



REUTERS
INSTITUTE for the
STUDY of
JOURNALISM

Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper
University of Oxford

**The Rise of Citizen Journalism in Nigeria – A Case
Study of Sahara Reporters**

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Michaelmas/Hilary Terms 2010/11

Sponsor: Thomson Reuters Foundation

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to provide a pioneering academic study of the birth of citizen journalism in Nigeria, through the examination of the country's foremost citizen journalism enterprise, SaharaReporters.com. This investigation explores and analyses the social context for the emergence of citizen journalism in Nigeria and the technological platform for its operations. What has been the impact of this genre of journalism on both the traditional media and more importantly, the process of participatory democracy and governance in Nigeria? This study seeks empirical data to examine the immense followership and support this phenomenon enjoys among Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora using Sahara Reporters as a case study. In the same vein, this study will examine the motivation behind the idea of SaharaReporters.com, its editorial plurality and sustainability. To what extent have SR and other forms of User Generated Content stimulated and dominated political and social discourse in Nigeria and how have they set the decision makers on edge? This paper argues that the emergence of Sahara Reporters was fueled by the interactive and investigative vacuum found in the traditional media in Nigeria. Its style of journalism has invigorated, informed and empowered the Nigerian citizenry. It has spurred them into a new era of citizenship awareness, greater political participation and a greater demand for accountability and transparency from those that govern them. The concluding section takes a look at how citizen journalism has come to challenge the hegemonic powers of the traditional media forcing the latter to make adjustments. It suggests that in spite of its inherent weaknesses, citizen journalism in all its various forms can be fused with the traditional media to create a synergy that will be of democratic value to a democratizing country like Nigeria. Therein lies the future of journalism in Nigeria.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In connection with my Fellowship with the Reuters for the Study of Journalism, Oxford University and particularly this research paper, I owe many people thanks.

I would like to thank David Levy and James Painter who were in charge of the programme and provided support, guidance and most importantly, an academically stimulating environment during my Fellowship at Oxford.

My profound gratitude goes to John Lloyd, my academic supervisor, whose steady hands and deep intellect assisted me greatly in my work. His assistance and insights were invaluable in keeping my paper on track.

In addition, I wish to thank Thomson Reuters for funding my Fellowship and the Reuters Institute staff for very wonderful support and care throughout my program.

Finally, a shout goes out to all my fellow Fellows for their camaraderie and professional solidarity.

DIAGRAMS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND CHARTS

1. Nigeria: Internet Usage and Penetration
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CHAPTER 1 GAME-CHANGER.

“A powerful global conversation has begun through the internet, People are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed”.¹

1.1. ‘ARRESTED’ BY THE INTERNET

Barely two months after Nigeria’s return to civil democracy in 1999, its democratic journey suffered a mishap. Alhaji Salisu Buhari, the newly elected speaker of the House of Representatives and by law the fourth citizen of the country, became the first casualty when he fell from his exalted position on allegations of certificate forgery and perjury. His fall was aided by internet technology, then a new tool for journalists and Nigerians.² The News magazine, a leading Nigerian weekly, used the internet to conduct investigations into the speaker’s claims that he had been awarded a University degree from Toronto, Canada, his business dealings, his age which he had lied about and the dates of other schools he said he had attended. Applying a combination of traditional investigative journalistic tools with searches on the internet and email communication, the magazine was able to publish a factual account that exposed Salisu Buhari as a liar.

In the July 1999 edition captioned “The Face of a Liar”, the paper produced all the documents and facts that showed the Speaker had lied about his age and qualifications on his electoral form. After repeated denials, the magazine story nailed the Speaker’s coffin. In tears and on national television, the Speaker admitted his lie and resigned.³ Desperate attempts by his aides and other powerful politicians to stop the story in the printed edition of the magazine also failed, thanks again to the internet. Aides kept vigil at the various airports and the vendor stands to seize and buy up all the copies of the magazine. Their aim was to ensure that Nigerians did not get to read about the lies of the Speaker. As soon as it knew their game plan, the magazine published the entire content of the edition that contained the story on the

¹ Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls and David Weinberger- in Dan Gillmor’s –We The Media: *Grassroots Journalism by the People, For the People*. O’ Reilly Media. 2004’ p14

² BBC website, July 22nd 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/401123.stm>

³ Sunday Dare, Harvard Neiman Reports, “Dictatorship and Democracy Require Different Kind of Courage”- <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/100386/Dictatorship-and-Democracy-Require-Different-Kinds-of-Courage.aspx>

internet. The magazine also shared the story with the AllAfrica.com website⁴ with which it had a content sharing arrangement. Eventually, it was not just Nigerians that read the story, but the whole world.

For the media, it was a huge triumph, a victory only made possible through the use of the new media tools offered by the internet. This was investigative journalism by the traditional media at its best, aided by the emergence of new media tools; email communication, search engines, and the wealth of information available on the information super highway. The sheer power of the new media tools offered by the internet was brought home to journalists like me.

The immediacy of the internet and its centrality to the work of the media was thus established in Nigeria. Also, the potential it held as a tool for social change empowering the individual became quite obvious to millions of Nigerians. According to Martha Mccaughey and Michael D. Ayers, “the internet is immediate, even more immediate than a daily newspaper. It can be more interactive than television. Not since the Institutionalization of the US Postal Service have we seen a communication development in the society that can give power to individuals like this”.⁵

1.2. Research Questions

This study will attempt to provide answers or insights into the following: how has the internet Web 2.0 technology affected the practice of journalism in Nigeria; more specifically, to what extent has the brand of citizen journalism practiced by Sahara reporters online impacted the system in terms of engendering civic engagement in the discourse for good governance and government accountability? How has Sahara Reporters, through its kind of journalism practice, fought and exposed corruption and brought pressure to bear on those in power? To what extent have Nigerians embraced citizen journalism in the forms of social media and online news muckraking sites and in what ways has the traditional media adjusted to/or embraced citizen journalism in all its forms?

The study will start by taking a cursory look at the Nigerian media landscape by providing a brief history of the emergence of newspapers in Nigeria, and the various transformations the newspapers have undergone during the challenges of colonialism, nation building and military intervention. The role of the media during the epochal struggle against military dictatorship and their role since the return to civil democracy will be examined. This will be with a view to arriving at a judgment of how far the mainstream media can and do hold power to account, the impact the media have made on political developments and citizen rights and where the media now stand. All of these will be done within a description of the Nigerian political context because journalism practice cannot exist outside the wider culture in which it is practiced.

⁴ All Africa.Com, Nigeria-The Buharigate Special. <http://allafrica.com/stories/199908090170.html> and The News Magazine, Cover Story, 'Face of A Liar@', July 1999 edition

⁵ Martha Mccaughey and Michael D. Ayers, “Cyberactivism-Online Activism in Theory and Practice”. Routledge 2003. p 4

A contextualization of citizen journalism will be carried out within the global and Nigerian context, and in that process we will locate the triggers for its emergence on the Nigerian media landscape. In tracing the advent of citizen journalism, a pre-Sahara reporters' sketch of the media landscape will be laid out. It will zoom in on the guerrilla journalism era and how a segment of the media held power accountable in a people or public oriented journalism. How far did the pre-Sahara websites and blogs such as Nigeria Village Square, Nigeriaworld.com see themselves as filling an accountability gap left by the mainstream media soon after the return to democratic rule? The chapter will provide insights into how all of these eventually crystallized into citizen journalism in Nigeria as we now know it. Equally, the different forms of citizen journalism now classified as UGC (such as Mobile Phones, Face book, Blogs, YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter, et al) will be examined within the Nigerian context. This chapter will seek to establish the arguments that first, citizen journalism is alive and thriving in the Nigerian media landscape and that the wider implications of citizen journalism for the political system in Nigeria are just beginning to emerge.

Next, a case study of Sahara reporters (SR) will be carried out to seek answers to several fundamental questions such as what is SR, who is behind SR, what was the motivation behind its establishment, what is the SR agenda, how is it funded and what is the business model, what conditions gave birth to its emergence, its journey so far and why do Nigerians reckon with SR? The idea is to provide a detailed account of its history, editorial philosophy, and particularly its effect on "good governance". To what extent and in what ways has SR through User Generated Content stimulated and dominated political and social discourse in Nigeria? The result of a questionnaire distributed to 120 Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora will be analyzed in order to reveal certain truths or misconceptions about Sahara Reporters and the extent of its use among the User Generated Content community in Nigeria. How successfully has SR exposed corruption in government and to what extent has it succeeded in putting those in power under increasing public scrutiny? What has been the impact of citizen journalism in Nigeria using SR as a prism and to what extent has it given birth to a new form of citizen-driven advocacy journalism capable of making government more accountable?

A battle line seems to have been drawn between the traditional media and citizen journalism. This study intends to examine the truth by looking at the practice of traditional journalism and the justification for its claim to have a hegemonic position. It will examine how the legacy media consider the rise of citizen journalism as a direct challenge to this hegemonic power and the various arguments for and against Citizen Journalism. The central focus will be a submission on how far the latter (CJ) has changed the former - and how far and in what ways have mainstream media adopted some of the approaches of citizen journalism. This will be examined through a brief content analysis of the websites of eight leading newspaper websites in Nigeria towards generating a typology of UGC in the media.

In conclusion, this research will look at the prospects for partnership between the traditional media and citizen journalism bearing in mind the weaknesses and strengths of both. It will aim to find common ground, solid enough to catapult the media into a more interactive and dynamic age of democratic empowerment.

Chapter 2: THE MEDIA IN NIGERIA

2.1. THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

“A nation conceived in faith and unity is born today...” These effusive words of patriotism were penned fifty years ago by Babatunde Jose, veteran Nigerian journalist and editor of the government-owned Daily Times newspaper on the morning of Nigeria’s political independence from Britain, October 1st 1960. Today they ring hollow in the ears of millions of Nigerians.⁶ Though the faith remains, it is continuously wavering due to years of leadership failure and stunted development. The unity has been weakened by years of unequal development and a faulty implementation of the spirit of federalism enshrined in the Nigerian constitution.⁷ Five decades after gaining political independence from Britain, the question of Nigeria’s unity is still being debated and for the second time in her history, the country is very much polarized along ethnic and religious lines thereby giving credence to what one of the founding fathers, Chief Obafemi Awolowo said when he described Nigeria as a ‘mere geographical expression’.⁸

Yet, Nigeria is a country of great potential and promise. With a population of barely 42 million at Independence in 1960, Nigeria now has an estimated population of about 151 million people.⁹ Nigeria is the most populous African nation and offers one of the biggest markets for the industrialized world. Nigeria is also blessed with abundant oil resources and is today the 7th largest producer of oil in the world averaging 2.28 million barrels per day, with a proven reserve of 36.2 billion barrels as of 2007.¹⁰

The country is an electoral democracy operating a democratic political system patterned after the American Presidential system. It has 36 states that constitute the Nigerian federation and over 700 local government areas spread across these states. Nigeria thus operates a 3-tier level of government, the Federal, State, and Local. Nigeria’s democratic development unfortunately bears the outlines of authoritarianism in which the government at the center controls enormous resources and exercises near absolute authority leaving the states weak and nearly subservient. However, it is to its credit that the country has remained one single political entity and in fact survived a brutal civil war between 1967 and 1970.

Nigeria was ruled by the military for close to 30 years. In 1998, after the sudden death of General Sani Abacha, General Abdulsami Abubakar announced a one year political transition

⁶ Donu Kogbara, “Still Standing But Standing Still”, in BBC Focus on Africa magazine, Oct-Dec edition. 2010 p10)

⁷ Arthur A. Nwankwo in his book “Nigeria: The Challenge of Biafra” “It is true that the basic problems that caused the Nigerian crises remained unresolved.... here seems to be no consideration for the health of the Federation in the pursuit of individual or group interests -- And from the smuggling racket to the huge payoffs in bribery and corruption.

⁸ Obafemi Awolowo, “The Path To Nigerian Freedom”, 1947 and in “ The Path to Economic Freedom in Developing Countries; A lecture delivered at the University of Lagos on 15 March 1968 .Annual lectures - University of Lagos.

⁹ Op.cit., p 10.

¹⁰ Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_reserves_in_Nigeria

and decided to return the military to the barracks. After years of military dictatorship and a relentless anti-military media and civil society, the military had no choice. General Abubakar organized national elections in 1999 in which Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired general and former military leader emerged as the new President under the platform of the People's Democratic Party. From 1999 to 2011 Nigeria enjoyed 12 years of civil rule, although flaws and the very pertinent issues that threaten to disrupt her unity still remain unresolved. Most scholars agree that Nigeria's problems flow largely from incompetent leadership which has brought upon it endemic corruption, reckless financial management of the revenue earned from the oil rich Niger Delta, and ethnic and religious tensions.¹¹ The media in Nigeria have had to operate under an unstable political dispensation, quasi-democratic and a dictatorial military environment for nearly three decades.

2.2. NIGERIA: MEDIA OVERVIEW

Nigeria possesses one of Africa's most vibrant and still thriving media on the continent.¹² In almost five decades, the Nigerian media has blossomed and survived several attempts at curbing it.¹³ With over 100 newspapers and magazines in circulation and presently over 40 television stations with about a dozen of them privately owned and a proliferation of about 100 AM and FM (mostly private) radio stations,¹⁴ the media are not doing badly. Radio remains king.

In 1994 the deregulation of the broadcast sector led to the emergence of private television and radio stations which was dynamic in altering the media landscape.¹⁵ The free rein of these private media organs was somewhat curtailed in 2004, when Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, the government regulator, banned the live relay of foreign news and programs on domestic channels. This was seen as a subtle kind of censor by a government that was politically insecure.

However, it is in the newspapers (print media) that the backbone of the Nigerian media can be located. This is clearly justified by the history of the media industry. The combined circulation of the newspapers in Nigeria has been on a steady decline, hovering around half a million in a country of nearly 140 million. The reasons for the decline include the economic downturn, the high cost of newsprint, and a marginalized middle class and in recent times the advent of the internet and the multiplicity of online platforms to obtain news and information for free.

¹¹ Usman, Abdullateef Ph.D. "Nigerian Socio-Economic and Political Direction Issues and Prospect for National Growth and Development". Department of Economics, University of Ilorin Ilorin, Nigeria, October 6, 2009

¹² Park R. Preface to Nigerian Press Under the Military: Persecution, Resilience and Political Crisis 1983-1993, in Adeyemi A, A discussion Paper Presented at the Joan Shorenstein Center, JF Kennedy School of Government, and Harvard University. May 1995

¹³ Kakuna Kerina, Introduction 'Outliving Abacha: Six Nigerian Journalists Prison Notes'. CPJ Special Report, 1998 <http://www.cpj.org/attacks98/1998/Africa/NigeriaSR.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.pressreference.com/Ma-No/Nigeria.html>

¹⁵ Olutokun, Ayo, "Governance and the Media: Nigeria and East African Perspective" paper read at the Governance Seminar, held at Novotel, Arusha Tanzania, May 12-16, 1996

The use of social media in Nigeria in the past 4-5 years remains unprecedented, aided largely by internet technology, the privatization of telecommunication services and indeed mobile telephony, often referred to as the GSM (Global System for Mobile communications) revolution.¹⁶ The use of mobile phones for Short Message Service, SMS, and mobile internet has spread rapidly among Nigerians. Nigeria now has over 38 million mobile phone users.¹⁷ Millions of Nigerians in the Diaspora are heavy users of the new media social network tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube where they express their opinions and comments about political and social developments in Nigeria. Major newspapers in Nigeria have also set up online editions with a comment link after every story or opinion piece. By June 2009, 11 million Nigerians were online, according to the internet world statistics.¹⁸

There is considerable media freedom particularly since the departure of the military in 1999. Freedom House in its 2010 report describes the media landscape thus, "Freedom of speech and expression is constitutionally guaranteed, and Nigeria has a lively independent media sector. However, State Security Service (SSS) agents arrest journalists, confiscate newspapers, and harass vendors, notably when journalists are covering corruption or separatist and communal violence. Local authorities frequently condemn those who criticize them, and as cases of violence against journalists often go unsolved, suspicion surrounds the motives and perpetrators."¹⁹ Nigeria is also ranked 54th in the Freedom House and *Reporters Without Borders'* lists when it comes to freedom of the press globally.²⁰

Access to information is one of the current issues around freedom of the Press in Nigeria today. In May 2011 President Jonathan Goodluck signed into law the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill. Government in Nigeria is still largely a cult, a privileged club where power is hoarded and mis-used and access to information is difficult. The new law, it is believed, will ease this difficulty, though the country's weak legal and institutional framework is still a threat to journalism.

