The Impact of Online Feedbacks on the Credibility of News Stories (A Study of Saharareporters.Com)

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Abstract

The new media have revolutionized human communication. The traditional means of gathering, processing and disseminating news has been greatly altered. Consequently, the news audience is now sophisticated and highly dynamic. With the new media, the audience members are now equal partners in news business. Though a welcome development, it has raised credibility question. This study, therefore, investigates how online feedbacks affect the credibility of online stories published by saharareproter.com. Using qualitative content analysis and focus group discussion, findings revealed that majority of online feedbacks in the audience platform of saharareporters.com raised the issue of credibility. In most cases, the audience questioned the accuracy of some news stories. It was also found that most of the feedbacks analyzed had ethnic, religious and political connotations. It was therefore, recommended that the managers of saharareporters.com should verify some stories sent in by citizen journalist before they are uploaded.

Keywords: Fifth Estate ● saharareporter.com● Citizen journalism ● Free press● Online news credibility

INTRODUCTION

When Denis McQuail brought to the public domain the need to rethink traditional means of information gathering and dissemination in 1960s, digital technology which drives the new media was still a preserve of the engineering world. At that point, modern computer which was the first technological device to use digital technology was used mainly for business computing and military operations. McQuil's rethinking concept which was buried inside the Democratic Participant Media theory, brought to the fore the sensitive nature of the news media. McQuail had argued that the news media was too important to be left in the hands of media professionals alone. He rather advocated for a situation where everybody is a stakeholder in the business of news gathering, processing and dissemination. For many scholars in the field of communication, that was the concept that shaped the present day interactive media, collaborative journalism and citizen journalism.

The interactive media variously called the new media, social media and convergence media have redefined not just how news items are gathered, processed and disseminated, they have equally moved the world from the dark ages of delayed feedback to immediate feedback in news business. Umeh (2013, p.11) observes that new media technologies have redefined feedback mechanism in communication. According to her, the audience members have moved from being active to being sophisticated; possessing the powers to contribute instantly to a published story and sometimes questioning the credibility of some stories. The major thrust of this piece, therefore, is to examine how the new media have redefined the concept of feedback mechanism in news business and it attendant consequences on the credibility of news sources.

To make for easy presentation and comprehension, this piece is divided into four sections. The first section is an overview of the major concepts in the work; looking at new media, online news source, online feedback, online news credibility and Sahara reporters. The second section critically deals with news source credibility in the face of the new media. In the third section, an audience assessment was done to ascertain the impact of online feedbacks on the credibility of selected news stories published by saharareporters.com. The last section which is drawn from the qualitative analysis done in the third section is the conclusion and recommendations.

Again, in order to give this piece the direction needed, four research questions came to mind.

1. How effective is the feedback platform of saharareporters.com?
2. To what extent do the audience members send feedbacks on published stories?
3. In what ways do audience members' feedbacks affect the credibility of online stories published by saharareporters.com?
4. Do audience members respond along ethnic, religious and political lines?

Having made the above clarifications and research questions established, we will now proceed to look at some key words in this paper by obeying the advice of Cicero (106 BC). According to him, the first step in handling a subject is to define it, so that everybody will understand what the subject matter is all about (Udeze, 2008,p.2). In line with the above, we take on the first section by looking at some key concepts in the piece:

SECTION ONE

The Concept of New Media

The concept of the media has been in use since the 1960s and has to do with expanding and diversifying set of applied communication technologies. Lievrouw and Livingstone, (2006) cited in Mcquail (2010, p.39) point to the difficulties of saying just what the new media is. These editors choose to define "them in a composite contexts, bringing together three elements: technological artefacts and devices; activities, practices and uses; and social arrangements and organizations that form around the devices and practices" (McQuail, 2010,p.39). A more complex case appeared when media experts maintained that what differentiates the new media from the old was the introduction of technologies. In any case, attempt is made here to at least articulate the meaning of new media.

According to Manovich (1994) the thing called new media represents a convergence of two separate historical trajectories: computing and media technologies which began in the 1830s with Babbage's Analytical Engine and Daguerre's daguerreotype. In the middle of the twentieth century, a modern digital computer was developed to perform calculations on numerical data more efficiently which eventually took over from numerous mechanical tabulators and calculators widely employed by companies and governments since the turn of the century. This movement witnessed the rise of modern media technologies that allow the storage of images, image sequences, sounds, and text using different material forms – photographic plates, film stocks, gramophone records, etc. Therefore, the synthesis of these two histories brought the new media (Manovich, 1994). With this, graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces, and texts become computable; that is, they comprise simply another set of computer data.

