for their news, accessing the internet easily using laptop, blackberry or Iphone. This is where the future of readers and newspaper are headed. Dewolk (2001) in Jazaka (2010), opined that online journalism is reflecting changes in society as well as technology as about one hundred million people access the world wide web per minute and the number is ever increasing. Hence it provides avenues for a large number of world populations to get informed with speed. Similarly, Millison (2004) stated in Jazaka (2010) that the incorporation of multimedia elements make new websites more information and entertainment as hyperlinks, blogs and discussion forums allow web users a more hands on experience, allowing them to be participants in the news process. Online journalism involves the use of internet forums, discussion boards, chats etc, to publish, comment, paste recent or old news items.

### **Statement Of The Problem**

Democracy is supposed to be a “rule of the people” heralded by a smooth democratic process. This is not so in most part of the world especially in Nigeria where religious intolerance, ethnic bigotry, election malpractice, prolong court case etc are the aftermath of all contest in Nigeria. One begins to wonder what is the benefits in the democratic process for the average Nigerian who wait endlessly for the positive effects of democracy. Democracy is unattainable without the inclusion of the people into government affairs, this is as it is observed that public officers disregard the people opinion, disregard their wants and needs, instead flaunts to the people’s faces unwritten, over bloated and unnecessary projects and polices. This study is however

geared towards determining the role of online journalism in effective democratization in Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

This research study was meant to answer these research questions:-

- 1 What are the roles of journalism in democratization in Nigeria?
- 2 What are the effects of online journalism in Nigeria democracy?
- 3 Are Nigerians well informed of the democratization process?
- 4 What are the problems of online journalism in Nigeria?
- 5 What are the solutions to the problems of online journalism in Nigeria?

### **Significant Of The Study**

The researcher is aware of some of the importance of journalism to modern day democracies in the world. This paper would serve as a source of reference for studies in the area of journalism and online journalism in particular for journalist, mass communicator, researchers, government and private media houses etc. the research findings could also reveal the exact role, effect and problems of online journalism in Nigeria as regards to democracy.

### **Literature Reviewed**

The act of investigating and revealing that which is known is an act synonymous to journalism. The idea is to inform the intended audience about the going on in organizations and institutions such as government and business, journalism is a facilitator of the public spheres described as a distinctive space within which individuals combine to assume a political powerful force, Mark (2012). This is an exposition that journalism is that instrument which empowers an individual who ordinarily will not be recognized to achieve great feats in an uneven society. On a daily basis we are bombarded with messages and information, by implication the various activities that resulted in messages and information are called journalism. In the same vein Kent (2007) sees journalism as the idea behind giving opinion currency and providing information about issues. Thus journalism involves surveillance function by revealing wrongdoings and good deeds of individual of the society. Journalism is the vehicle through which information is being distributed. Hence, journalism is the function of an individual called journalist. In the words of Kent (2007) journalist can transform extraneous events, chance occurrences and seemingly meaningless details into issues that can decide events. Furthermore, Galfield in (1979) opined a world or society that will be devoid of any form of print matter. By implication communication activities being carried out by humans will be solely through the non print form. In addition to this Schiller (1982) buttressed that the world is shifting into a virtual age, an age where there will be a library without walls. This position by Schiller is a dictum of recent happenings all over the world organization and business communication, that sees communication between geographical locations taken place in micro seconds without the physical process of printed materials such as books, magazines etc.

Journalism as a profession has been left out as it has radically witnessed and presently enjoying this concepts or theory with the advent of "online journalism". Online journalism encompasses the acquisition, processing and distribution of news content through the virtual terminal of the World Wide Web. Online journalism is the reporting of facts when produced and distributed via the internet. The advent of the INTERNET challenges traditional news organization in

several ways in such a ways as much as newspapers lose classified advertising to websites. The main push for online journalism could be viewed from a submission by oh. (2004) Every citizen is a reporter. Journalism is not exotic species, they are everyone who seeks to take new development, put them into writing and share them with other.

### **Methodology**

Survey method was adopted. This is because the method is simple, saves time, cost and allows generalization to be made on the entire population of the study this is as the population for this study is composed of all journalists, mass communications in all media houses in Edo state, Nigeria. There are four media organization. For the purpose of convenience, the study population was made up of sixty (60) journalists from four (4) available media houses in Edo state, Nigeria.

The instrument that will be used for data collection is the questionnaire. In a bid of collecting data relevant for this research, the researcher visited all four (4) media houses that were surveyed. In each of the media house, copies of the questionnaire was personally distributed to the media practitioners (journalist) and responses collected on the spot. This means that for collection of data relevant to the study all journalists in the selected four (4) media houses were contacted. Data collected will be categorizes and coded. The data will be subjected to simple frequency calculation and presented in tabular format for easy comprehension; hence the final analysis will be done with the aid of simple percentage.