The media in Nigeria developed and crystallized along ethnic lines with underlining religious cum ethnic undertones. In the South-West, the Daily Times, The Guardian, Tribune, and Vanguard soon took a commanding lead. In the North, New Nigerian and Triumph dominated. These operational locations correspond with the ethnic cleavages present in Nigeria, as we will discuss later. However, the media was surprisingly still able to perform its watchdog role and never totally jettisoned its nationalist ethos and professionalism at critical periods. This has made many observers, such as media scholar Ayo Olutokun, describe it as a keen public-oriented institution.

¹⁶ Hope Eghagha, "The GSM Revolution" Published article on the net on ICT in Nigeria. February, 2002.

¹⁷ NCC (Nigeria Communications Commission) website.

¹⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1064557.stm

¹⁹ Country Profile, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism website. Oxford University, London. 2010

²⁰ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7890>

2.3. THE MEDIA UNDER MILITARY RULE

It is perhaps under military rule that the performance of the media in nation building can be best examined, with respect to how it raised the consciousness of the people, held accountable members of the ruling class and how it set or failed to set the agenda for a more cohesive society. Nigerian journalists see themselves not just as chroniclers of events but as stakeholders in the Nigerian project. The experience of the media was forged in the furnace of political activism during the fight for independence and during the struggle against military dictatorship. Thus the work of the media is informed largely by political experience and the perception of their role as agents of change and the conscience of the nation.

The slant, the perspective and the nature of coverage of developments offered by the media is reflective of the ethnic and religious fault lines that characterize the Nigerian state. This has called into question the effectiveness of the press as a neutral arbiter. As one report describes it, "Although the press was intended to be a "watchdog" for the country, similar to its role in free countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States, it has had difficulty fulfilling that role due to the demands of the various competing special interest groups. The large number of different voices created something of a marketplace of ideas ..." ²¹

The stratification of the Nigerian media into the southwest, northern and government media is instructive in understanding the positions taken by its different segments. To talk of 'the northern media' may generate a serious debate from media experts, but statistically it exists. One must however, put it in the context that the media in northern Nigeria hardly exists in an institutional sense of the word. What one calls the 'northern media' is mostly government-owned, which places a large burden on them. Things are different in the South-West where several private independent newspapers and magazines have taken root and have professionals minding them. Many in the north were opposed to the ethos of dictatorship but had little avenue to express it. By playing to the typology of the north/south media there is a risk of diminishing the struggle of the 1980s and '90s as a regional one. The struggle, then, was not regional but national. The same is the case today. Dapo Olorunyomi, one of Nigeria's leading investigative journalists, argues that the media in Nigeria lived up to its social responsibility role within the context of the political circumstances of the country by serving as a disinterested arbiter. ²²

The present forms of citizen journalism which are steeped in advocacy and investigative ethos borrow largely from the journalism practiced during the periods discussed earlier. The traditional media in Nigeria has on its heels an army of citizens in the fight to ensure good governance.

²¹ <http://www.pressreference.com/Ma-No/Nigeria.html>

²² Author Interview with Dapo Olorunyomi, Former Deputy Editor in Chief of The News Magazine and Chief of Staff, Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crime Commission, EFCC.

CHAPTER 3: CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA

3.1. A NEW MASS MEDIA ECOLOGY

The concept of mass communication as practised in traditional journalism is one in which thousands of newspaper copies roll off the press daily or weekly onto the newsstands, and where the newsroom is a large area fitted with desks, type writers, computers, and dozens of reporters with copy moving from one desk to another. Here the journalist is a trained professional, setting the news agenda with the editor acting as gatekeeper. This norm is now under siege from unexpected members of the society - the citizens. Thanks to the advancement in information technology, the media landscape is being altered dramatically and the exclusivity of the traditional media is being gradually eroded by the cyber sphere.²³

However, the making of the news is no longer exclusive to journalists and a legion of newsmakers and public relations people.²⁴ In the last decade, traditional journalism has been in serious competition for relevance. Legacy media continues to struggle to secure its turf as the “authoritative” voice and the manager and processor of news in the face of citizen journalism. The audience, aided by internet technology which has made the online communicative experience possible, is no longer a passive receiver of news, but also an active creator of content, altering the face of journalism from being a lecture to a conversation.²⁵

The restructuring of the architecture of information flow as we have it today is due largely to what Davis Buzz Merritt calls the *fragmentation of the internet*.²⁶ At the core of the paradigm shift are interactive publishing platforms which have given rise to a flurry of virtual spaces where information is created and shared.²⁷ In the early 1990s, journalism “*by the people and for the people*” began to flourish as new networking technologies became readily available²⁸ after the birth of the internet and Web 2.0²⁹. The cyberspace, the realm within which the online communicative experience takes place, has broken all known information barriers. The cyber

²³ Fackson Banda, “Citizen Journalism & Democracy in Africa”-An Exploratory Study. Highway Africa. 2008.p26

²⁴ Dan Gillmor, We the Media -Grassroots Journalism by the People, For the People. O’Reilly Media. 2004 Pg xiii

²⁵ Ibid.pp xiii-5

²⁶ David “Buzz” Merritt, “What Citizen Journalism Can Learn From Public Journalism”, in Public Journalism 2.0-The Promise and Reality of a Citizen- Engaged Press”- 2010 Routledge. p 27

²⁷ Jack Rosenberry and Burton St. John III-‘Public Journalism Values in an Age of Media Fragmentation” pg 10 in book ‘ Public Journalism 2.0-The Promise and Reality of a Citizen- Engaged Press”- 2010 Routledge

²⁸ Shaun Sutton, ‘The “MY” In OHMYNEWS: A Uses and Gratifications Investigations into the Motivations of Citizen Journalists in South Korea”. University of Leeds, UK. 2006 p 4.

²⁹ Sean Tunney & Garrett Monaghan, “Web Journalism: A New form of Citizenship” define Web 2.0 as the interactivity now available through developments such as blogs, Wikis and Podcast. Sussex Academic Press, 2010. p 63

sphere now 'affords unbounded, non-geographic, non-ethnic, non-nationalist access to citizens'.³⁰

Indeed, the concept of citizens acting as agents of information and contributing to the public information sphere is not entirely new³¹. What is new are the internet technologies now in use in the 21st century. Historically, there were many different examples of citizen engagement in public discourse and information dissemination.

We now live in a world of 'ubiquitous media tools' as described by Dan Gillmor.³² This is a world that confers on any citizen (with new media tool kit) the ability to transmit, share or create content almost in real time. A citizen at the location of an important event instantly gets the opportunity to capture the event and feed the content into the various social media outlets in cyber space. This is an act of citizen journalism in its simplest form. We see almost every day on the internet diverse acts of journalism done by ordinary citizens who share information and videos amongst themselves. These citizens have become an inevitable part of the media or journalistic ecosystem. The audiences have become creators and producers of content, a direct challenge to the erstwhile hegemony of the mass media. The new tools are affordable, simple and ubiquitous.

3.2. DEFINING CITIZEN JOURNALISM

What then is citizen journalism? Defined broadly, it is the kind of journalism in which the users or audience create content online rather than wait to be fed by the traditional media outlets. According to Serena Carpenter, a citizen journalist can be described as an individual who intends to publish information meant to benefit a community.³³

Citizen journalism has further been described as the individual "playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information." In their report *We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information*, Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis write further that "the intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires."³⁴ According to Joyce Nip, citizen journalism, sometimes called online citizen journalism, can also be defined as a process in which people were entirely responsible for gathering content, along with envisioning, producing and publishing the news product.³⁵ Roles

³⁰ Op. cit 2008.p 26

³¹ The 21st century Samizdat-style publications written and printed by anonymous citizens passionate about the defense of human rights in former Soviet Union.

³² Dan Gillmor, "Media active"- Citizen Journalism Defines the Future. USA p 3

³³ Serena Carpenter, "News Quality Differences in Online Newspaper and Citizen Journalism Sites. in Public Journalism 2.0-The Promise and Reality of a Citizen- Engaged Press"- 2010 Routledge. p69

³⁴ Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis in 'We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information'- The Media Center, American Press Institute, 2003 Page 9

³⁵ Joyce Y.M. Nip, "Routinization of Charisma-The Institutionalization of Public Journalism Online' in Public Journalism 2.0-The Promise and Reality of a Citizen- Engaged Press"- 2010 Routledge p 135

hitherto played exclusively by the traditional media are now performed by citizen journalism through the virtual community. Citizen journalism embraces all the social media platforms such as Face Book, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace and the Blogosphere. All the content generated from these social media platforms alongside comments from the audience and message board postings, pictures and video uploads constitute what is now known as the User Generated Content (UGC), which is a feature closely associated with the citizen journalism concept.

Fackson Banda's ground breaking exploratory study on 'Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa' defines citizen journalism as "a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community".³⁶ Fackson identifies two types of citizen journalism - institutional and non-institutional. The non-institutional forms place the individual at the core of the practice, one that lends itself to the social networking platforms where private citizens generate content and share among a network of friends and online. On the other hand, institutional citizen journalism has a defined organizational structure and some minimal constraint.³⁷ A good example is the opening up of most traditional media websites allowing traditional journalists to interact via comments and feedback using citizen journalism platforms. The BBC and The Guardian of London have fully embraced in different ways the institutional form of citizen journalism and its practice is widespread in the traditional media to different degrees.

Citizen journalists can be accidental journalists, advocacy journalists and grassroots journalists.³⁸ Ross and Cormier 2010 provided further insight into these different forms of citizen journalism. Advocacy journalism according to them is "one that adopts a viewpoint; journalism with an intentional and transparent bias although it must be distinguished from propagandist reporting", while accidental journalists are people caught unexpectedly in the middle of an event and who then make use of the social networking websites to broadcast their material.³⁹ However, to a large extent what we see today is a widespread citizen journalism practice that combines the features of accidental, advocacy, participatory and grassroots journalism. In Nigeria, we have such sites as Sahara Reporters which proudly announces its advocacy bent, but also absorbs all these other inputs. The same can be said of the first global online citizen journalism site in South Korea, OhmyNews.com.⁴⁰

As far as we can infer, there is no one single definition of citizen journalism - it is varied, but with very distinguishable characteristics. Though the debate over classification continues, there is an uncontested central agreement: the direct involvement, ability, opportunity and right of

³⁶ Op.cit. p26

³⁷ Ibid. p29

³⁸ The US based National Association of Citizen Journalists, NACJ, makes a distinction between accidental journalists, advocacy citizen journalists and citizen journalists. According to eh NACJ, just because someone uses a cell phone camera to photograph an incident and then uploads it to Flickr or Facebook, does not make that person a citizen journalist.

³⁹ Ross & Cormier 2010pgs 58-60,

⁴⁰ OhmyNews.com is a South Korean online newspaper with more than 37,000 contributors and it is regarded as the first and most successful model of citizen journalism. Founded in February 2000 by journalist Oh Yeon-Ho

the individual to produce content and disseminate it. But it is to Dan Gillmor regarded widely as the father of Citizen journalism, that we must turn to for answers on the nature of citizen journalism, its essential characteristics and the potential and future of this new genre.

The emergent ecology of citizen journalism is linked to crisis reporting. During political crises like those in Kenya and Iran, natural disasters like the tsunami and earthquake in Haiti, terrorists attacks such as the September 11 attacks on America and the July 2005 London attacks, we saw citizen journalism or “accidental journalism” as many would regard it at work. Ordinary citizens at the wrong place at the right time have risen to the challenge and have committed “acts” of journalism by using new communication “toolkit”⁴¹ to capture footage of these important developments as they unfolded adding depth, timeliness and comprehensiveness. These random acts have enriched our world of information and journalism and in the same breath re-defined the relationship between the traditional media and the audience. Dan Gillmor captured this epoch when he said:

*“Something else, something profound was happening this time around: news was being produced by the regular people, who had something to say and show, and not solely by the ‘official’ news organizations that had traditionally decided how the first draft of history would look. This time, the first draft of history was being written in part by the former audience”.*⁴²

According to Gillmor, “the collision of journalism and technology is having major consequences on journalists, newsmakers and the audience”.⁴³ From Iran to Nairobi, from the USA to Cairo and from Lagos to London through Japan to the Americas, citizens have become empowered to communicate and set the news agenda. Consequently, the great possibilities for participatory and more deliberative processes of democracy this development holds have led to increased academic interest in examining the tools and processes that have opened this new vista in citizenship participation.

3.3. BLOGHOSPHERE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

From the age of emails and emailing lists, to the era of discussion forums we are witnessing the exponential growth in the use of the internet through social media networks. This medley of sites or platforms constitutes the Blogosphere and has become very popular. Collectively, they offer a platform where a plurality of views co-exists and where a healthy simultaneous clash of

⁴¹ Ibid. pxii

⁴² Ibid. p xx

⁴³ Ibid. p237

ideas takes place. Increasingly, citizens are taking over the blogosphere by writing, commenting and reporting about different issues from politics, society, human rights, disasters, family, attacks and other community-related issues. Today, we have hundreds of such websites devoted to citizen-created contents on virtually all continents.

Millions from Africa and the developed world have adopted Facebook, YouTube and lately Twitter as social platforms of choice. Facebook is in the clear lead in Africa with almost 20 million users. (See graph on Facebook Use by African Countries). Blogging is perceived to have brought about a disruptive change in main stream media.⁴⁴ Alfred Hermida, a former BBC journalist, acknowledges the extensive use of blogging by journalists in the traditional media and says blogging can bring about both accountability and a conversation between producers and citizens, especially in the case of the BBC.⁴⁵

Dan Gillmor and Bowman and Willis⁴⁶ all agree blogging has a democratizing component that cannot be ignored by keeping the mainstream media on its toes, blogging allows them to do better journalism. William Dutton, Executive Director of the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), believes blogs are perfect tools for consultations on specific issues by political leaders and for the media he says it is a repository of information they can tap into.⁴⁷

3.4. RISE OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA

The wave of a democratized media world has caught on in Nigeria. Millions of Nigerians have signed up for social networking sites and numerous audience-driven online citizen journalism sites and discussion forums. A lot of excitement now surrounds the perceived empowering potential of citizen journalism. As in most parts of the world, the promise of participatory media is being delivered faster than envisaged since the global democratization spirit took hold. It is this same new media technology that has given international broadcasters like the CNN, BBC, VOA and German Radio the platform to reach a global audience.

The birth of information and Communication Technologies, ICTs, has engendered a new era of new media tools signaling unbounded possibilities for citizen journalism.⁴⁸ Through the instrumentality of the internet, emerging sites that aggregate views, information, news, comments and diverse opinions have opened a new frontier of possibilities in the way news is produced, distributed and consumed. More importantly, it has brightened the hope for a participatory and interactive process.

Prior to the advent of the internet and its full appropriation by the media and by ordinary Nigerians, the traditional or mainstream media held sway. Newspapers, magazines, periodicals,

⁴⁴ Paul Bradshaw, in his survey of 200 journalist bloggers in 30 countries.