A more complex angle to what is new media as discussed earlier is the fact that some scholars appear to believe that both old and new media are one and same except for the introduction of technologies. Leckenby and Collier (2003) observe that "the first thing to note about "new" media is that they are not completely new. They have, in many instances, been growing out of the old media over time, so that there is a need for historical perspective in the discussion of new media". Lending credence to this fact is Marvin (1988) cited in Leckenby and Collier (2003). According to him, new technology is a historically relative term. We are not the first generation to wonder at the rapid and extraordinary shifts in the dimensions of the world and the human relationships it contains as a result of new forms of communication." This is why Williams, Strover, Grant (1994) defined new media "as those which offered new services or enhancement to old services and included such applications as microelectronics, computers and telecommunications. Festoon Media (2010) sees the new media as a:

> Term meant to encompass the emergence of digital, computerized, or networked information and communication technologies in the later part of the 20th century. Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, interactive and impartial. Some examples may be the Internet, websites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMS, and DVDs (Para. 23).

Rice (1984) cited in Festoon Media (2010) defined the new media as communication technologies that enable or facilitate user-to-user interactivity and interactivity between user and information. For instance, the internet has replaced the "one-to-many" model of traditional mass communication with the possibility of a "many-to-many" web of communication. Diri (2009, p.177) sees the new media as those methods and social practices of communication, representation and expression that have developed using digital, multimedia, networked computer and the ways this machine is used to transform work in other media, like books, movies, newspaper, magazine, radio, television, telephone, etc". From all these definitions, one thing stands out and that is the fact that new media have to do with series of communication networks riding on the platform of digital technologies. This platform has made possible concepts like social media, convergence media and interactive media.

Having looked at the meaning of new media, let us proceed to examine the principles of the new media. An understanding of these principles will enable everyone to fully appreciate the issue at hand. Lev Manovich in his book, the Language of New Media, published in 2001 proposes five principles of new media. For him, these principles should be understood not as absolute laws but rather as general tendencies of a culture undergoing computerization. The five principles are numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding (Sorapure, 2001, p.13).

The principle of numerical representation explains that all new media objects are composed of digital code; they are essentially numerical representations. This means that all new media objects can be described mathematically and can be manipulated via algorithms. According to Manovich (2001) cited in Sorapure (2001, p.13), says that the key difference between old and new media is that new media are programmable while the old are not. The second principle is that of modularity. This principle explains that certain media objects like pixels,

images, text, sounds, frames and code which are independent can be combined to form a new media object. These elements can be independently modified and reused in other works. Sorapre (2001, p.14) further explains that "the modularity of new media is related to the modular character of structural computer programming, such as we find in Java and C++, in which independent functions or subroutines are brought together in larger programs.

The principle of automation is seen in terms of computer programs that allow users to create or modify media objects using templates or algorithms. This means that images can be manipulated under this principle. With this, the question of originality, creativity, and authorship is raised (Sorapure, 2001, p.13). The last two principles are those of variability, and transcoding. On the principle of variability, Manovich (2001) cited in (Sorapure, 2001,p.13) writes that, "a new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions. Unlike old media, new media does not "hardwire" structure and content together. One example of variability is found in hypertextual or interactive media that allow users to take different paths through a text and therefore access different content". Many new media scholars believe that variability is the hallmark of the new media. For instance, with just a few mouse clicks, an individual could generate many different versions of images and movies online. Transcoding simply means the translation of a new media object from one format to another (for example, text to sound) or the adaptation of new media for display on different devices.

The Concept of Online News Source

It is unarguably a fact that in media business, the source of a published story is of paramount importance to the audience who is the end user of the information. A whole lot of times, the importance to the audience members attach a published story is a function of whether they believe the source or not. Among the audience, it is common to hear questions like, 'what is your source?' Who is your source'? Where did you get that from'? These questions underscore the centrality of news sources to the audience.

The proponents of both Congruity and Cognitive Balance theories lend credence to the strategic place of a source in the business of selling meaning. Folarin (1998, p.77) in explaining the congruity theory writes that the theory presupposes a situation "where a message results in internal inconsistency, the receiver is likely to change his attitude to both the source and the message". Umeh (2013, p.12) defines news source as the provider of an information on a particular issue at a particular time. Ndolo (2006, p.17) sees a source as a sender of an information. According to him, when we move from the interpersonal level to mass communication level, some changes take place. One of these changes is the fact that the term sender which is used at the interpersonal level changes to a source. Online news source simply means any technologically powered online platform that provides news to estimated audience at a certain period. Umeh (2013) observed that online news sources are usually made possible by the internet. Dare (2010) gave the name of such online news to include www.nigeria.com, www.USAfricaonline.com, www.nigeriacenral.com, odili.net (also known as Nigeriaworld.com), www.naijapolitics.com, www.nigerianvillagesquare.com, nairaland.com, nigeriavillagesquare.com and saharareporters.com. These do not include other conventional newspaper broadcast stations that now have online version such: Vanguard, The Guardian, The Punch, Sun, The Nation, Nigeria Tribune, Leadership, Trust, ThisDay, People's Daily, PM News, national Mirror Newspapers, Nigerian Observer, Independent, Complete Sports, Business Day, national Network, Times of Nigeria, Daily Times, Osun Defender, Nigerian Pilot, National Accord, Champion, The Tide, Business News, Nigeria Delta Standard, Desert Herald, Fresh Fact, Edo World, Daily Post, Nigeria Masterweb, Urhobo Times, Channels Television, All Nigeria Soccer, Fresh Angle, Channels Television, Google News-Nigeria, Yahoo News, Eagle Reporters, Editorial Nigeria.com, Factual Reporters, Liberty Report, Naijaleaks, Nigeria 24 News, Nigeria Communications, Week Nigeria World, Nigeria Current, Nigerian Inquirer, Orient News, Nigeria Standard, Nigerians Abroad, Pointer, Premier, Premium Times, Royal Times of Nigeria, BBC Media Action – Nigeria, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), THEWILL, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria)FRCN), Voice of Nigeria.