### **Findings And Conclusion/ Recommendations**

The research was able to establish form findings that:-

1. Online journalism plays important roles in the democratization of any nation with emphasis Nigeria. This is as table 4.3, showed, freedom of information, adherence to political practice, open interaction of the electoral in democratic are the roles of online journalism in effective democratization process in Nigeria.
2. Online journalism affects effective democratization in Nigeria, as it was deduced from the findings that online journalism enables adequate report of election news, early reports of election result, reporting of events as they were, does not give room for the manipulation of facts and figures, eradicates the monopolizing of facts and information by elected public officer. This is shown in table 4.4
3. The journalism profession is effective in Nigeria. Hence it is still playing an important role in effective democratization of Nigeria.
4. Journalists in Nigeria are doing their jobs in informing the Nigeria populace of happenings in the democratic process.
5. There are problems mitigating online journalism in Nigeria. And thus the pace at which it is been accede and used in Nigeria is slow. Table 4.4 showed at a glance that inadequate technology, citizens' inability to use the online news forum, inadequate bandwidth, lack of awareness etc. one problem hindering online journalism in Nigeria.
6. There exist solutions to the problems of online journalism in Nigeria. Such that table 4.5 showed that government provision of internet facility, training of journalist and citizens on how to access and use online news forum, government subsidizing the cost of internet subscription and creation of awareness through publicity as solutions problems of online journalism.

7. The response rate was adequate this is as forty-three (43) which is (99.8%) out of sixty (60) questionnaire set out was retrieved and find useable for the study.
8. Majority 18(41.9%) of the respondents were to have worked between 21-30 years , while
9. Twenty-seven (62.79%) of the respondents were males.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the following and proffered as recommendations to the study findings.

1. Government of Nigeria should take responsibility for the finding of internet connectivity, thus making access and use of inline medium cheaper and readily affordable. This will be in line with the goals of the freedom of information (FOI) bill.
2. Government at various tenets should use its established agencies of online journalism; this is as a bid of bonging its awareness to the generality of its citizens.
3. Online journalism should be introduced as a subject in all tertiary institution in Nigeria. Furthermore, it should be introduced as a subject in post-primary institutions. Hence, this will further advertise online journalism and educate, journalist in training on this need to adequately use the online medium in their course of duty.

### **Conclusion**

Problems of various form have been identified that militates against the role of online journalism in effective democratization in Nigeria; however it is expedient that the Nigerian citizens should adequately be sensitized as regards the availability, use and access of online journalism. Furthermore, adequate training measures should be made available for journalist as a form of motivation and incentives by their employers, in a bid to making journalism more effective and productive.

**Appendix**

Table 3.1 Media Houses in Edo State

| S/N | Names  | State Located   | Ownership |
|-----|--|-----------------|-----------|
| 1   | The Nigeria Observer                           | Edo, Benin City | State     |
| 2   | Independent Television Authority               | Edo, Benin City | Private   |
| 3   | Nigeria Television Authority                   | Edo, Benin City | Federal   |
| 4   | Edo Broadcasting services Radio and Television | Edo, Benin City | State     |

\*Source personal observation and visitation

**Research question 1:** What are the roles of online Journalist in Democratization in Nigeria?

Table 4.3

Roles of online Journalism

| S/N | Question Items  | Responses Yes | %     | No | %     |
|-----|---|---------------|-------|----|-------|
| 1   | Ensure freedom of information                                   | 43            | 100   | -  | -     |
| 2   | Permit timely coverage of information                           | 18            | 41.9  | 26 | 58.1  |
| 3   | Ensure adherence to political practice                          | 38            | 88.37 | 5  | 11.63 |
| 4   | Ensure open interaction of the electorate in democratic process | 43            | 100   | -  | -     |
| 5   | Guarantee freedom from electoral manipulation                   | 40            | 93.02 | 3  | 6.98  |

**Research Question 2:** Effect of Online Journalism

Table 4.4:

What is the effect of Online Journalism?

| S/N | Question Items   | Responses Yes | %     | No | %     |
|-----|--|---------------|-------|----|-------|
| 1   | It enables adequate report of election news  | 43            | 100   | -  | -     |
| 2   | Early report of election result  | 39            | 90.7  | 4  | 9.3   |
| 3   | Reporting of events as they were   | 43            | 100   | 5  | -     |
| 4   | Does not give room for manipulation of facts and figure                            | 43            | 100   | -  | -     |
| 5   | Allows for citizens freedom in stating their views and opinion                     | 41            | 95.35 | 2  | 4.65  |
| 6   | Allow for a stable democracy   | 5             | 11.63 | 38 | 88.37 |
| 7   | Eradicates the monopolizing of facts and information by the elected public officer | 43            | 100   | -  | -     |

**Research question 4:** What are the problems of online journalism in Nigeria?

| S/N | Question Items   | Responses<br>Yes | %     | No | %     |
|-----|--|------------------|-------|----|-------|
| 1   | In-adequate Technology                                       | 36               | 87.72 | 7  | 16.28 |
| 2   | Lack of technical know-how on the part of journalist         | 12               | 27.9  | 31 | 72.1  |
| 3   | Citizen's inability to effectively use the online news forum | 26               | 60.5  | 17 | 39.5  |
| 4   | Inadequate public awareness                                  | 43               | 100   | -  | -     |
| 5   | Inadequate bandwidth   | 43               | 100   | -  | -     |
| 6   | High cost of accessing and using online news forum           | 28               | 65.1  | 15 | 34.9  |

**Research question 5:** What are the solutions to the problems of online Journalism?

Table 4.5:

## Solutions to problems of online Journalism

| S/N | Question Items   | Responses<br>Yes | %    | No | %    |
|-----|--|------------------|------|----|------|
| 1   | Government provision of adequate internet facility   | 43               | 100  | -  | -    |
| 2   | Training of journalist and citizens on how to access and use online forum                                    | 43               | 100  | -  | -    |
| 3   | Government subsidizing the cost of internet subscription in Nigeria  | 28               | 65.1 | 15 | 39.4 |
| 4   | Creating awareness through publicity of availability and use of online news medium for journalism in Nigeria | 43               | 100  | -  | -    |

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