⁴⁵ Sean Tunney & Garrett Monaghan, -'Web Journalism: A New Form of Citizenship', Sussex Academic Press. 2010.p21

⁴⁶ Op.cit Dan Gillmor pp 1-15

⁴⁷ William Dutton, Director, Oxford Internet Institute, interview with author.

⁴⁸ Op. cit., p9

radio and television dominated the media landscape as the major source of news. Nigeria's 100-plus newspapers and magazines were the strong link in news and information dissemination, though only about ten of the newspapers such as Punch, This Day, Nigerian Tribune, New Nigeria, Champion, Vanguard and Guardian dominated. Later entrants like The Nation, Daily Trust, The Sun and 234Next have all been impressive.

During the pre-internet period of the 80's and the advent of social media in the mid-2000s, the traditional media in Nigeria had only a small window for audience interactivity or contribution. This was restricted to letters to the editors, submission of opinion pieces, and right of reply and in most cases paid advertisements by members of the audience who felt strongly about an issue. One of the major triggers of citizen journalism and user generated content was the near absence of audience participation, interactivity and the seemingly undemocratic nature of the Nigerian traditional media. Journalists at this point were acting like secular priests and delivered lectures and sermons in addition to being unwilling to share their space.⁴⁹

However, the emergence of the internet and its early inroad into Nigeria in the early 90s began a silent revolution in the media and particularly the relationship between the audience and the professional journalists working in the traditional media. The earliest way the traditional media employed the new internet technology was through the use of email for electronic communications and later to surf the World Wide Web for information. This was largely made possible by local internet service providers (technology companies) such as Linkserve and Hyperia which also aided the increase in technology based content in news gathering and distribution. The penetration at this time (1991-1994) was very limited to a few major newspapers and magazines. And it took almost ten years for traditional media in Nigeria to fully assimilate the new media tools offered by internet technology.

The ability to employ new media tools is predicated on the level of internet access or internet penetration in any country. Presumably, a country with low internet penetration will be saddled with a weak media and near absence of audience participation in news and information gathering. Citizen journalism thus becomes greatly hampered. In Nigeria, from the lows of 0.1 per cent internet penetration in the late 90s to 2000, there has been an explosion in internet usage and penetration to a staggering 16.1 per cent in less than a decade according to the International Telecommunication Union, ITU. Interestingly, recent data released by the ITU puts Internet user figures at 43,982,200 as of June 2010, equivalent to a whopping 28.9% of the population. This means Nigeria has one of the highest rates of Internet penetration in Africa.⁵⁰ However, the level of that diffusion is not yet clear.

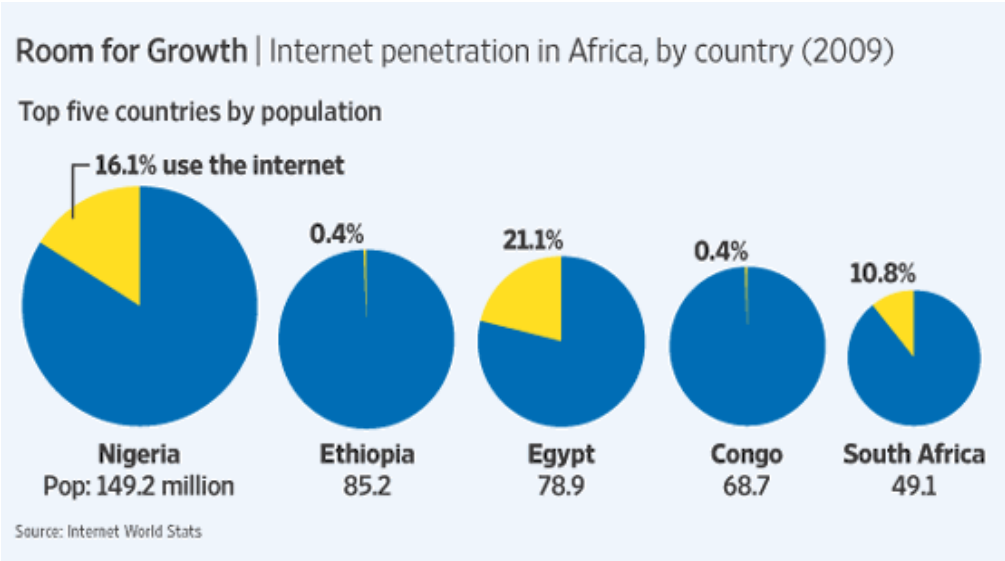
⁴⁹ Greensdale, R. "Move Over: Journalists Will have to Share their Space", Sidney Morning Herald, May 2008. Retrieved 20 June 2008 from Nexis, UK data base.

⁵⁰ Website –International Telecommunications Union, ITU

YEAR	USERS	POPULATION	% of PENTRATION	SOURCE
2000	200,000	142,895,600	0.1 %	ITU
2006	5,000,000	159,404,137	3.1%	ITU
2009	23,982,200	149,229,090	16.1%	ITU
2010	43,982,200	149,229.090	28.9	ITU

Table 1-Nigeria-Internet Usage and Penetration. Source: ITU

Similarly, the chart below shows at a glance the comparison with other countries in Africa. For instance, Egypt with 21.1 per cent internet penetration in 2009 against Nigeria’s 16.1 percent was overtaken by Nigeria in 2010. South Africa, Congo and Ethiopia also number as top countries with appreciable internet penetration.



Source - <http://www.onlineafrica.net/statistics/internet-penetration/>

3.5. MOBILE REVOLUTION AND ONLINE NEWS SOURCES

One of the enablers of internet penetration particularly in Nigeria has been internet enabled cell phones. The internet has become a regular feature of mobile communication in Nigeria thanks to its affordability. Due to the poor quality of fixed landlines, millions of Africans have taken to the use of the cell phone which has outstripped fixed landline use. As a new media

technology, the cell phone is a veritable mass communication tool in Nigeria and Africa. Many have argued that there is the likelihood of “Mobile technology becoming the seventh mass medium-the first six being the print, sound recording, cinema, radio, television and the internet”.⁵¹ Mobile phones represent around 90 % of all telephones in Africa. And Africa’s mobile market is growing at around 50-60% every year.⁵²

In Africa in 2010 at least one of every two people uses the phone to send a text message. In Sub-Saharan Africa in 2006, 15% had cell phones. By 2010, it had risen to 45%.⁵³ In Nigeria, local market women, tomato and fish sellers are enjoying a new kind of economic empowerment because through cell phone communication they can be in touch with various markets, negotiate prices and determine where is the best place for them to go and sell their products. This is impact at the level of the ordinary citizen. However, at the level of the media, the rise in the ownership and use of the mobile phone has gradually created a ready-made audience base for the journalistic outputs of citizen journalism on the one hand, while on the other hand, cell phone-wielding audiences have become volunteer citizen journalists providing information, news and videos - the life-blood of citizen journalism. As we shall see later, Sahara Reporters online, a leading citizen journalism website has about 450 Nigerians who send messages through the blackberry messenger to it and about 5,000 Nigerians who send SMS messages, pictures and videos to it frequently. Thus far, we have seen that the advent of internet technology, its adaptation and subsequent increase in penetration into the media and larger Nigerian society alongside the emergence of mobile telephony and SMS messaging have served as catalysts for citizen journalism, as they are identifiable triggers for active citizen participation in journalist acts.

In the years that the media struggled to embrace the internet a number of significant things happened as precursors of citizen journalism. First was the realization that there was no stopping the new convergence taking place due to new technology. Nigeria was not completely left out. Media organizations and citizens, who were mostly middle class professionals, began experimenting with new media. This research found out that in 2009 there were about 120 newsgathering and distribution websites based on Nigeria content and largely controlled by Nigerian citizens at home and in the Diaspora. But there were a number of pre-Sahara Reporters websites and blogs that relied heavily on citizen contributions. Such Online news sites and discussion forums were *www.nigeria.com*, *www.USAfricaonline.com*, *www.nigeriacentral.com*, *odili.net* (also known as *Nigeriaworld.com*), *www.naijapolitics.com*, *www.nigerianvillage square.com*, and *nairaland.com* among several others.

⁵¹ Op.cit., p16

⁵² Paul Budde Communication Pty Ltd. 2009

⁵³ BBC 4 monitored Program, “ ME AND MY MOBILE”, Nov. 27, 2010

While mainstream media use new media largely to place on the internet the online version of their print edition, the emergent citizen journalism sites use the new tools for different purposes. They see themselves more as social crusaders rather than filling an accountability gap. They were largely platforms for a plurality of opinions and a portal for accessing Nigerian news and information. In a way, their introduction was more empowering for millions of Nigerians in the Diaspora who needed to have a say in the way the affairs of their country was being run. They were sounding boards for Nigerians and discussion forums on all kinds of topics from female genital mutilation to elections and the struggle for power or areas of professional opportunities. The global reach of these sites gave Nigerians access to Nigerian news, and this began to have an effect on the people in power. Because of the viral nature of these sites spreading bad news quickly, they began to take note.

Odili.net leads the pack with its establishment in 2002. The site basically re-publishes news from newspapers and magazines and lacks original content. It highlights major stories, interviews and opinion articles from the Nigerian newspapers. This was an early outline of citizen journalism. Alexa.com, the web information company which ranks traffic of online sites in different countries, in its December 2010 traffic report ranked Odili.net as number 623 with 45.5 % of its traffic coming from Nigeria. Alexa places Odili.net's content firmly in the "Chats and Forums" category.⁵⁴

Then in 2003 came the Nigerian Village Square (NVS), believed to be slightly more elitist. NVS is heavy on opinion pieces and analysis. It is wholly a user generated site. The site proudly proclaims itself as the 'Market Place of Ideas' with an open invitation to the audience - 'Write for us'. While it receives and publishes a lot of original submissions by the audience, NVS also selects from time to time a few very topical opinion write ups written by reputable Nigerian columnists across the traditional media for publication. In the Alexa traffic ranking, Nigerian Village Square is number 446 in terms of its popularity in Nigeria.

The biggest surprise however among early Nigerian citizen journalism sites is Nairaland.com, a Nigerian forum established in 2004 and named after the Nigerian currency (the naira) by a young 22-year old unemployed graduate in Lagos, called Seun Osewa. It is a user generated forum and super commercial. Today, it is arguably Nigeria's number one online community with nearly 60 million followers, 36,000 registered membership, daily page views of over 10,000 and over half a million indexed pages. Alexa.com describes its best as "a big broad discussion forum for Nigerians. Covers dozens of topics including romance, technology, careers, business and entertainment and currently on Page Rank 4 on the search engine giant-Google; type anything related to Nigeria on Google -Search and Nairaland will come up on the first page of the search result".⁵⁵ Nairaland.com ranks number 8 in terms of traffic ranking in Nigeria. It is clearly ahead of all the mainstream newspapers in the country today.

In terms of visitors per country, Nairaland attracts 75% of its traffic from Nigeria, according to the December 2010 Alexa rating. Nairaland has a distinct user profile when compared with

⁵⁴ <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/odili.net#>

⁵⁵ Ibid

other similar sites which have mostly college educated, working class and dominantly male audience. For Nairaland, its users are mostly African, low-income men under the age of 35 and educated. Sahara Reporters online was established in 2006 and modeled fully as a citizen journalism website. The founders of Sahara Reporters from the outset were upfront about the fact that they were not journalists or pretending to be one, but they are citizen journalists committed to “advocacy journalism”. Perhaps the best profile for Sahara Reporters is that by Alexa.com:

“Sahara Reporters is an outstanding, groundbreaking website that encourages citizen journalists to report ongoing corruption and government malfeasance in Africa. Using photos, text, and video dynamically, the site informs and prompts concerned African citizens and other human rights activists globally to act, denouncing officially-sanctioned corruption...”⁵⁶

A measure of Sahara Reporter’s increasing visibility and impact is demonstrated in the change in its ranking from being the number 57 site in Nigeria in terms of traffic in October 2010, to number 37 by December of the same year. The site attracts 77.1% of its traffic from Nigeria and 6.2% from the USA while interestingly it breaks from the pattern by attracting 5.5% traffic from South Korea and 4.1% from the UK. As we will see later, Sahara Reporters is Nigeria’s answer to South Korea’s foremost citizen journalism website, OhmyNews.com

Similar online citizen journalist’s websites have also cropped up such as NaijaCommunity, Naijapals.com, (social and entertainment community) HuhuOnline, Pointblanknews, (one stop source of news) Newsbreaksnow.com, (power of the printed word), NigerianMusings, among others. The traditional media remained largely unperturbed by this emerging form of citizen engagement because they still enjoyed their hegemonic role. This, however, was about to change.

Leading Citizen Journalism Sites in Nigeria

⁵⁶ <http://www.alex.com/siteinfo/saharareporters.com#> DEC. 2010

Web Site	Traffic ranking in Nigeria	% of traffic from Nigeria	Daily Global Reach	Daily Page Views	Age of Visitors	Education	Gender Domination
Odili.net Since 2002	623	45.5	0.00500	3.4	35-44	College	Male
Nigeria Village Square Since 2003	446	58.5	0.00340	2.2	35-44	College and Above	Male
Nairaland.com Since 2004	8	75.0	0.07100	5.2	25-35	College	Male
Sahara Reporters.com Since 2006	37	77.1	0.01000	4.0	35-65	College and Above	Male
Naijapals.com Huhuonline.com	59 86	70.0 93.0	0.01100 0.00460	7.8 4.8	25-45 35-44	College/low Income College	Male Male

SOURCE: Alexa.Com- Trafficking Ranking and Web data. November 2010

The most popular bloggers in the citizen journalism sphere outside Nigeria with sizeable followership are Okey Ndibe, Pius Adesanmi, Sonala Olumhense and Rudolf Okonkwo among others. The traditional media are yet to produce a blogger with influence and huge followership. What is more common is that established newspaper columnists enjoy appreciable numbers of followers. Reuben Abati of Guardian, Joseph Adeyeye and Tunde Fagbenle of Punch Newspapers, Adebayo Williams, Sam Omatseye, Abimbola Olakunle, Olatunji Dare, Yomi Odunuga all of The Nation Newspapers, alongside Simon Kolawole, Dele Momodu, and Yusuf Olaniyonu of This day newspapers, Steve Nwosu, Funke Egbemode and Femi Adeshina of The Sun, Mahmud Jega and Adamu Adamu of Daily Trust are a few of the well read newspaper columnists.

Undoubtedly, the rise in the use of social media and UGC is quickly shifting the relations of communicative power in Nigeria and Africa at large. From the Nigerian president who has a Facebook page, and presidential aspirants to most governors and lawmakers with their own pages, social media are gradually penetrating the Nigerian political culture. National recognition came for social media when on June 28 2010, Nigeria's President, Jonathan Goodluck, launched his Facebook fan page to reach out to the youth and Nigerians with a view to getting feedback on electoral reform and other national issues. During the April 2011 Presidential elections, Nigerian politicians employed social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter and indeed SMS messaging to advance their campaigns and deliver their manifestos in order to boost their followership. To capture the online youth voting demographic, President Jonathan Goodluck and former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar employed these tools the most. As one newspaper wrote, "Use of Facebook and twitter and SMS messages introduced a new twist to political

campaigns in the country, which hitherto had been characterized by radio and television jingles, billboards, handbills, public rallies and advertisements in newspapers and magazines”.⁵⁷

3.6. THE POLITICAL TRIGGER FOR CITIZEN JOURNALISM

The central trigger for the emergence of citizen journalism in Nigeria was political. A vacuum of progressive and investigative content and civic engagement was left by the traditional media shortly after the departure of the military from power. This era in which journalists defied anti-media laws and proscription and continued to publish underground and disguise became known as ‘guerrilla journalism’.⁵⁸ The media set the agenda for the return to democratic rule, respect for human rights, rule of law and demand for accountability. These characteristics later became the very ones upon which present day citizen journalism now thrives. With the return of democratic rule in 1999 the media went to sleep. Believing its work was done, the media and civil society became passive and almost besotted with power.