Online Feedback

Of the best know definitions of communication, contained the idea of feedback. In fact, the communication process is said to be incomplete without some forms of feedbacks; whether delayed or immediate. Ndolo (2006, p.13) writes that when messages are sent, there is usually a mental or physical, verbal and or non-verbal response by the receiver that indicate whether the message is understood and shared. Traditionally, media organizations get to know the feelings of their audience from their feedbacks. It is such feedback that reveals whether message sent was message received. Therefore, feedback gives communication the meaning it deserves.

Online feedback has to do with the responses of the audience members on a story published on any platform on the internet. Cases however exist where the audience could be responding to a story published by a conventional medium that lacked online presence. It is through such responses that the source gets a sense of followership online. This is part of participatory journalism practice.

Online News Credibility

According to Metzger (2005), the basic notion behind credibility is believability. Review of literature in the area of media credibility reveals that credibility consists of two primary dimensions, which include the expertise and trustworthiness of the source of some information. Metzger (2005), explains that "some secondary factors have also been seen to affect credibility perceptions, including source attractiveness and dynamism". With this, one can define source credibility as "a receiver-based judgment which involves both objective judgments of information quality, as well as subjective perceptions of the source's trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and other qualities" (Metzger 2005, p.29). Simply put, online source credibility means the perception of online audience on the ability of a source to provide accurate information. We shall return to the issue of online source credibility in the next section.

Sahara Reporters

Since the entire piece is about how online feedbacks affect the credibility of saharareporter.com news, there is a need for us to build a general background as this will help us to understand why it reports the way it reports and why the audience members respond the way they respond.

Saharareporters.com is an online citizen journalism based site established on January 25, 2006 by activist, Omoyele Sowore, a 39-year old Nigerian blogger who proudly proclaims himself a citizen journalist. The launching of this news website marked the advent of a new estate of the realm. The site is popularly known as saharareporters.com (Dara, 2011, p.28). Dara (2011) writes that on "the day of its launch, Sahara reporters issued a 750-word press statement in New York and emailed it to thousands of Nigerians at home and the Diaspora and media houses. It announced its birth unabashedly". The founder made it clear during the launch that the new citizen website anchored its conviction on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". This would later inoculate it against several law suites and attempts to censor and proscribe it by politicians back in Nigeria.

Shortly after its launch, the founder handed the site over to the citizens of the world especially those in Nigeria. According to Dara (2011) a press release attributed to the founder reads in part:

> It is a unique organization, comprised of ordinary people whose only mission is to seek truth and publish it without fear or favour. This means that apart from the team of professionals running its affairs, Sahara Reporters is also an umbrella for anyone who has something to say and who seeks an avenue to say it, as far as what he/she says is verifiable and ascertainable as true and the information therein, is in the public interest he has been the scourge of Nigerian political leaders and key private figures that many regard as central to the rot in the Nigerian state. The citizen website proudly invites every Nigerian Citizen to "Report Yourself and that is what has been happening, with record hits and record levels of citizen generated content. This is what William Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute calls the 'Fifth Estate of the Realm'

Two years into operation, founder issued a statement saying that, "we are unapologetically practitioners of advocacy journalism, because to us journalism is not an end in itself' (Dara, 2011, p29).

The site's underling editorial policy is to report the truth as citizen journalism and not as professionals who are trained in the business of journalism. According to Omoyele Sowore cited in Dara (2011):

> We are Citizen Reporters, not Professional Journalists. This was no doubt a direct answer to many who have criticized the quality and bent of the stories the site had carried. It stated further that "we depend on the efforts of concerned citizens who act as whistleblowers as well as the main sources for our exposes. The information on this site, sometimes in the form of rare documents, photos, videos and audio records, comes from citizens anxious to see change. Our pages are free and open to everyone who wishes to contribute story tips, authentic information, or even rebuttals.