The absence of bold investigative journalism made the audience query the effectiveness of the media. The neutrality and objectivity of the traditional media was being called into question by an audience increasingly isolated from them. Adebayo Williams captures it thus, ‘Just as it is said that war is too serious a business to be left to soldiers and politics is too sacred a profession to be left to politicians, journalism is too serious a business to be left to professional journalists. Nature abhors a vacuum and as history has demonstrated, every profession, which devalues itself, which desecrates its sacred obligations, invites external interventions. The generalissimo defied and demystified the general; the political practitioner disrobed the politician; the “journalissimo” has demystified journalism turning citizens’ arrest into the preeminent form of order-enforcement’.⁵⁹

The audience went off to explore emerging citizen journalism websites, and particularly the discussion forums to vent and hold different levels of conversation. One excited member of the audience puts it thus, “After five years of sticking to it and advocating the possibility of a new world where the voices of the voiceless, so called underdogs who could not afford the cost of putting their opinions on the pages of the regular media, now have a new found love, opportunities in the social media platforms- premised on the need to communicate, share opinion in an environment that encourages cordiality and relationship building”.⁶⁰

The citizen journalism websites are close on the heels of national newspapers largely because of their bold advocacy type of journalism, but more importantly, because of their interactive

⁵⁷ Tribune Newspapers, Nigeria Election Wars go online; Jonathan, Atiku, IBB slug it out on Facebook, Twitter (Tribune) in *Aspirants, Elections by Sammy ajufo*

⁵⁸ Op.cit., pp 42-59

⁵⁹ Adebayo Williams ‘The Blogger as Nemesis’ At the launching of www.saharareporters.com at the offices of New York Foundation, Empire State Building, New York City on the Saturday, February 18, 2006

⁶⁰ Yinka Olaito. “Social media and Nigeria’s market/brands”. May 17, 2010

nature and the opportunity for thousands to get published almost in real time. The table below from Alexa.com shows how most of the traditional newspapers have been overtaken by citizen journalism online news and discussion forums. Apart from Punch and Vanguard newspapers that are in the top 15, others are way back. The success of these two newspapers as we will see later is due largely to their opening up to hosting user generated content on their websites.

Table: Alexa.com-Traffic Ranking of Nigerian National Newspapers.

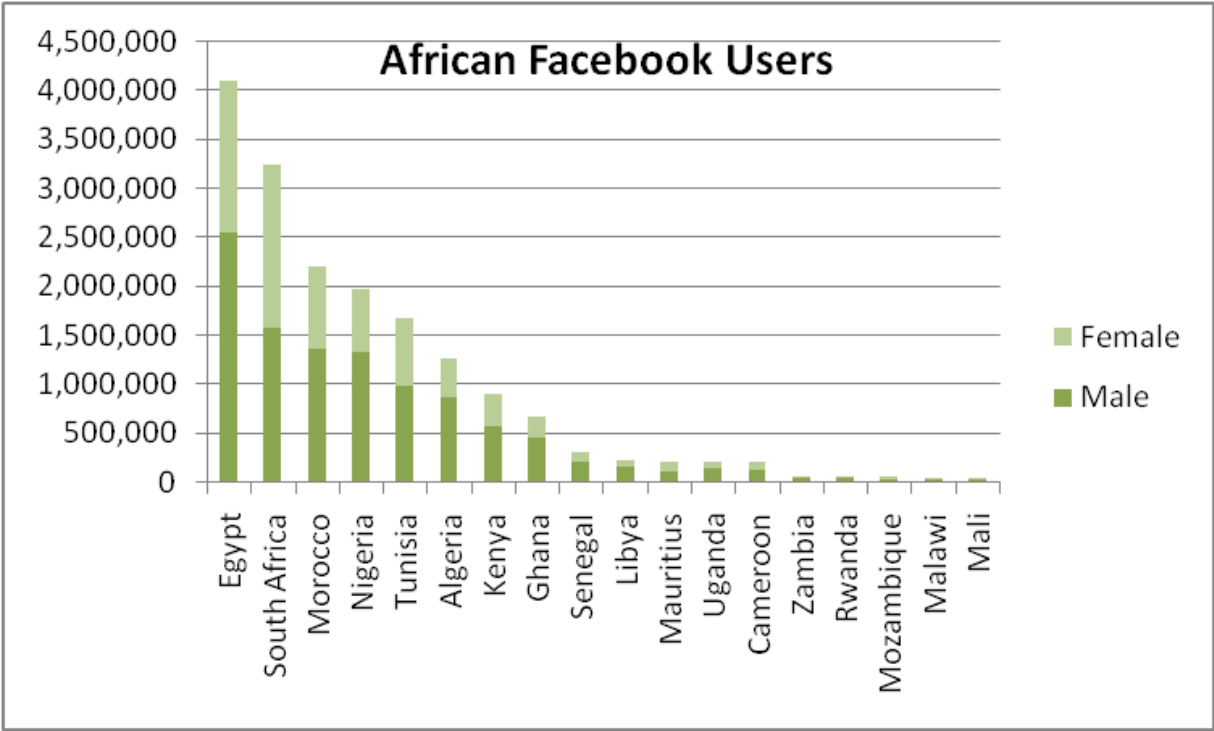
NEWSPAPER	TRAFFIC RANK IN NIGERIA	% OF TRAFFIC FROM NIGERIA
<i>Guardian</i>	44	82.4
<i>The Nation</i>	49	84.9
<i>The Punch</i>	* 12*	88.9
<i>This Day</i>	58	78.4
<i>Vanguard</i>	* 13*	84.3
<i>Daily Trust</i>	62	93.0
<i>Sun</i>	19	83.3
<i>234Next</i>	27	82.7

Over time, the more mainstream media tries to put down Citizen Journalism, the more it ends up beaming the light on its faults and weaknesses: this range from a small window of citizen or reader participation in its content generation to the low level of interactivity and the perception that it is often closer to power than the people. The lack of a democratized space for readership participation remains one of the factors that continue to drive Nigerian audience towards to citizen journalism.

Available data on the number of Nigerians on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube is not very accurate, but Web Trends in February 2010 put Facebook Penetration rate in Nigeria at 9.4%⁶¹, though this has since swung upwards. In the last five years, the dynamics of social media appreciation is changing with an increased level of awareness especially among the youth and the middle-aged. There is however still the challenge of overcoming the low level of infrastructure and the cost of access to the Internet which is still not within the reach of the average Nigerian. Egypt leads Africa in Facebook User numbers.⁶² By January 2011, the Facebook figure for Nigeria went close to 2 million. Internet penetration rates have also changed significantly with Nigeria sprinting ahead with 43 million users and 28.9 penetration rate ahead of Egypt.

⁶¹ <http://webtrendsng.com/blog/facebook-users-in-nigeria-crosses-1-million-as-african-countries-see-growth/>

⁶² Ibid



Below: Facebook Users in Africa (Gender Indicator). Source: CP-AFRICA.COM

CHAPTER FOUR

SAHARA REPORTERS ONLINE

“It was like the buzz of the semi-automatic gun when the trigger is pulled.

I was not surprised that Nigerians accepted our mode of journalism quickly.

My understanding as an activist is that they saw this as an alternative media holding those in power to account”.

- ***Omoyele Sowore, founder, SaharaReporters.com***

4.1. BEGINNINGS

Nigeria’s media landscape has not been the same since the first major citizen journalism website emerged some five years ago, or to be precise on January 25, 2006. It marked the advent of a new estate of the realm. SaharaReporters.com was established by an activist, Omoyele Sowore, a 39-year old Nigerian blogger who proudly proclaims himself a citizen journalist. 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”⁶³ 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’.⁶⁴

Perhaps nothing better describes or captures the very essence of the work of Sahara Reporters than the preamble found on Alexa.com, a web information company. “Sahara Reporters is an outstanding, groundbreaking website that encourages citizen journalists to report ongoing corruption and government malfeasance in Africa. Using photos, text, and video dynamically, the site informs and prompts concerned African citizens and other human rights activists globally to act, denouncing officially-sanctioned corruption, the material impoverishment of its citizenry, defilement of the environment, and the callous disregard of the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution”.⁶⁵

⁶³ Website- www.saharareporters.com

⁶⁴ William H. Dutton, *The Fifth Estate Emerging through the Network of Networks*. Routledge. 2009 pp1-2

⁶⁵ *Alexa.com*, opening research preamble on the survey conducted on SaharaReporters.com

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. In the introduction, the new citizen website anchored its conviction on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “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”. It was a far-sighted move that would later inoculate it against several law suits and attempts to censor and proscribe it.

The website then moved quickly to place the ownership of the site in the hands of the ordinary citizen;

*“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”.*⁶⁶

From the start, the activist behind Sahara Reporters was upfront about his mission and the nature of journalism to which he hoped to dedicate his site. He bluntly stated that “We are unapologetically practitioners of advocacy journalism, because to us journalism is not an end in itself”. Apart from making Nigerians its primary audience, it sought to establish a continental platform: “We are here because we have something to give to our people; we are here because we want to give them the power of information, the power of truth. We believe with this power, the Nigerian and African people can begin to set a right in every sphere all that is wrong with our mother continent.”

Five years into operating as a citizen journalism website, Sahara Reporters issued a re-worded editorial policy in which it sought to re-state the rationale behind its operation and answer some of the questions and allegations thrown at it. Titled, “Sahara Reporters: Our Philosophy and Editorial Policy”, October 25, 2010, it declared that, “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 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

⁶⁶ Press Release Introducing Sahara Reporters, January 25, 2006. New York

everyone who wishes to contribute story tips, authentic information, or even rebuttals.” And with this, the site firmly locked in place the citizen orientation of its content and practice of journalism.

Describing itself further as a “Public Trust”, the online forum defines its target audience as Nigerians: “Sahara Reporters accepts story ideas from Nigerians and friends of Nigeria, particularly if they include documents that would facilitate our investigations. Sahara Reporters maintains the faith that ordinary citizens, reporting a country about which they truly care, can build that country by opening up all the dark corners where both criminals and detractors try to hide.”

On the whole, Sahara Reporters, as a citizen journalism website, makes no pretence about its philosophy of aggressively exposing corruption using ordinary citizens as foot soldiers and sources of information and content. Clearly from the onset, it set for itself a mandate to be the people’s parliament, providing a media platform, aided by new media technology (particularly Web 2.0 publishing tools), for all citizens. The opening statement of its editorial policy further re-enforces this. “The forum’s major aim is to empower all citizens of various African nations to actively demand and defend their democratic rights. Our journalistic mission is to beam a critical searchlight on the people and practices that undermine and subvert the democratic process”. With these declarations, the Sahara Reporters went full throttle and in the first few months significantly altered Nigeria’s media landscape by capturing a large segment of what was previously a captive audience of the traditional newspapers. Dapo Olorunyomi, veteran investigative journalist said that arguably, Sahara Reporters represents the first wave of the successful execution of citizen journalism in Nigeria. According to him; “the greatest benefit of this type of journalism is that it has created an expanded space for political participation. Political participation and communication is the life blood of a democracy and in this respect, Sahara Reporters has altered Nigeria’s media landscape”.⁶⁷ Sonala Olumhense described Sahara Reporters as the ‘face of citizen journalism’ and urged all literate Nigerians to “to visit if you really want to understand where Nigeria has been or what it is doing. It is, I suspect, the address that corrupt Nigerian politicians and their privileged criminal brethren detest the most on earth”.⁶⁸

And indeed, the extent to which Sahara Reporters has succeeded in holding power accountable, in exposing corruption, in empowering the ordinary citizen and in other self-assigned roles will be the subject of the research in this chapter.

⁶⁷ Author Interview with Dapo Olorunyomi, Enterprise Editor of Next Newspapers and one of Nigeria’s leading Investigative journalists. Abuja, January 7, 2011

⁶⁸ Sonala Olumhense, ‘Our SaharaReporters’ article published in Nigeria Village Square. August 10, 2008

Sahara Reporters alone shares the title of being the first truly online site to incorporate the full features of citizen journalism. Regarded in many circles as Nigeria’s citizen journalism website or better still, “the face of Citizen Journalism”⁶⁹ in Nigeria, Sahara Reporters has given journalism a new face and new meaning in Nigeria. Dapo Olorunyomi says that “It has helped to open up traditional media. The likes of Sahara Reporters have given the traditional media a new orientation in audience participation and interactivity”. Today, Sahara Reporters according to Alexa.com is credited with about 6 million page views drawing almost 80 per cent of its audience traffic from Nigeria. The site as also attained a traffic rank of 40 among Nigerian users in a recent Alexa 3-month survey.⁷⁰



The emergence of Sahara Reporters was triggered by a combination of factors from technology to the perceived failure of the mainstream media and the desire of the ordinary citizen to be involved in news making. However, it wouldn’t have been possible without Omoyele Sowore. An activist forged in the progressive campus activism that dominated Nigerian campuses in the ‘80s to late 90s under military rule and one with fervour for public speaking, Sowore never disembarked from the train car of change.

Significantly, Sahara Reporters has spawned imitators in the online community and this include *Nigerian Village Square*, *Nigeriaworld*, *PointblankNews*, *HuhuOnline*, *TheWheel-Nigeria.com*,

⁶⁹ Op.cit.,

⁷⁰ Alexa.Com, survey is done every three months and data often changes.

NewsDiaryonline, EconomicConfidential, Desert Herald, NigeriaLibertyForum, UK, Viewnaija among others. These websites to various degrees depend on user generated content, with none yet to attain full integration as a citizen journalism website like SaharaReporters.

The impetus to start something different came from Sowore's close association with the traditional media. A heavy consumer of news and other media, he happened upon blogging as a tool that democratized the ability to publish and empowered the individual in the process. That was the first turning point for him. In his words, "It fascinated me a lot that you can own your own website and write whatever you want to write. The idea then came that as a citizen who pays taxes, why can't I be a citizen journalist? If you can be a citizen police serving as a citizen informant for the police, why not a citizen journalist policing the country?"⁷¹

4.2 HOW IT RELIES ON CITIZEN JOURNALISM

He needed a platform to advance his idea to be part of a new kind of journalism in which citizens reported developments. Between 2004 and 2005, Sowore teamed up with a London-based Nigerian, Jonathan Elendu, who at the time had started a blog focussed on events in Nigeria called 'ElenduReports'. According to Sowore, "We started obtaining public records in the UK and the US of properties owned by Nigerian government officials. We took photos and put them online. That was how it started and it became an instant hit". This initial initiative was in line with Sowore's desire to focus on corruption, which later served as one of the major motivations behind setting up SaharaReporters.

After his stint with ElenduReports, Sowore's 'eureka moment' came when on a trip to Nigeria in December 2005, 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.⁷² The interview was timely and most revealing. Sowore was able to squeeze important and previously unknown information of national importance involving corrupt dealings out of the son of the President. Deep family and government secrets were revealed. At the beginning of the interview, Sowore's style of journalism was recognized by Gbenga Obasanjo himself. "Look, I read your reports. Six months ago you did a thorough job. You did your research very well and made your findings public in a way that nobody can contest".

Gbenga revealed to Sowore how men close to the President were stashing away public money in foreign banks, and he named the then Vice President, Atiku Abubakar, and El-Rufai, the former Federal Capital Territory Minister,

"Look at African Petroleum, AP and the privatization process that took place in Nigeria, - they just sold the entire country to themselves. Look at the Pentascope deal; they stole over one

⁷¹ Interview with founder of Sahara Reporters, November 2010. London/New York

⁷² Interview with Gbenga Obasanjo, conducted in late December 2005 by Omoyele Sowore, but published in January 2006

billion dollars from Nigeria without fixing a single telephone line...” He was referring to the privatization of major public enterprises by the Obasanjo presidency. At the family level, Gbenga Obasanjo confirmed Sowore’s earlier story that the expensive house the younger brother bought in New York was with state funds channeled to him by his mother, President Obasanjo’s wife.