The above statement leaves no one in doubt that sharareporters is a citizen's based news site committed to the principles of citizen reporting. This explains why the site is open to everyone to make uploads considered to be the truth and of importance to the audience.

Before the site was launched in 2006, the founder contacted a London based Nigerian, Jonathan Elendu, who at the time had started a blog focused on events in Nigeria called 'ElenduReports'. They both spent the greater part of 2004 and 2005 gathering materials on properties owned by Nigerians in the United Kingdom and the United States. Dara (2011) writes that the greatest moment for the emerging site was the founder's trip to Nigeria in December 2005 during which he ran into the eldest son of the then President of Nigeria, Gbenga Obasanjo, at the Nigeria-Benin border. The exclusive interview Sowore fortuitously secured served as a lightning rod. The interview was timely and most revealing. He was able to squeeze important and previously unknown information of national importance involving corrupt dealings out of the son of the President. In fact, the interview revealed damaging details about the President's family. The interview also revealed that the third term bid by Obasanjo to stay in power for 12 years was real and enjoyed the tacit support of the Americans.

Another milestone that bolstered Sahara Reporters' image internationally was the exclusive picture of the 2009 Charismas day failed bomber, Nigerian born Umar Farouk Mutallab, which Sahara Reporters was the first to obtain. As the US and International media were scrambling for more details of the failed terror attack, Sahara Reporters tapped into the power of citizen journalism. It employed the tool of crowd sourcing to ask its Facebook fans if anyone knew or went to school with Mutallab and if anyone was willing to provide a picture. Within a few hours, someone sent in the picture and Sahara Reporters became the first to publish the picture of the Mutallab. CNN and BBC immediately picked the picture and ran it repeatedly crediting Sahara Reporters. Few hours later, almost all media stations in the world were streaming to use the picture. Sahara reporter was equally the first to publish details about Mutallab and his family. When the late Yar'Adua died on May 5, 2010, the site was the first to report it before any conventional station in Nigeria. In fact, it was a moment of legitimacy for the site (Dara, 2011, p.31).

With no official reporters, Sahara Reporters has had to depend on thousands of reports from ordinary Nigerian citizens who contribute content, materials, leads, documents, pictures and video. In most cases, it engages people to follow up an important story or help to investigate a story in which case they are paid. Dara (2011, p.34) explains that:

> In one year, over 200 Nigerians in sensitive positions contributed important and sensitive information and documents. Presently it has over 500 citizen reporters who send stories and photos using blackberry messenger for free and a citizen volunteer corps of nearly 6,000 drawn from the Nigerian community. Sahara Reporters has also written over 4,000 news reports with about 98 percent accuracy as claimed by Sowore, the founder of the site. Nigerians have embraced citizen journalism and to some extent Sahara Reporters is the first purveyor of this kind of journalism.

The major funding of the site comes from donations from spirited individual, organization and advertisement. For instance, Sahara Reporters has received funding from the Ford Foundation to the tune of one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars ($175,000).

Because of the citizen based nature of the site, it has over a million human traffic everyday with over 20 stories uploaded. This does not diminish the fact many of the published stories come from government officials who are not comfortable with corruption in the government (Dara 2011).

SECTION TWO

News Source Credibility in the Face of the New Media

In just two decades, the new media powered by the Internet has integrated itself into our lives as an important indispensable tool for information and communication. With the new media, millions of people perform searches each day looking for a wide variety of information that concerns them. These include medical and health information, economic information, political and news information, as well as entertainment, travel, and many other kinds of information (Fallows, 2005 cited in Metzger 2005). In fact, online and digital news consumption has continued to increase, with many more people now getting news on cell phones, tablets or other mobile platforms. And perhaps the most dramatic change in the news environment has been the rise of social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2012). In a study by the Center, it found that:

> Just as online newspaper readers make up an ever-greater share of all newspaper readers, so too are more magazine readers and book readers abandoning the printed page for tablets, digital books and other devices. In the current

survey, 9% of those who said they read a magazine yesterday, and 20% who read a book, read them in a non-print format. And substantial percentages of the regular readers of leading newspapers now read them digitally. Currently, 55% of regular New York Times readers say they read the paper mostly on a computer or mobile device, as do 48% of regular USA today and 44% of wall street journal readers (Pew research Center, 2012, p.7).

This super highway of information occasioned by the new media has seriously revolutionized the perception of the audience about news sources. This has no doubt brought to the fore the issue of source credibility. Lending credence to this, Metzger (2005), says that "the plethora of information available online, coupled with the heavy reliance on the Web by information-seekers raises the issue of the credibility or quality of information found online".

Abbasi and Liu (2012) define credibility as the quality of being trustworthy. They further argued that "in communication research, information credibility has three parts, message credibility, source credibility, and media credibility". In explaining the complex nature of ascertaining source credibility online, Abbasi and Liu (2012) maintained that "comparing conventional media, assessing information credibility in social media is the more challenging problem. In the case of conventional media such as newspapers, the source and media re known; in addition, the medium's owners take responsibility for the content". Obviously, in the case of social media and other online platforms, the source can be unknown thus no one takes responsibility about the content in the case of misrepresentation of facts. In many cases a username is the only information we have about its source (e.g., an incomplete or even fake parole in Twitter or YouTube that publishes information about an incident) (Abbasi and Liu 2012). That brings the issue of identity theft online.

Identity theft online is one major contributory factor to the issue of online source credibility. Where everyone is concern as to what to trust online, it becomes a problem. Adepetun of the Guardian newspaper reported in the March 10 2014 edition of the paper that online identity theft (OIT) and impersonation are problems growing at a fast pace globally. According to Adeptun (2014, p.11), the potential for fraud has become a major hurdle for the evolution and growth of online commerce. His report captures the fact that in the United States alone, close to 10 million people fall prey to online theft yearly with over 50 billion US dollars lost. In Nigeria, the case is not different. For instance, in January 2014, Honeywell Flour Mills Limited published a disclaimer in the Guardian Newspaper that its manager, Otunba Otudeko did not own a Facebook account. This was because many accounts were opened in his name. Again, in the same month, the Nigerian Army published a disclaimer that Lieutenant General KTJ Minimah did not own any Facebook account (Adepetun 2014, p.11). These two disclaimers in less than one month underscore the danger of online source credibility. For instance, if the duo of General Minimah and Mr. Otudeko should later in life open Facebook accounts, many online friends will still find it extremely difficult to trust the accounts as belong to them.

Even though some have argued that the need to maintain freedom online is very important, we have to rethink it. According to Abbasi and Liu (2012) anonymity is both an advantage and a disadvantage of new media. On one hand, people create content, and leave feedback or vote without being afraid of any negative side effects resulting from their activities. This is a great advantage especially for people in countries that lack the freedom of speech. On the other hand, people could also take advantage of openness and anonymity to pass on falsehood and hate massages. This is why assessing credibility is an important part of research on mass communication. Expectedly, many works on credibility concentrated on source credibility as well as credibility attributed to different media channels. In traditional media as well as in new media, the credibility of the source has a great effect on the process of acquiring the content and changing audience attitudes and beliefs (Abbasi and Liu 2012).

In a survey conducted in 2012 in Malaysia, Sharon Wilson, Pauline Leong, Carmen Nge & Dr. Ngerng Miang Hong sought to investigates online consumer behavior with regards to student perceptions f the trust and credibility of online news. A study of 1,000 students of institutions of higher education in the Klang Valley, reveals that youth still rely on traditional media to obtain news. However, traditional media fails to provide sufficient information for youth so they resort to getting additional information from alternative news websites. Nevertheless, their level of trust in alternative news websites is based on how accurately these news sites reflect the current scenario. Another study by Bello Usman in 2011 reveals that there is increasing concern of trust about online news stories. Majority of the respondents used in the study believed that online stories are not reliable especially from new sites. From whatever angle one looks at this issue, there is growing concern of source credibility.

Theoretical Underpinning

This piece is anchored on two theories – democratic participant media theory and technological determinism theory.

The Democratic Participant media theory was developed in 1960 by Denis Mcquail. The major presuppositions of the theory is that bureaucratic obstacles in media operations should give way for all citizens to participate actively in the business of information sharing. The theory maintains that the mass media institutions were too sensitive to be left in the hands of professionals alone. We called this the prophetic theory because as at the time of its development, the interactive nature of the media was still not in sight.

This theory provides an explanation to this study as it explains the concept of citizens' participation in news production and dissemination.

Technological Determinism Theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. This theory provides explanation regarding the effects of technological advancements on the society. According to McLuhan (1962, p.13) cited in Baran and Davies (2012, p.273) "changes in communication technology inevitably produce profound changes in both culture and social order". This theory helps explain in this study that technology determines how the audience members respond to news items because technology gave the means. With the internet, everyone can now be an equal sender and receiver of information.

SECTION THREE

The Impact of Online Feedbacks on the Credibility of Selected News Stories Published By Saharareporters.com

In this section, a qualitative content analysis of ten selected news published by saharareporters.com between 2012 and 2013 was done. This enabled the researchers to support the body of literature presented in the first two sections of this piece. The content analysis aspect of this work was equally complimented with Focus Group Discussion. To this end, three focus discussions were held with students at University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State University of Science and technology and Renaissance University, Ugbawka. The transcript of these discussions was analysed using themes. The content analysis was equally analysed discursively using themes.