But perhaps the most shocking part of the interview was the confirmation that the third term bid by Obasanjo to stay in power for 12 years enjoyed the tacit support of the Americans. “...the Americans are passing messages through me; forget about all those scripted statements. They want him to stay”. Nigerian citizens and legislators mobilized to ensure that the bid to stay on failed. Gbenga, who later claimed that he was tricked into the interview, said that the frank conversation was down to his desire to get even with his father for wrecking his marriage.⁷³

As was to be expected, the interview was an instant hit. Sowore lacked a powerful platform with audience reach, so he gave the interview to the wholly user generated and online forum, Nigeria Village Square, and The News magazine⁷⁴, one of Nigeria’s leading weeklies. The edition captioned, “The President’s Men” sold out. There was a huge buzz around the courage of the person who conducted the interview. Stunned by the impact of the interview, Sowore decided it was time to start his own news operation. “It was the greatest motivation for me to start my own thing”, he says. About a month after the interview with Gbenga, Sahara Reporters was born.

Working in a full time job in New York from where he started the online citizen journalism website, Sowore knew what he wanted to achieve from the outset: provide citizens with undiluted news and the opportunity to read and produce news themselves. For him, citizen journalism provided the best platform to realize this. He saw Citizen Journalism as a movement to take power away from the traditional managers and place it in the hands of ordinary citizens who themselves are newsmakers and sources for the traditional media. Citizen journalism as practiced by Sahara Reporters thus became known as what Sonala Olumhense once described as, ‘Journalism by the people, for the people’.⁷⁵

Like the very successful and popular Korean Citizen Journalism website, OhmyNews⁷⁶ founded in 2000, Sahara Reporters was the first website in Nigeria to fully embrace citizens as provider of news. While OhmyNews founder, Oh Yeon-Ho was a journalist formerly with *Mahl*⁷⁷ in Korea who used his insight into the media as a weapon to break off and make “Every Citizen a Reporter”, Sowore had to depend largely on his activist past. As already mentioned, through Sahara Reporters Sowore invites every citizen to “Report Yourself”.⁷⁸ They all had a similar

⁷³ Omoyele Sowore’s exclusive interview with Gbenga Obasanjo, Published January 9, 2006

⁷⁴ The News magazine, a Lagos Weekly publication

⁷⁵ Op.cit. (Author interview with Dapo Olorunyomi, Abuja 2011)

⁷⁶ The Economist, 2006;7, Mcintosh, 2006:5 identified OhmyNews as the world’s most popular and powerful example of citizen journalism.

⁷⁷ A Korean based monthly magazine

⁷⁸ Pay off line on the home page of Sahara Reporters-“Report Yourself”

objective to empower the citizens and turn journalism into a conversation which according to Dan Gillmor is the central goal of citizen journalism.⁷⁹

Sowore's timing was in sync with emerging Web 2.0 technology and the gradual internet penetration in Nigeria. Sonala Olumhense identified the internet as the catalyst for the rise of citizen journalism. "In recent times, the internet has permitted the arrival of citizen journalism as an important genre in this trade. One of the most important organizations in the Nigerian environment is Sahara Reporters." Sahara Reporters is getting information aggressively by way of social media through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Blogs text messaging, photos and emails.

A key milestone that bolstered Sahara Reporters' image internationally was the exclusive picture of the December 25, 2009 failed bomber, Nigerian born Umar Farouk Mutallab, which Sahara Reporters was the first to obtain. As the US and International media scrambled for more details of the failed terror attempt and searched for the picture of the alleged bomber, Sahara Reporters went to work and 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 alleged bomber, Mutallab. CNN immediately picked the picture and ran it repeatedly crediting Sahara Reporters. BBC followed and also credited Sahara Reporters. Several media houses used the same picture. It was a moment of legitimacy for Sahara Reporters but more than that, it was a moment of validation for citizen journalism.

Sahara Reporters owned the story. The website did not stop at just the picture scoop of the alleged bomber, Mutallab, but dug deep to provide exclusive detail and profile of Mutallab and his family which ran on December 26, 2009, a day after the arrest. The abridged version of the story ran like this:

"Sahara reporters has identified the family of Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab, the 23 year old would-be bomber of Northwest Airline flight 253, who was arrested yesterday in Detroit, Michigan. He is the son of the recently retired Chairman of First Bank of Nigeria, Dr. Umaru Abdul Mutallab. The Al-Qaida-linked Abdul Farouk Abdulmutallab is an engineering student at University College London. Sahara reporters' sources have revealed that prior to his sojourn in the UK, Farouk had studied at the prestigious British School of Lome, Togo, where he passed his International Bacchalaureate Diploma before moving to UCL.

The younger Muttallab lives in a £4 million pounds apartment in Central London, although he is only a student. The apartment, Flat 16, no 2 Mansfield Street in London, W1G95 NE is registered to a US company and has been raided by UK security agents today".⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Author Interview with Dan Gillmor. 'Citizen Journalism affords a great opportunity to broaden conversation emerging around the world through digital media'. November 2010

⁸⁰ Sahara Reporters, <http://www.saharareporters.com/news-page/northwest-airlines-bomber-son-prominent-nigerian-banker-dr-muttallabDec.26,2009>

This story alone attracted about 291 comments and the web site in three days had close to four million page views.

For several days after, the site continued to update the story about the alleged bomber with exclusive details from citizen journalists and its own investigations. "For us, we made international impact and also demonstrated the power of citizen journalism for Nigeria and the world", Sowore enthused.

Other stories carried by the site had a similar impact. The series of investigative reports it did in 2010 under the title of "Super Computer Scammer- Phillip Emeagwali", revealed the bogus claims of a Nigerian computer scientist based in the United States of America. The reports generated great interest alongside heated reactions and responses from its audience. For instance, the first major story on the issue published by Sahara Reporters on October 22, 2010, captioned "How Emeagwali Lied His way to Fame" instantly attracted 699 comments, one of the highest reactions ever to a story. In the story, the website stated that the claim by Mr. Emeagwali "... of being a father of the Internet, of having invented the Connection Machine, of possessing 41 patented inventions, of winning "the Nobel Prize of Computing" and of being a "doctor" and/or "professor" have been conclusively debunked with widely documented evidence".⁸¹ The site regards the Emeagwali series as one of those that drew the highest number of comments, reactions and opinion pieces, which reached nearly one thousand. The Emeagwali story was bylined by Sahara Reporters as "A citizen investigative Essay".

Another such story was the breaking news on the death of Nigeria's former President, Umar Yar'adua, who died after months of intensive care abroad. For months rumours flew around about his death and the state of his health. However, Sahara Reporters was one of the first media houses that broke the news of his death on Wednesday 5th of May 2010. Less than a few hours after the death of the President, Sowore received the breaking news while at a gas station somewhere in New Jersey. "All I did was to park my car and ask the attendant to pump in gas. I typed the story, uploaded it on our site and it went out to the whole world". It was from Sahara Reporters that most people learnt about the death. The site had also produced some groundbreaking stories on the health status of the President for over a year and was the first to identify and publish the medical name of the President's illness.

With no official reporters, Sahara Reporters has had to depend on thousands of reports from citizens across Nigeria who contribute content, materials, leads, documents, pictures and video. Sometimes, it engages people to follow up an important story or help to investigate a story in which case they are paid. 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 per cent accuracy as claimed by Sowore, the founder of the

⁸¹ SaharaReporters.com, story published on October 22, 2010, "How Emeagwali Lied His way to Fame". <http://www.saharareporters.com/report/how-philip-emeagwali-lied-his-way-fame>

site. Nigerians have embraced citizen journalism and to some extent Sahara Reporters is the first purveyor of this kind of journalism.

4.3. EDITORIAL STRUCTURE

What began with a mere \$21 monthly running cost for hosting the website has now become a \$7,000 monthly operation. From buying a small space from a server hosting company, Sahara Reporters now has three dedicated servers. When it began in 2006, only about two stories were put on the site per week. The site is now a 24/7 operation updated 2-3 times per day with a size of content and traffic never before imaginable. An average of 20 stories is uploaded per day, including one original story written, investigated and verified by Sahara Reporters, and several opinion and commentary pieces. Ordinary citizens supply commentaries all the time. The three servers provide the space and power needed for the site and the possibility of suffering a server attack like it did in 2006 is now remote.

Sahara Reporters states in its editorial policy a commitment to ensuring that most stories sourced through ordinary citizens, "... satisfy strict standards of verification in order to present authentic and evidence-based reports to our readers". This is what it has tried to achieve in the time it has existed and through its content generation and publishing. The content on Sahara Reporters comes under three distinct categories: 1) breaking news and investigations. These are reports original to Sahara Reporters: then 2) the section on opinions, commentary and blogs all categorized as commentary and finally 3) the Citizen Reports section which contains reports written by citizens who do not want their names revealed. There is an important adjunct which is the link to comments and reactions to all content in any of the three categories. There is also Sahara TV where video clips shot by citizen reporters are uploaded.

Using new media technology platform and tapping into the various forms of social media, Sahara Reporters is able daily to assemble and generate content for its audience. It does this in keeping to its promise to use every means available technologically and otherwise to bring news to the people and give them voice. And so far in five years of operation it has produced over four thousand news reports published over 6,000 commentaries and opinion pieces submitted by citizens based on Sowore's records. Sahara Reporters takes seriously its avowed subscription to fairness, factual journalism and balance. As a demonstration of its commitment to fairness and balance, the website publishes rejoinders to any commentary or opinion immediately and unedited. "We present all sides to the story. In commentary, beyond just two sides there is a jury". Indeed, the comments and reactions posted by visitors to the site remains one of the most dynamic, democratizing and empowering feature of Sahara Reporters. Almost within minutes of a commentary or opinion being published, a torrent of reactions and comments follow unedited from Nigerians.

These comments range from the lucid to the outrageous. Farooq Kperogi, a Nigerian journalist who has written extensively on citizen journalism and its co-option by mainstream media houses such as CNN, describes most of the comments as "primitive cacophony of rank

ignorance and bigotry that now pass for 'comments' ...".⁸² According to Farooq, these comments are at best egregious in nature and reflective of the disunity that plagues the country: "if the comments people make on popular Nigerian cyber forums is a genuine reflection of what we think about the fascinating ethnic and religious tapestry that is Nigeria, and then we have no business remaining as one country." Thus, this dynamic ongoing conversation often suffers a downside in quality, as venom is spewed out in some of the comments.

In terms of the nature of content, 70 per cent is news, 10 per cent opinions and analysis and 20 per cent blogs and user generated content. Sahara Reporters sometimes takes up to two months to investigate a story before publishing and if the facts of the investigation cannot be established, it will not publish the story. The site does not have an editorial team in the formal sense of the word since it still operates largely as a citizen journalism website. But it has a core of about ten people who fact check and edit materials. Contact is also made with some trusted journalists in the mainstream media who are on the ground to help verify information or dig deeper. Its network of highly placed sources has also served it well. And in five years, the site has only had to recall about three of the news stories it published. According to Sowore, he wants the model to be driven by citizens because as he argues, professional journalists are themselves citizens. Indeed for security reasons the few professional hands that help perform oversight functions on the website do not have their names disclosed.

However, Sowore is not alone in this enterprise. Kennedy Emetulu, who is based in Europe, is Sowore's partner. In London and Nigeria is intrepid Kayode Ogundamisi, an activist and citizen journalist. The likes of Pius Adeyemi, Okey Ndibe and Sonala Olumhense, all prolific bloggers and opinion writers, carry the torch for the website and sometimes provide editorial oversight. Other editorial hands work under cover.

So how has the site been able to sustain its operations when most of the citizen reporters who provide content are not paid and are motivated by their desire to contribute to the discourse, have their names in print or simply be part of the democratizing platform of the internet? The business model is self-sustaining and transparent. The site relies on three main sources of revenue. First, it draws heavily on citizens who provide free content and donations from verifiable sources using PayPal. Secondly, it relies on advertisement revenue from Google AdSense to which it has subscribed. There is also direct revenue from Nigeria which in the early years of its operation was non-existent. Advertisers from Nigeria avoided Sahara Reporters because of the fear that the government would come down hard on them. However, as the website gained a reputation for blunt reporting and attracted a huge audience of close to 50,000 visitors daily who are mostly college graduates and educated, these companies switched and began placing adverts. The site does not accept advertisements from the government. "We are finicky about the type of adverts we accept even from private organizations and we accept these placements on the condition that our editorial policy will not be compromised", explained Sowore. In the last two years, Sahara Reporters has received funding from the Ford Foundation to the tune of one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars (\$175,000) spread

⁸² Farooq Kperogi in "What Virtual Nigeria Says About Real Nigeria". USA Africa Dialogue Series. October 30,2010

over two years for its operations. This undoubtedly is a testimony to the impact the site is making in the crusade against corruption and the information empowerment it offers Nigerians. In Nigeria however, the operators of the site are on the security watch list. Every Governor, Cabinet Minister, key government official and close aides and advisers of the President reckon with Sahara Reporters and of times have made direct threats, trashed them in the media or sued them. For instance in November 2006, President Olusegun Obasanjo accused the site of malicious defamation of his character and served notice through a press release that he ‘will vehemently and vigorously pursue all civil legal remedies available to him’ against the site. Sahara reporters stood by its reports and nothing happened. Also, in 2008, the site was sued for \$25billion by Texas-based Dr. Paul Botwev Orhii after it questioned the speed of his political appointment and his complicity in the Pfizer vs. Nigeria government case was exposed. In 2006, the server of the website was attacked and in fact, a company by the name “Reardenilson and Associates” threatened legal action against the site on the grounds that Sahara Reporters was disseminating subversive information against the President of Nigeria.⁸³ Persons close to the government also sponsored media stories alleging that Sowore had five properties in America in an effort to show he was corrupt. These remain mere allegations and the case is still in court.

4.4. FIGHTING CORRUPTION

Since 2006 Sahara Reporters has published extensive stories on corruption in Nigeria. According to Rapsody, an avid follower of the site, “Sahara Reporters has undoubtedly come to represent the voice against corruption and they should keep it up, they are the conscience of the Nation”.⁸⁴ Sonala also argues that through its unrelenting chronicling of malfeasance over the years the website “has done more for the anti-corruption cause in Nigeria in the past two years than EFCC and other anti-corruption bodies bundled together”.

“I wanted to focus on corruption and the most serious dimension of corruption in Nigeria was offshore in nature. Most of the funds stolen from Nigeria were hidden in offshore accounts”, he says. The site has also brought under the microscope the heist of key government functionaries and the abuse of power by lawmakers, cabinet ministers and corrupt politicians in Nigeria.

One of such extensive corruption investigations done by the website is that of the former governor of Delta State, James Ibori, which for the sake of this study will be called, “the Ibori-gate corruption Investigation”. The site followed both the money and the man. For nearly five years, the site carried out comprehensive investigative reports to bring the corrupt governor to justice. The climax of the revelations came in the last seven months of 2010 in court proceedings. The highest court in the United Arab Emirate ruled that Ibori could be extradited to Britain for trial. The judgment came on December 14, 2010. This judgment meant Ibori had a case to answer in the United Kingdom ranging from charges of money laundering, credit card fraud to official theft.⁸⁵ James Ibori did not act alone. In London, just before the UK won the

⁸³ Sonala Olumhense, in “Popular Investigative Nigerian Website Sued for \$25 Billion” December 2008

⁸⁴ Comment in 234Next newspapers on a profile of the site

⁸⁵ Sahara Reporters. Ibori to face trial in UK, 14/12/2010 03:17:00 Former Delta State Gov Ibori

judgment to extradite him, his sister, Christine Ibie-Ibori, and his mistress, Udoamaka Okoronkwo (nee Onuigbo) were successfully prosecuted by British authorities on similar charges and were jailed and sent to prison in October in the UK. Ibori's wife, Theresa Nkoyo, in December 2010 was convicted on two counts related to money laundering and sentenced to five years in prison by a Southwark Crown court in London. Ibori's British lawyer Mr. Bhadrash Gohil, was also found guilty on all counts of money laundering. Nigerians at home and abroad exploded with joy when these judgments were handed down and flooded Sahara Reporters with reactions and comments.

One of the 125 comments on the final ruling ran thus: "Praise the Lord!!! I have been waiting to see the outcome of Ibori's extradition to UK. God is indeed not asleep; the wicked will surely not go unpunished. Blood of the poor, needy and oppressed are surely crying to God for vengeance. I pray and hope that Ibori will not only go to jail but will also return all that he has stolen from Deltans and Nigerians. This is surely a caution call to every corrupt Nigerian officials out there.....the day of judgment is near!!!"⁸⁶ Another reader simply posted, "This is great news". Bertwell Nyeduko, a Nigerian posted on November 23, 2010, "Our present office holders should please learn from Ibori that one day nemesis will catch up with them. If the crusade about corruption is not treated with kid gloves Nigeria would have been better for it". Ololade Adewuyi, a journalist with Tell magazine in Lagos wrote, "Nkoyo Ibori's sad demeanor as Judge Geoffrey Rivlin pronounced a five-year jail sentence on her at the Southwark Crown Court, last week, said it all. The former First Lady of Delta State of Nigeria had finally met her Waterloo. Far from the safety of the Niger Delta, where she and her husband, James held sway as lords of the manor that could not be touched by Nigerian laws because they had powerful political connections, Nkoyo was carted away to a London jail in handcuffs like a common felon".⁸⁷

The justice that was denied Nigerians in Nigerian courts by Nigerian judges was achieved in a foreign land and Nigerians rejoiced. Though the courts in the UK did their job, the media, and especially Sahara Reporters, played a key role in keeping it on the front burner and aggressively putting in the public space the lurid details of the theft of state funds. Indeed, the Ibori corruption story, trial and sentencing were the most comprehensive done by Sahara Reporters. It was a story which had the most updates and extensive investigations so far. It created so much impact in terms of citizenship awareness about corruption that pressure was brought to bear on the Nigerian government to declare James Ibori a wanted man. More importantly, it created the sort of result that was Sahara Reporters' cardinal objective, that is, for their reports to generate action, reactions and protests. According to Sowore, "The reporting we did on Ibori led Nigerians in London to start organizing around and against corruption. The Nigeria Liberty Forum (NLF) organized a lot of protests, mobilized people to court and engaged in protests

⁸⁶ Submitted by Ayekotito (not verified) on October 17, 2010 - 14:01.

⁸⁷ Tell Magazine, Lagos. Cover Story, December 2010. Ibori's Case Puts Judiciary on the Spot.

against the then Nigeria's Attorney General, Michael Aondoakaa on the Ibori corruption issue and how the Nigerian government was trying to shield him".

4.5. CASE STUDY OF JAMES IBORI

James Onanefe Ibori contested and won the election to become the governor of Delta State in 1999 soon after the return of civil democracy on the platform of the People's Democratic Party, PDP. Delta State, one of the oil-rich states in the country, was also one of the richest in terms of revenue and allocation from the central government. James Ibori governed the state for two terms of four years each. In 2007, his 8-year term expired. However, the controversy about his past and alleged large scale corruption of his government dogged him all the way.

The most damaging was the story about his past life of crime. While living in London he was twice convicted firstly together with his wife Nkoyo Theresa Ibori nee Nakanda in January 1991 for theft of home/building materials from a hardware store (Wickes) and on a later occasion in February 1992 for fraudulent use of a stolen American Express credit card. This information was contained in a detailed disclosure by the London Metropolitan Police. In an effort to cover up these revelations, James Ibori invented a new identity, changing his birthday but keeping the same name before he ran for office as governor: there was one James Onanefe Ibori born on 4th August 1958 (his original birthday) and the other James Onanefe Ibori born on 4th August 1962 (the fake date of birth). For years he battled allegations about his identity linked with his criminal past which also included his arrest and investigation by United States federal officials of lodgment of the sum of \$1 million in a US bank in 1994 and how he had to forfeit \$400,000 of the amount.

Sahara Reporters reported this comprehensively and exposed Ibori then as an errand boy and informant for Nigeria's dictator, General Sani Abacha. The website went further to expose other criminal acts of the ex-governor including one in Nigeria when he was convicted in 1995. Part of the website story read thus, "It was this same "identity" dish that the ex-Governor served that Nigeria's judicial system lapped up with relish and which resulted in him retaining his seat as Governor of Delta State in 2003 despite overwhelming evidence linking him to a 1995 case involving theft of building materials from the Usman Dam building project and a conviction for Criminal Breach of Trust and Negligent Conduct. As we know, the ex-Governor went on to famously sponsor the presidential and Delta State pogrom of April 2007 using the coffers of his state as the "petty cash" pot for his grand scheming".⁸⁸ On November 6, 2010, Sahara Reporters then published a detailed piece titled "NARRATIVE ON THE HISTORY AND COURT EVIDENCE AGAINST JAMES IBORI" by one Simon Ochuko. The narrative provided an insight into the criminal past of James Ibori right from his days in London and his return to Nigeria both as a private individual and later governor.

James Ibori, was facing accusations of stealing more than £196m of state funds channeling 'dirty money' to Britain. In 2007, a London court froze UK assets worth \$35m allegedly

⁸⁸ SaharaReporters- The 1995-Ibori-Ex-convit case re-visited-2010

belonging to Ibori.⁸⁹ He had already left the UK when his assets were seized. By this time, revelations about his past and corruption dominated the media, especially Sahara Reporters which stayed on the story. The website published details and pictures of James Ibori's stupendous wealth: a home worth £5 million in the Dorset countryside, several other homes in the UK, including an electronically gated home in Westover Hill, North London, and a guesthouse at 23 Abbey Road North in London; properties in Texas and South Africa; a £3 million trust fund with Mrs. Ibori as beneficiary; a Mercedes Benz as well as other expensive cars including Chrysler Voyager (Peoples Carrier 2009 model) and a customized Maybach car, Jaguar (2000). Also in an exclusive report in December 2010, Sahara Reporters revealed James Ibori's ownership of a private airline, Wings Aviation Limited managed by a man called Noggie Meggison.⁹⁰

The ex-governor was first arrested briefly in Nigeria in December 2007 shortly after he left office by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) under Nuhu Ribadu. The exposure of Ibori's corruption by Sahara Reporters played a vital role in pressuring the anti-corruption agency to act. "The website had put compelling evidence in the public that we could not ignore because they were true. So we arrested him", a senior EFCC officer said. The EFCC brought 170 corruption charges against Mr. Ibori in December 2007. Southwark Crown Court froze UK assets of £17m allegedly belonging to Mr Ibori after the EFCC passed a file of evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service. He was soon released because of his close relationship with the then President, Umar Yar'adua, who became a power broker. He also received protection from Michael Aondoakaa, former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice.

The website revealed how Ibori used state funds to manipulate and corrupt the Judges who sat on his case. In Nigeria, Ibori repeatedly escaped justice through legal maneuvering by his lawyers and controversial court rulings that gave him what seemed like a final legal respite or outright clearance from allegations of corruption or criminal past. Two years after charges were proffered, precisely December 2009, a court in Asaba, Delta State cleared him of 170 charges of corruption, saying there was no clear evidence to convict him. The judgment, delivered by Marcel Awokulehin, the trial judge, shocked many people on the bench and across the country.

Nuhu Ribadu, former head of the EFCC under whose watch a water tight case of corruption was built against Ibori described the judgment as 'a disaster' for the judiciary in Nigeria. "The judgment is laughable. Dismiss a 170-count charge of corruption against Ibori just like that? It is unfortunate."⁹¹ Professor Wole Soyinka, a noble laureate, responded thus, "Today, Nigerian judges can be bought for two a penny. We know cases where judges have been bought for half a million naira". He made this declaration in New York at an award ceremony by Nigerian lawyers in 2010. The Nigerian Judiciary came under the hammer.

The unexpected death of President Umar Yar'adua in May 2010 blew Ibori's cover. The Acting President, Jonathan Goodluck, ordered his arrest and trial. The EFCC on April 13, 2010 declared Ibori wanted in connection with the alleged diversion of the shares in Oceanic Bank to

⁸⁹ Heid Blake. Republic Report, New York. February 2010

⁹⁰ SaharaReporters. Series of Investigative Reports between 2006-2010 and London Court Documents

⁹¹ Author Interview with Nuhu Ribadu, former EFCC Chairman in Washington D.C. August 2010

guarantee a N44billion facility granted to a company called Ascot Offshore Nigeria Limited by Intercontinental Bank. He refused to hand himself in and a manhunt was launched. He escaped to Dubai, but on May 12, 2010 Ibori was arrested there. Metropolitan Police in the UK requested the courts in Dubai to send the ex-governor to the UK for trial and the Nigerian EFCC also wanted him extradited to face corruption charges. It came down to the wire and for the seven months from May to December 2010 that the court cases ran in Dubai and London, Sahara Reporters was out first with the breaking news of all the developments and detailed background of the whole corruption saga.

Sahara Reporters in one of its numerous reports detailed how Aondoakaa, Nigeria's Attorney General, frustrated the EFCC's bid to prosecute Ibori when he was arrested in late 2007 on the expiration of his term in office and the subsequent loss of immunity. In a bid to clear the former governor Aondoakaa also blocked the British judiciary from putting Ibori on trial when he wrote a letter to the Southwark Crown Court declaring that Ibori was not under any investigation in Nigeria.

Sahara Reporters revealed through leaked documents how the Nigerian government under late Umar Yar'adua refused to discuss a prisoner transfer agreement with Britain unless the Crown Prosecution Service dropped corruption charges against Ibori. The British government had proposed an agreement allowing the transfer of more than 400 prisoners back to Nigeria of the 1,000 Nigerian inmates in British jails. But talks over the agreement stalled after Britain refused to drop charges against Ibori. A diplomatic cable from the US embassy in London also released by WikiLeaks claims that Nigeria's attorney general attempted to blackmail British officials into abandoning the corruption case against Ibori.⁹²

The convictions of all the accomplices of James Ibori in British courts and the successful bid to extradite him to the UK to face trial was made possible largely by media investigative reports and the key role of the prosecutors and the courts. In the same way SaharaReporters exposed the weak link in the Nigerian traditional media, UK authorities exposed the inadequacy of the Nigerian judiciary. Tell magazine in its cover story enthused, "What took the Nigerian law courts forever to handle was done and dusted by the UK courts in a few weeks bringing aberration to the Nigerian court system". UK judge, Justice Christopher Hardy, before pronouncing judgment berated the Nigerian judiciary thus, "I want to make it absolutely clear that Nigeria's judiciary was usurped. Countries who are signatories to fighting corruption and money laundering must live to the full letter of their commitments."

Sahara Reporters covered in detail all the court cases in Nigeria, UK, and Dubai to the extent of producing court transcripts of what transpired. There were lurid and shocking details of public theft and greed previously unknown. In total Sahara Reporters produced about 104 news items and investigative reports on the Ibori corruption scandal between 2006 and 2010. This was a staggering number when compared to what the traditional media produced. The site also

⁹² Heidi Blake, www.africanoutlookonline.com. Feb. 2011. The cable sent to Washington in May 2009 states: "Nigerian Attorney General (AG) Michael Aondoakaa has directly told the UK the [Government of Nigeria] will not begin negotiations on the PTA unless the UK drops its case against former Delta State Governor James Ibori and his associates". Wikileaks

published court and official documents in support of the grand theft and looting alongside photographs of the properties, cars and aircraft purchased by Ibori with stolen state funds. There were also video clips of court appearances and the mocking of protesting Nigerians by Ibori's mistress.

Nigerians lapped it up but were also angry at the status quo. They wanted revenge and all former governors to be equally tried. A sampling of the other comments by Nigerians on the Ibori corruption coverage reveal the level of impact the site had in the fight against corruption in the anecdotal sense.

Here are some examples:⁹³

"I hope that what happened to the former governor of Delta state, James Ibori should happen to the entire clan politician in power. This would send a strong message to all those in power that one day they can be held accountable for what they have done". Dorothea.

"I thought Ibori is rich enough to buy the Judges off? So there's truly a limit to what money and influence can do? I hope other criminals are watching! Gosha.

"All Nigerian newspapers copied Sahara Reporters in this story, Punch was the most decent of all. They acknowledged SR. But 234next and Leadership newspaper just lifted paragraphs from SR and reprinted, they didn't acknowledge their source at all. Vanguard, Nigerian Tribune, Guardian, go and read all of them, they stole their stories from SR". Kenneth

Sowore had this to say about the impact the site's stories had in advancing the corruption case and tightening the noose around James Ibori: "Ibori admitted that if it was not for SaharaReporters that continued to expose him, he did not think that Nigerians would have rejected or questioned the judgment he got from the Nigerian court system. We were tenacious in providing information. Ibori tried to tackle me - bribes, threats and attacks, but we stayed true to our philosophy to expose corruption".

4.6. RESULTS OF SURVEY

In a survey conducted among 120 Nigerians from different professional backgrounds, sex, and age, we were able to reach a partial finding about the popularity and impact of Sahara Reporters. The survey also provided insight into the usage pattern of the internet by Nigerians and what they trust as their news source. The questionnaire had 12 questions to which every

⁹³ All postings reacting to the judgement by the Dubai court that Ibori has a case to answer in the UK were posted on SR between October 17 and 30, 2010.

respondent had to provide answers. Respondents were drawn from Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna and Kano, which are all major cities in Nigeria.

In all, 120 respondents were surveyed between December 2010 and January 2011. About 70 per cent of those who participated were journalists and the rest came from the professional ranks: teachers, lawyers, bankers and civil servants. In terms of gender demographics we had 90 males and 30 females, while the age range was between 29 and 56-years-old. From the tables below we can glean a lot of detail relating to how much Sahara Reporters is trusted and relied upon as a source of news when compared with other sources of news, and especially the traditional media in Nigeria. They also provide details of the level and nature of internet usage and the use of social media platforms.

From the survey, Sahara Reporters had mixed results. In table 1 below, only 33 respondents of the 120 surveyed trust the website, while 55 respondents do not. The site however scores high as a source of breaking news: 86 respondents cited it as a source for breaking news, while only 27 cited the mainstream media. Sahara Reporters’ edge here comes largely from the exclusiveness and immediacy of its news reports and investigative pieces. However, newspapers from the traditional media were cited as the respondents’ general source for news. A major component of the survey was an attempt to find out if Sahara Reporters has empowered its audience by giving them a voice in the way things are run. Interestingly, 58 respondents said that it has given them a voice, while 43 said they have not gained any democratic value from it.