In each focus group, 5 final year students who were identified as heavy users of the internet were used. The choice for this category of student was to ensure that a robust discussion was held. For content analysis, the online responses engineered as a way of feedback on each story were analysed using the themes of disbelieve, correction, doubt, misinformation and misrepresentation. The focus group helped to ascertain whether online audience reacted alone ethnic, religious, economics or political lines. Let's look at the stories:

Story 1

Governor Yakowa of Kaduna, former NSA Azazi Dead In Helicopter crash

Story I was published by saharareporters.com shortly after the deaths of the former Kaduna State Governor, Mr Patrick yakowa, and the former National Security Adviser to President Jonathan. This story which was published on December 12 2012, generated 126 comments.

Some of the comments questioned the slant of the story in a manner that suggested expression of doubt. The comments with their usernames and date of post are presented below:

advice

submitted by Alli yaquub (not verified) on Dec, 17 2012, 11:12 AM.

> If what sahara is saying is true, why will people start to talk on issues that concern the whole nations as if it is a personal issue. Why will Muslims be happy over the death of a fellow human being like him. Isiam did not teach us dat. As muslim we believe dat death is inevitable …. and everybody will taste death one day, we are all going to die and go back to our creator. Like it or not, it's a must. So no Muslim should be haapy over the death of another human being. We know that the way he come to office is very rough, but nonetheless we have to accept it bcos there is nothing we can do to that. at the same time we are not happy about his death. So we should try to watch our tongue in other not to cause a quick on the land, especially went the land is facing many trouble. Why will the Christians say it is a plot from the muslims, have we forgotten so soon? When the life of Dasuki and others were lost in plane crash as well ….did the muslims Complain about it? So why are we so sentimental on issues like dis….. may Allah help us in Nigeria.

(a)Wahala even a monkey has more brains than u

Submitted by DERI (not verified) on Dec, 16 2012, 7:12AM.

> The Nembe Kolo creek road project has been on for over 36 years now. The SS most especially the ijaw nation are wasting time with these Fulani despots as well as members of the old regions of 9ja! If the renovation of a 100 yrs old church building in the home town of the president in Bayelsa State, could lead to the death of the Italian managing director of the firm. That embarked on the exercise, is it the construction of a road project in Nembe that will not attract the wrath of animals like u? Imagine some pigs here

> saying Azazi deserves to die because he stole the nation blind-what about buhari and the theft of 4.8b oil windfall-IBB 12.4b nko? What about danjuma who made over 500m from an oil block that was dashed him by Abacha? But it became war when the same abacha gave one to Etete an Ijaw man-why would dumps like you not attempt to David west us here with stories aimed at appeasing the Fulani North? Perhaps it was thievery that killed late Gani Zik & Awo. Animals. I don't blame them, I blame saharareporters.

Under this story alone, 19 more comment accused saharareporters of wrong slanting and not deleting unfriendly comments. In any case, these comments suggest that most respondents reacted alone ethnic and religious lines.

Story 2

President Jonathan Misses Investor's Council Meeting After Falling III, Checks into London Hospital posted by sharareporters.com: Nov, 21 2013, 10:11Am

This story attracted 70 comments. Some are presented below:

He needs our prayers

Submitted by bala haruna (not verified) on Nov, 22 2013, 6:11AM.

> It is funny how low you think of our president. He took ill suddenly and instead of being concerned about his well being, you (shaharareporters) are rather suspecting that he got drunk. I think what our president needs right now is our prayers and good wishes so he would recover quickly and carryout his duties to move our country forward. He might have also taken ill the last time at Addis Ababa, but it is a reason why there is a word like "coincidence" if GEJ was truly hospitalized due to illness, you can bet your bottom dollar that the Nigerian govt will not divulge that fact. They will do all in their power to conceal the whole thing. That leaves us with just one other explanation: stage-fright induced alcoholic binging. Just too many of these cases for them to be coincidences.

2019-BEACREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

Submitted by Pual (not verified) on Nov, 21 2013, 4:11PM.

> The way some people are commenting here anybody would think that They have personally witnessed president Jonathan drunk. Nigerians, all they need is one rumour and off they go chasing the wind. In 2019 president Jonathan will finish his 2nd term and then Nigerians will get a new president. Maybe we should just divide the Country, so that Buhari can be president of the North and Tinubu can be be president of the south- west, because we in the south-south love our president. My question is simply this; without our Oil, which of these devil worshippers like Tinubu would really want to be president? Yeye sahara reporters with fake story.

Story 3

Embarrassment ss Jonathan Misses Speaking Slot At AU Gathering. Posted: May, 25 2013, 11: 05 AM

This story attracted 115 feedbacks. Most of the comments accused saharareporters of bias. The key comments are presented below:

Sahara Reporters HATES GEJ

Submitted by Tony h (not verified) on May,26 2013, 8:05AM.