Table 1: RATING OF SAHARA REPORTERS IN COMPARISON WITH MAINSTREAM MEDIA

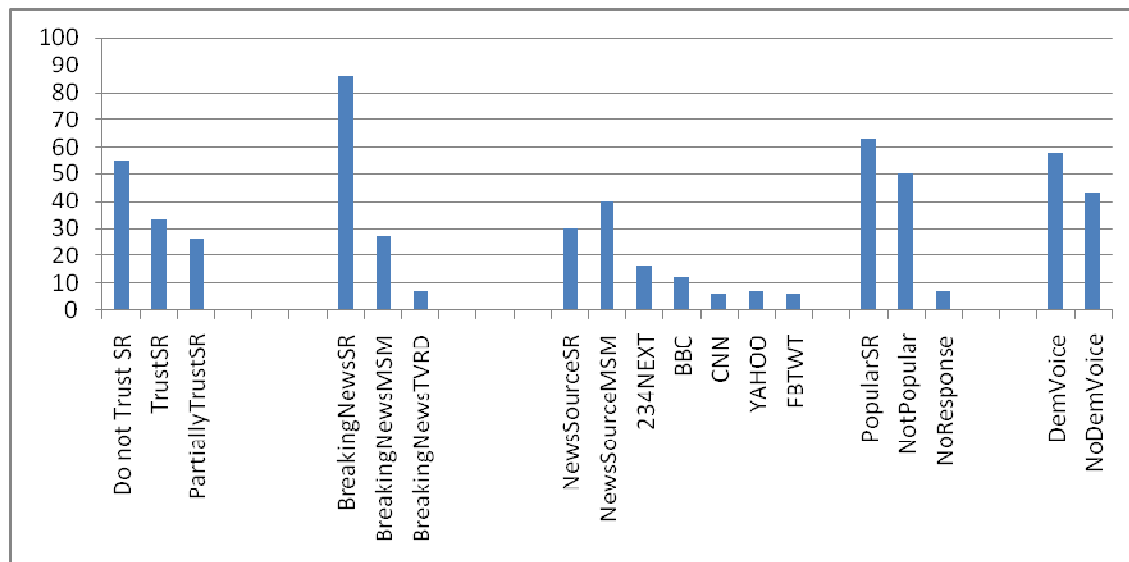
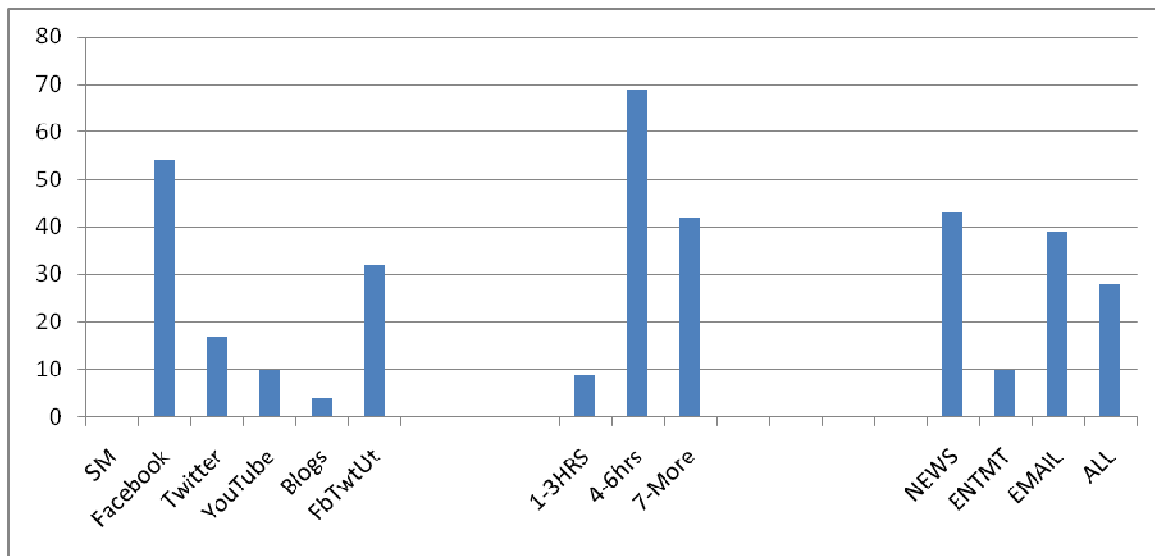


Table 2: USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET IN NIGERIA



In table 2, we get a further insight into the use of social media in Nigeria. Facebook scored the highest with 54 respondents, followed by Twitter 17, YouTube 10, Blogs 4 and about 32 recorded using a combination of the first three. The survey finding with regard to Facebook tallies with the country data that puts Facebook users in Nigeria at around 2 million, ahead of other social media or online platforms. Nigerians spend long hours on the internet, the survey also revealed.

We found throughout the survey that Sahara Reporters scores high on anecdotal evidence, with many people interviewed citing the site as the source of important news and loving its aggressive and uncompromising style. It is not unusual to find that once any big story breaks, Sahara Reporters is immediately mentioned as the source. It has earned a reputation of very often being first with the story or new angles to a developing story. Throughout the survey, we find that for some reason the site is yet to wrest a sizeable audience away from the mainstream media. It might do so if more citizen journalism sites emerge.

Sowore says he owes no one any apology for the kind of journalism he practices. “We are unapologetic practitioners of advocacy journalism. We advocate good governance. We

advocate lack of corruption. We advocate general improvement in the welfare of the Nigerian people".⁹⁴ He argued further that the agenda is clearly to force the hand of change through revelation about Nigeria's widespread corruption.

Indeed, according to Next newspapers, in a piece written by Musikilu Mojeed, Sowore and the work of the site gets validation to the extent of being compared with WikiLeaks. "Mr. Sowore's distinctions are legion. In the five years that he has run his site, he has become Nigeria's version of Julian Assange, the controversial Australian internet activist. His blog, SaharaReporters.com, is also as audacious as Assange's WikiLeaks, a secret-spilling organization that publishes sensitive and classified documents that would have been otherwise unavailable to the public. In fact, Philip Shenon, a former investigative reporter for The New York Times, and author of "The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation", in a recent article for the Daily Beast, referred to Sahara Reporters as Africa's WikiLeaks. But while Assange scouts the entire world for sensitive and confidential documents, Sowore has made Nigeria his forte".⁹⁵

4.7 CONCLUSIONS

Today, Sahara Reporters is in the forefront of online citizen journalism in Nigeria which has become the new frontier for activists to get the word out about government corruption to the consternation of politicians and their accomplices.⁹⁶ Indeed, Sowore's greatest motivation for the website was the fight against corruption. "I wanted to focus on corruption and the most serious dimension of corruption in Nigeria was offshore in nature. Most of the funds stolen from Nigeria were hidden in offshore accounts. An offshore corruption led to creating an offshore media". Sahara Reporters has lawyers, doctors, bankers, civil servants and ordinary Nigerians volunteering news. This development shocked Sowore, who claimed that the moment people realized that Sahara Reporters was a powerful tool to fight back and that it was independent, they signed on and made it a grassroots exercise. "We are capable of calling out people who are culpable for corruption and expose them. We have moved from a mere publishing platform to some kind of a movement", Sowore says.

One of the corrupt senior government officials the site exposed was Mike Aondoakaa, Nigeria's former Attorney General. Sahara Reporters chronicled his corrupt activities and deals until he was booted out of office when President Yar'adua died. The US State Department also cancelled his visa to the USA and barred his family. Indeed, recent Wikileaks revelations detailed how he cut a deal with Pfizer to settle a court case involving illegal tests carried out in Kano State.

Thus, Sahara Reporters became a news outlet of choice as it gained a reputation of exposing corruption. The site took off from where the progressive arm of the traditional media stopped. Sowore suggests that the mainstream media slept at the switch with the investigative flavor

⁹⁴ Author Interview. London November 2010.

⁹⁵ Musikilu Mojeed, "SaharaReporters a Thorn in the Flesh of Corruption" November 2010. New York. http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Home/5644304-146/sahara_reportersa_thorn_in_the_flesh.csp

⁹⁶ Mary Joyce, 'Nigerian Blogger Fight for Free Speech'- article in DigiActive Blog. October 29, 2008.

drying away and that he found a vacuum and moved to fill it. According to Sowore, “I expected the traditional media to become more vibrant after the military left power and to extend its vibrancy and doggedness to the civilian era – but I was disappointed”.

Sowore soon found himself in the mainstream media writing for the Nigerian Guardian newspaper. That did not last long due to his radical view of what is news. “I realized that the media was not ready to go to the next level. It was at this point I thought of an online news website”. To further reinforce the claim that mainstream media may have abdicated its responsibility after military rule, Sonala, who writes frequently for Sahara Reporters, identified the challenge of journalism in Nigeria as abiding in the province of investigative or forensic journalism. “In Nigeria, this often poses tremendous difficulty for the mainstream press which may opt for a comfortable compromise”.⁹⁷

However, not many journalists in the mainstream media share this opinion. Joseph Adeyeye, the editor of Punch Newspaper, who says he visits SaharaReporters.com “once in a while”, believes that the traditional media still holds the key in terms of quality and reliable news. “Yes, SaharaReporters is playing a role, but that should not suggest in any way that it has taken over from us. We are professionally trained and we cover the issues no matter”.⁹⁸ Sam Omatseye, Chairman, Editorial Board of The Nation newspaper and one of Nigeria’s leading columnists disagrees with the notion that the traditional media left an investigative void that Sahara Reporters had to fill. “Some of the best news and investigative reports are being broken and done by journalists from the traditional media. So, what are you talking about here?” he says. Dapo Olorunyomi, an investigative journalist and one time deputy editor in chief of The News magazine in Nigeria cautioned that though Sahara Reporters has recorded some great investigative stories, it should not be forgotten that a paper like 234Next has a tradition of vigorous investigations. “Investigative journalism has atrophied in the Nigerian media for a very long time and we must be careful not to exaggerate what Sahara Reporters has done or is doing”, he argues.⁹⁹ In summary, there is good evidence for arguing that ground-breaking investigative reports by the traditional media have been spotty and though they may be better positioned to dig deep given their training, structure and reach, they have not fulfilled their potential when compared with a citizen journalism website based in New York and operated by a few citizens.

Adebayo Onanuga, Editor-in-Chief of The News magazine and one of the architects of guerrilla or underground journalism practice sees the advantages and disadvantages of Sahara Reporters: “The uninitiated, non-discerning people love it for its unvarnished news, un-gated news so to speak, and for its immediacy. But it does great damage to people's reputations”.¹⁰⁰

No matter the arguments, Sahara Reporters now has a stake in the Nigerian media in terms of audience and impact as our survey partly confirms. A large section of the media audience found

⁹⁷ Op.cit.

⁹⁸ Author interview. Joseph Adeyeye, editor, The Punch, November 2010

⁹⁹ Author Interview with Dapo Olorunyomi. January, 2011

¹⁰⁰ Adebayo Onanuga, Author Interview, Lagos, February 2011

on offer at Sahara Reporters the kind of stories and breaking news they needed and embraced the medium to the consternation of members of the traditional media. Sonala, one of the lead columnists on Sahara Reporters supports the need for a website like Sahara Reporters, but also criticizes the dwindling quality of Nigerian journalism in recent times insisting that Nigeria's journalism thrives on commentary and not reporting.¹⁰¹

Historically, the kind of advocacy journalism Sahara Reporters now practices borrows largely from the practice of 'guerrilla journalism' described earlier. It was some kind of defiant journalism and had an aggressive and uncompromising investigative bent and exposed corruption in power. The only difference with citizen journalism today is that whereas the 'guerrilla journalism' of the late 80s to late 90s could not rely on the internet, today's citizen journalism has the web 2.0 and the whole benefit of what Dan Gillmor calls the new communication tool kit. Today, Sahara Reporters runs a virtual office.

¹⁰¹ Sonala Olumhense, "Popular Investigative Nigerian Website Sued For \$25 Billion" in www.blackstarnews.com. Dec. 26, 2008

CHAPTER 5

TRADITIONAL MEDIA VS CITIZEN JOURNALISM

“You are monitoring power. You are publishing the kind of materials that traditional media would think twice before publishing. That is why they have targeted the new media and in Journalism, the worst that can happen to you is to be ignored. People are paying attention to you because you are a target. You are hitting the right targets.”- Olatunji Dare

5.1 THE CHALLENGE

On May 5, 2006 media leaders from the mainstream media (MSM) gathered in London to brainstorm how to respond to the marching troops of citizen journalism. The conference sponsored by two media giants, BBC and Reuters, had a single agenda: how to “nail down the big issue”¹⁰² with regard to citizen journalism. “The mainstream media is grappling with how to react to the explosion of so-called citizen journalism...and the conference billed itself as talking about how to create a better-informed society by collaborating with one another”.¹⁰³

For the gurus of the mainstream media, their organizations needed to work out a template for collaboration with citizen journalism because of recent events that year that showed the potential of citizen journalism in enhancing their coverage. While their first instinct was turf protection and self-preservation, they also wanted to explore ways in which the old and the new media could work together. The importance of the rise of citizen journalism to the London group was underscored in 2006 from the “thousands of text messages, emails and mobile phone images during the July 7 bombings in London, to simple day to day information on news events. Newspapers and broadcasters are wondering how they can harness millions of ‘citizen journalists’ even as many of those citizens are doing their hardest to get around mainstream media (MSM) with their blogs and community sites”.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Mike Butcher, “We Media: the citizen journalism dilemma for mainstream media”. 5/5/2006

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

In Nigeria, we twice saw the power of citizen journalism demonstrated: first, when Sahara Reporters used crowd sourcing to obtain the picture and exclusive information of the December 25, 2009 bomber, Umar Farouk Mutallab who almost blew up an American airline over American skies; and secondly when how citizen journalism delivered the first raw footage and pictures of the Abuja bomb blast in Nigeria on October 1, 2010 when Nigeria celebrated its 60 years of political independence. Again, it was citizen journalists that captured the moment in history and also used SMS and their blackberries to send the news to citizen journalism websites like Sahara Reporters.

In Nigeria, these developments are not lost on the media as they have also had to depend on the new material produced by the social media to report government corruption, cover international events and the spiral of bombings that have been taking place in Nigeria since October 2010. Not too long from now, the leaders of the mainstream media in Nigeria will have to face up to the issue of marrying traditional news with citizen journalism.

Suffice it to say however, that citizen journalism has caught up in Nigeria and bridged the media gap. Uche Nwora, a Nigerian who has written extensively on citizen journalism argues that, “the advent of the internet and independent/alternative media has ensured that Nigerian citizens can now practice their own journalism from wherever they are”¹⁰⁵. He argues further that full citizens’ involvement in the media can only help to improve the vibrancy while ridding it of the docility that has gradually become a feature. Fackson Banda in his exploratory study of citizen journalism and democracy in Africa asserted that, “the institutionalization of the practice of citizen journalism into MSM has since begun.”¹⁰⁶ For Nigeria, the growth of citizen journalism platforms and the infusion of user generated content into traditional media content in the past five years attest to this development mentioned by Banda.

The traditional media holds tenaciously to its claim that it is tested and trusted because it is the professionals at work and not ‘wanabes’ or accidental journalists who have had no training. In Nigeria, the position of the traditional media as the custodians of news and information on which the society must rely upon or surrender to is one that is shared with their counterparts worldwide. However, with the practice of citizen journalism gradually taking root in Nigeria and globally, the hold of the traditional media on this claim is presently at best tenuous.

5.2. LESSONS FROM NIGERIA

Even in Nigeria, opinions are divided about the value of citizen media and what recognition the traditional media should accord it. Professor of Journalism, Olatunji Dare, a member of the editorial board of the Nation newspapers and a renowned journalism scholar, subscribes to the value of new media and on-line journalism to bringing about the development of democracy in

¹⁰⁵ Uche Nwora, ‘Citizens as Journalists’ January 2006. Internet article.