> My dear sahara Reporters, why not start each article by saying "we at sahara Reporters Hates president Jonathan". Just get that part out of the way, then go into the story. Your General Boko Haram will NEVER, NEVER, NEVER rule Nigeria again! For your information, I voted for Nuhu Ribadu, and will do it again.

My president

submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Jun, 19 2013, 3:06 AM.

> My president is someone I rever cos he has the oil poured on him as a president, though I felt bad after reading this piece by saharaReporters, it write up is so unpleasant, but why didn't they interview MY PRESIDENT to hear his side of the story.

@Saharareporters and @ wahala

Submitted by Osagie (not verified) on May, 26 2013, 9:05AM.

> Please start editing the comments of @wahala. His comments are offensive and unduly rude. He routinely uses the most disrespectful language to describe OBJ and president Jonathan and at times @ sharareporters itseif if people o equal crudity directs crude comments on his "icon"! @wahala brings down the quality of this site and he should be banned!

Grow up Sahara reporters

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on May, 26 2013, 6:05AM.

> Why do people remember the bad that has been inflicted on them and forget the good that was done. If you are asked to come in rule, you won't be able to do it. Are we moving forward or back wards. We won't Nigerians be looked down on when we go about rubbishing us through media and the morrafuckers Sahara reporters my foot. They come here and rubbish Nigerians and we concur with them. Every body from other parts of the country will read how Sahara desert reporter rubbished the Nigerian name and president then they condemn us. Nigerians which way naaaa no day F up Sahara desert oh.

THE MEDIA

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on May, 26 2013, 2:05AM.

> I have said it over and again, the Nigeria media will destroy Nigeria, watch and see. The are the problem of Nigeria and Governance.

Interesting News

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on May, 25 2013, 8:05PM.

> This Saharareporters is full of bad journalist who have no opportunity to work in bigger media companies. You want to play the role of A1-Jazeera in Nigeria, but you are taking it too far. What sort of Journalism is this? Its either you have problems with Jonathan or the Wife or is associates. You gain from confusion and that is the wrong way to earn a living.

SH Please Respect our Leaders

Submitted by Abubakar Ibrahim (not verified) on May, 25 2013, 12:05PM.

> Why is Sahara Reporters always like reporting negative things about Mr. President GEJ. Our president is a human and just last week Nigeria became the biggest economy in Africa passing south Africa by GDP, so you can imagine, secondly the battle with militants at home, kidnapping, Boko Haram, Armed robbery, 419, fuel subsidy fraud and so many in addition to loosing the chairmanship of NGF to Amiechi are enough to make anybody ruling Nigeria have a sleepless night, therefore please bear with him for not addressing the AU gathering besides, NIGERIA IS THE BIGGEST CONTRIBUTOR TO THE UNION FINANCIALLY that is why they did not make it an issue there for not addressing them.

Useless journalism

Submitted by Truesage id (not verified) on May, 25 2013, 12:05PM.

> Whether the likes of Sahara reporters like it or not Goodluck Ebele Jonathan is here to stay. If I were in Goodluck's shoes I will see to it that the likes of Sahara reporters are banned from transmitting to Nigerians. I will also seek the help of United States of America to ensure that useless domain is blacklisted. Nigerians most especially the ones not from oil producing states cammpt reject Jonathan and want oil allocations. Reject Jonathan and reject oil allocation and lets see who will suffer. When Goodluck sneezes it's in the news, when he doesn't it's also in the news. Haba give our president a break. Shege barawo banza.

Story 4

Stella Oduah Certificate Scandal: Senate Does not Independently Verify Documents Presented by Security Agencies, Spokesman Confirms posted: Jan, 07 2014, 2:01PM

This article attracted 51 comments.

 Does SH reporters know the

Submitted by Georgia 23 (not verified) on Jan, 08 2014, 10:01AM.

> Does SH reporters know the difference between a citation and a CV?. What you are calling a CV is a citation about the minister possibly written by somebody else.

Don't You know that PM an SR are

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Jan, 08 2014, 4:01AM.

> Don't you know that PM an SR are owned and controlled by another certificate forger tinubu-none will appear if the story had something to do with APC-which exist only in the mind of those who visit the web.

Error in Reporting

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Jan, 07 2014, 4:01PM.

"Below is the CV Ms. Oduah presented to the Senate in 2011:

PRIEF CITATION ON PRINCESS STELLA ADAEZE ODUAH, OON-HONOURABLE MINISTER OF AVIATION FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

…Princess Stella Adaeze Oduah, OON is indeed a gem of our generation and a blessing to this Country. WE BELIEVE IN HER TRANSFORMATION AGENDA FOR THE AVIATION MINISTRY !!!! CONGRATULATIONS OUR DEAR HONOUABLE MINISTER".

The above was reported as part of Stella Oduah's CV presented to the Senate in 2011. It indeed it was, it should have been reported in first person singular tone and should not have been concluded with the above congratulatory ,essage before the senate okay'ed it. Or is CVformat changing these days?

Why was she addressed as: HONOURABLE MINISTER OF AVIATION FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA" before she was cleared by the Senate? Could this have been written by someone else or a group of overzealous individuals just as it is usual in Nigeria?

STORY FIVE

2013 Anambra Governorship Election – Results Come in

Posted: Nov, 16 2013, 10:11AM

This news item attracted 69 comment(s)

Partisan Report

Submitted by Berium (not verified) on Nov, 17 2013, 3:11AM.

> What do you expect from sahara reporter if not partisan report.
> Sahara reporter has proved himself to be biased in all their dealing.
> Time II soon run out of you.

SAHARA TALES BY MOONLIGHT

Submitted by IDENILI (not verified) on Nov, 16 2013, 7:11PM.

> Sahara your tales are too stupid, your results are too childish and where South East is concerned, it is clear that your journalists don't even bother to go and make up stories in the backyard of Ajegule.
> Even with Ngige APC will not go anywhere in South East.

Sahara Brewing Problem in Igbo Land!

Submitted by Obinna R. Onuoha (not verified) on Nov, 16 2013, 7:11PM.

> You people are trying to use Igbo land to test your stupidity Sahara or what do you call yourself "we are Igbos!!!" take your trash to the West!!!

SAHARA DESERT TALES AGAIN

Submitted by Idemili (not verified) on Nov, 16 2013, 7:11PM.

> SAHARA, YOU HAVE PRINTED TALES BY MOONLIGHT AGAIN. APC IS TINUBUS PARTY AND SAHARA IS TINUBUS WEBSITE. BUT APC CANNOT WIN IN THE EAST. FASHOLA SINGLE HANDEDLY SUCCEEDED IN WHAT ALL THE NORTHERN STRATEGY FAILED TO DO – HE PUT THE FINAL NAIL IN THE COFFIN OF IGBO/YORUBA COOPERATION AND WHEN THE HISTORY OF NIGERIA IS WRITTEN, FASHOLA WILL HAVE THE NOTORIOUS ROLE OF THE MAN WHO COULD HAVE BEEN PRESIDENT BUT DESTROYED IT BECAUSE OF HIS ETHNIC HATRED OF IGBOS. SO SAHARA DESERT, PRINT ALL THE FAKE RESULTS YOU WANT BUT APC WILL NOT GO ANYWHERE.

Analysis

A thorough analysis of the comments presented in the stories above and five others not presented for want of space, revealed that a significant member of the audience are concerned about some of the stories published by saharareporters.com between 2012 and 2013. Again, it was revealed that a significant number responded along ethnic and religious lines. More so, the analysis revealed that majority of Nigerians are active audience. This is established from the fact that 78 percent of the stories published by the site usually attract numerous comments from the audience.

On a positive note, it was discovered that saharareporters has one of the most dynamic feedback platforms. Its feedback is better if compare to the nearly 100 online news channels in Nigeria. As seen throughout the ten stories studied, the site managers allow all to comment; verified or not. This some argue suggests the fact that the site has respect for the views of the audience members.

The qualitative data generated from the focus group revealed among other things that majority of Nigerians are exposed to saharareporters and other online news channels. In fact, it was found that most students depend on online sources for most of their daily news needs. In focus group three (3) held at Renaissance University, a participant argued that "I depend on sahara for my news. I understand that they are sometimes bias, but they are still the best we have around here".

On the question of credibility, majority of the participant believed that sahara reporters is not immune to biases. They however maintained that most stories published were written by ordinary citizens while saharareporters.com merely provided platform for publication. The result also revealed that some doubts expressed by the audience have a way of building in other audience members the fear of believing the story. Invariably, this affects source credibility. Finally, it was found that most feedbacks have ethnic, religious and political connotations.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, the following conclusions were reached.

i.   The feedback platform of saharareporters.com is effective in terms of providing equal opportunity for all its audience members to express their views on any news items.

ii.   It is also concluded that the audience of saharareporters.com to a large extent send in feedbacks on published stories.

iii.   It is equally concluded here that some of the feedbacks that question the credibility of some stories published on the site discouraged other audience members from believing the stories.

iv.   Finally, it is concluded that the audience members respond along ethnic, religious and political lines.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion reached, the researchers recommends the following:

First of all, there is an urgent need for the managers of saharareporters to rethink their concept of citizen journalism. While we appreciate the fact that every citizen has the right to report an event or an issue in this era of digital technologies, efforts should be stepped up to confirm some of these reports before they are uploaded. This is because misinformation is as deadly as the absence of the press.

To all Nigerian, we can do better than react to issues strictly from religious, ethnic and political angles. Issues should be discussed constructively and devoid of sentiments. This, we believe, is the right thing to do.

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