¹⁰⁶ Fackson Banda. “Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa: an exploratory study”. Highway Africa. pp 7-15

Nigeria and more importantly, the encouragement of independent journalism free from the shackles of the Piper who dictates the tune. “I think its speed of dissemination is one of the advantages. The fact that the start-off capital is small and the fact that it can reach a large audience in a short time, without suffering from the contracts of the old media are the major strength... It’s a new media; you don’t need a huge printing press. You are not beholden to any money interest, because of that which gives you potentially the opportunity to be more certain, at least potentially, to be less disinterested in outcomes. And of course, it gives speed and faster response time.”¹⁰⁷ Prof Olatunji talks further about the power of online journalism and how it is putting pressure on persons in power in Nigeria: “You are monitoring power. You are publishing the kind of materials that traditional media would think twice before publishing. That is why they have targeted the new media and in journalism, the worst that can happen to you is to be ignored. People are paying attention to you because you are a target. You are hitting the right targets.”¹⁰⁸

Adebayo Onanuga, editor in chief of one of Nigeria’s leading weekly magazines, The News looked at the citizen journalism practice as popularized by Sahara Reporters and said, “Sahara reporters is like Wikileaks: all the news fit and unfit to print. No inhibitions at all. No consideration for the ethics of the profession, the subtleties expected from the practitioners, the sense of social responsibility and the restraints that trained journalists normally exhibit”.¹⁰⁹ This position is reinforced by the argument that citizen journalists are not trained to subscribe to the traditional journalistic standards of objectivity, fairness and accuracy found in news organizations.¹¹⁰

Professor Dare took a hard look at user generated content and declared that the products do not enjoy the benefit of the rigorous checks and balances that you find in traditional media. “The material doesn’t pass through a chain of editors that would take a second or for somebody else to correct an error that has been made.” For him, the sense of responsibility that goes with the journalistic profession must not be glossed over or sacrificed for the sake of achieving speed in dissemination.¹¹¹

This is a view shared by Professor Adebayo Williams of The Nation newspapers’ editorial board who welcomes the citizen journalism genre in Nigeria but cautions against reckless journalism. For him, bloggers have stepped up to the plate in areas where the traditional media slept at the switch due to what he describes as “internal contradictions as well as historical developments”¹¹² within the journalism profession and the Nigerian state. He celebrated the bloggers, and especially their contribution to fighting corruption. “*It is not the blogger who will put an end to this elaborate charade, this sustained chicanery and macabre musical chairs. But blogging will*

¹⁰⁷ Professor Olatunji Dare. Source- <http://www.pointblanknews.com/os1945.html> He spoke with pointblanknews.com after delivering a paper at the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Author Interview. Lagos. February 2010.

¹¹⁰ Serena Carpenter, “News Quality Differences”. In Public Journalism 2.0 et al p70-71

¹¹¹ Op. cit. Pointblank news.

¹¹² Op.cit

help. The defenestration of some important sectors of the Nigerian press as a result of corporate corruption and individual greed has assured the blogger of a great historical platform. Yet if he is to fulfill this historic mission, the blogger must conduct a constant reality check and come up with a profound intellectual interrogation of his own vulnerability in a web of elite deceit and mischief. It is only after this that the blogger can reconnect with the endangered forces of genuine change in the home country”.¹¹³

The fact that citizen journalism lacks the structure, resources and personnel the traditional media invests in news gathering and overall news operations limits its ability to engage professionals, set up a process of verification, invest funds in long investigations and turn out the same volume of stories that the traditional media produces. In Nigeria only a few online news sites practice citizen journalism full blast; a host of over 20 other sites rely heavily on user generated content and are low in news production. Nigeria’s blogosphere is still in infancy. Thus, stepping into the shoes of the traditional media becomes a hardous task for citizen journalism. We have however, seen citizen journalism rise up to address some of its shortcomings particularly with regards to quality control and gate keeping issues and the general ethical conduct of their newsgathering operations. An example of such is Sahara Reporters. The site implores citizens to ensure that the information they supply is factual, but also gate keeps by verifying every material sent to it except for commentary. “We sometimes delay publishing a piece until we are able to confirm the details of the story”, according to the publisher, Sowore. The site has also lined up a number of experienced journalistic hands to help verify and investigate stories and also edit.

Sowore will not however, let the attacks from the traditional media go unchallenged. He insists that it has failed in performing its watchdog role because many of those who sit on the editorial chairs do not want to give up the privileges they have, “Somehow, Nigerian media practitioners have become a power block”.¹¹⁴ While the issue of how professional the news produced by citizen journalism will linger, Sowore argues that the sheer independence and investigative aggressiveness empowers it and sets it apart, enabling it to do more in making government accountable and in giving voice to the people. Prof Olatunji Dare echoes Sowore’s concern about the susceptibility of the traditional media to corruption and compromise due to its nature of ownership. “You own a newspaper and you are bidding for contracts. Your paper is to that extent circumscribed. They can’t write on anything that touches on your business interests, even though they are of public interest”.¹¹⁵

Sahara Reporters is not beloved by many professional journalists in Nigeria because they argue it lacks editorial oversight and it is too combative. Sowore disagrees and said he often engages with some of them who according to him seek to “trash” the site. “The idea that we are unethical, or that we report rumour is simply baloney. They do not want to come near us, yet, we have become the source of their most powerful news. Even if they do not want to admit it, most of them use our stories and use their own bylines without crediting Sahara Reporters.”

¹¹³ Ibid.Op.cit

¹¹⁴ Author Interview. London 2010

¹¹⁵ Op.cit. Pointblank news.

Sowore accuses the traditional media of being “Closet Sahara Reporters” without wanting to admit it. Abdul Razak Barkindo, a senior newspaper editor, sees Sahara Reporters’ role as complementary to that of traditional newspapers but thinks that some of their stories wouldn’t have survived editorial scrutiny in the newsrooms of the traditional media.¹¹⁶

5.3. Uptake of Citizen Journalism by Traditional Media

It is clear that the traditional media in Nigeria is also responding by incorporating the features and using the tools of the new media but applying traditional editorial standards in most instances. A look at the typology of the usage of user generated content in eight national newspapers provides us with an appreciation of the level to which the fusion of citizen journalism into traditional media is taking place. In Nigeria, this process is at two levels, corporate and personal. First, traditional newspapers are establishing an online presence and enhancing that presence with user generated tools and other forms of citizenship participation and feedback processes. On another level, some of the journalists now have blogs or simply email or text their stories to Sahara Reporters or similar sites once they realize their traditional papers will not use them.

“The web and online newspapers can empower citizens with information they provide in democracies and the importance of online newspapers and journalism has increased with the advent of new information technology, and particularly Web 2.0.”¹¹⁷ This has been taken to heart by Nigerian newspapers with virtually all of them having an online presence. Every Nigerian newspaper has not only launched an online website, but has also over time tried to develop it by making it more interactive and user friendly. Presumably, because they want to attract traffic and by extension generate advertising, they have had to go the way of using social media tools and user generated content on their sites. These sites now have comments links at the end of every story or opinion pieces, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Polls, Online community, email story, share and chat rooms.

The Guardian, Punch, This Day, The Nation, The Sun, Daily Trust, Vanguard and 234Next are clear market leaders. A cursory look at their online editions reveals the level to which they are succeeding or failing with incorporating elements of citizen journalism and new media into their operations.

TYPOLOGY OF USER GENERATED CONTENT IN THE TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA.

Newspapers	Online Community	Opinion Poll	Comment	Face book	Twitter	You Tube	Chart room	News SMS	Blogs	You Report
Daily Trust		Y	Y	Y					Y	
Guardian		Y	Y	Y	Y					Y

¹¹⁶ Author Interview, editor, The Road Newspaper, Abuja.

¹¹⁷ Fouhy, E. Which way will it go? American Journalism Review, 22 (2) 18-19 2000)

234Next	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y		
The Punch		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	
Thisday		Y	Y	Y	Y					
The Nation		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y				
The Sun	Y	Y	Y				Y			
Vanguard	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y	

Table: Typology of UGC based on Nigerian Newspapers Websites. Key-Y= Yes

As the chart shows, of the eight online sites examined, the Vanguard Online is ahead of all the other seven national newspapers in embracing user generated content and incorporating virtually all aspects of citizen journalism on its site. While still keeping a steady hand on gate-keeping (for example all comments are moderated before being posted), the site also allows full rein citizen participation through its very successful Vanguard Online Community (VOC). The VOC has become a mini-Facebook and a forum for discussion, content sharing and interacting with friends. There are eleven topics which people can base their discussions around, but members can also use it simply to connect with friends, post comments that are personal and also upload pictures like on Facebook. The VOC has about 8,234 members as at February 2011. Sign up is easy and it has become one of the most popular pages in its online operations.

The Vanguard e-edition, which is the electronic version found on its online page, is quite modern and innovative and sets it apart from the other newspapers. The electronic version of the paper offers all the contents found in the print edition. It is user friendly with pages flipping open and loading quickly in the same style as the Ipad. On the left side of the e-edition is an innovative tools bar that allows readers to navigate easily, print, download, search and get help easily. Apart from Vanguard, other newspapers offer about 50-55 per cent of content of their print edition online and not in an e-version format.



No new minimum wage, no election



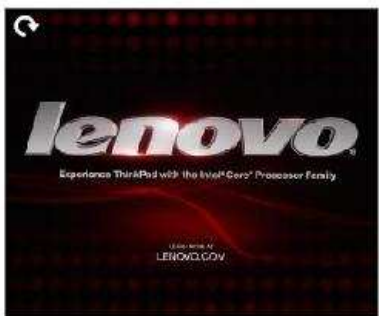
49 Comments
THE struggle for the implementation of N18,000 new minimum wage, yesterday, took frightening dimension as 1,992 leaders of the Nigeria Labour Congress, NLC, in all parts of the country and all sectors of the nation's economy, resolved that Labour..... FULL STORY

News

- Boko Haram militants kill 2 policemen
- Suicide bomber kills 9 in Pakistan
- Police charge rapist to court
- Gaddafi's land, air offensive repelled
- Ruling on JAME's objection over UTME suit for May 9
- Father drags son to court for neglect
- Libya: Nigerian envoy flees
- Wharf - Mile 2 - Oshodi expressway: We have not signed contract -Julius Berger
- Husband, wife kidnapped in Delta
- Fayemi disburses N1.2bn severance package to ex-political office holders

Energy Updates

- Electricity employees urged to ensure stable power supply
- President Jonathan unveils oil and gas industrial plan
- NAMA to spend over N900m on



Vanguard on Facebook

Connect with Vanguard on Facebook to get access to the latest breaking news from Vanguard Online. Comment, share and connect.
<http://www.facebook.com/vpages>



PEOPLE RECENT POPULAR

Recent Comments
Chike_Afanna Break down of law and order and Nigeria's general lax attitude towards sex crime is to

Vanguard is also using social media quite well. At the top of the homepage, the Facebook and Twitter logos dominate. Others have theirs buried down on the front page or on the second page online. For Facebook, Vanguard had 11,943 followers at February 2011. On Twitter, it has 3,384 followers with latest updates and about 30,977 tweets which are considerably higher than others. The paper also sends out SMS news updates to their readers in Nigeria and those in UK through a special 5-digit number code. On the whole, Vanguard operates a very active online presence and has fully embraced citizen journalism but more can be done in terms of citizens making sure that most of its user generated content finds their way into the print edition. Vanguard's editor in chief, Azu Akanwa, sees the future of journalism in investing in new media technology. He says Vanguard newspapers are compliant and working on ways to create a more deliberative newspaper experience.¹¹⁸ He confirmed that both advert revenue and subscriptions are up as a result of their interactive online presence, the electronic edition

¹¹⁸ Author Interview, London, March 2011.

and the mobile Vanguard. An unknown percentage of the user generated content on their website makes it to the print edition and according to him, "Online presence with interactivity and loads of user participation is the future of journalism". Vanguard online is ranked number 1 among all Nigerian newspapers websites by Alexa.com and the 11th most visited website in Nigeria when compared to all other websites.

The 234Next newspaper comes second with active user generated platforms. As at March 2011, it had on twitter about 15,499 followers and 12,199 tweets. On Face book, it has 13,713 followers. The Punch newspapers, reputed to be Nigeria's largest circulating daily, also scores highly, though its weaknesses are that blogs are not up to date, it has no online community, Facebook pages are virtually empty, while Twitter only has 3,797 followers and just 335 tweets with the last tweet posted about a year ago on April 28, 2010. The Guardian stands out in the You Report section where there are three options to report Lagos, Nigeria or the World. It has appreciable content, though is yet to embrace fully all aspects of social media. The Nation newspaper is on track. The 'Have Your Say' segment is unique to the site and needs to be promoted very well and put to use like the BBC's 'Message Board'. For Daily Trust, the leading newspaper in Northern Nigeria, its Facebook followership is perhaps the largest at 69,229. Whether they tap into this for useful content is as yet unknown. Thisday newspapers which launched a new website January 2011 seems to have devoted more time to putting bright colors and pictures on the site than enhancing its user generated content. It is a promising site, though its Facebook and Twitter components are still weak.

From the table we can see that on the whole all the newspaper websites have caught the bug of social media with almost all of them displaying Facebook, Twitter and YouTube links on their pages and a comment link after every story, opinion or news items. The level of diffusion and integration of social media and user generated content in the traditional media in Nigeria is still very low. Apparently, they are yet to have a full appreciation of the potential of user generated content and are not investing in skilled personnel that can help them develop this area and evolve a business model to generate revenue. Part of the problem also is an unwillingness to provide free content for their readers. An attempt by The Punch to charge readers for news received online and via SMS failed in 2010. The prospects are bright and the traditional media need to go beyond the rudimentary and come up with ideas that will make their online operations attract more audience and generate revenue. If they don't, they will miss the ride on journalism's train into the future.

The Nigerian media are yet to access the full benefits of being online, either in the form of a business model that will attract advertisers or through using it to drive up copy sales by doing exclusives. It is still stuck at the level of elementary usage of new media resources and an over reliance on copy sales. They can go beyond this. News organizations sometimes use their online news sites to scoop their offline print edition thereby achieving two things - ensuring that no other media beats them to an exclusive story and also promoting their print edition by referring their readers to watch out for more details in their print edition. Here we see the supplemental

nature of online news sites.¹¹⁹ Online sites now use tickers, breaking news flashers and other multi-media tools to draw the attention of their audience when they have fresh news. Online news has immediacy through snippets and the crop of editorial hands that craft online news specially tailored for an online audience and can offer audio and video components. It has become a powerful force in shaping public opinion and public policy.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Michael Salwen, Bruce Garrison, Paul Driscoll. *Online News and the Public*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. 2005. New Jersey p69

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* New Jersey. p71

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSIONS

It has become clear that the uptake of citizen journalism in Nigeria by ordinary Nigerians and the traditional media is on a steady rise, though slightly below expectations. We believe that Sahara Reporters is the face of citizen journalism in Nigeria and its reporting and investigative styles of journalism have altered the media landscape. Its impact has been mostly felt in the fight against corruption as seen in the Ibori-gate corruption coverage and similar reports. Citizen journalism is giving traditional media in Nigeria a black eye and challenging it to be more transparent and investigative. Dan Gillmor agrees Journalism has been shrouded in some kind of secrecy and the time to open up is now. "We have been a black box and have become only slightly transparent in recent years. The public is demanding more transparency in our own field and is doing some reporting of its own when we fail to respond in satisfying ways'.¹²¹

The public has embraced citizen journalism sites to do their reporting. In Nigeria, Sahara Reporters' site is growing in popularity. Though most evidence of its acceptance and diffusion is still highly anecdotal, it has millions who visit the website and in May 2011 had about 51,000 fans on Facebook. Many have not visited the site personally but have heard about the site's reputation and penchant for breaking news or publishing certain stories. For these Nigerians, any corruption exposing story or breaking news is simply attributed to Sahara Reporters as the source. Perhaps no other medium provides a more leveled playing field for all classes of Nigerians. During and after the Nigerian elections, Sahara Reporters served as some sort of parliament flooded with petitions by politicians and ordinary Nigerians complaining about rigged election primaries.

Though sometimes controversial, being online and operating from New York, beyond the reach of powerful politicians and the security forces, has served Sahara Reporters well in its work. Adebayo Williams captures the present world graphically, "*In this brave new world of Internet hostilities, the surveiller becomes the surveyed. As disaffected nationals in the Diaspora position themselves on the Internet lobbing artillery shells of disgust and disdain on the home country, the situation becomes very dire indeed. Such are the resources available; such is the intellectual firepower that village despots tremble in their lairs under the sustained bombardment. The hunter has become the hunted.*"¹²²

Thanks to new media, the political space has a new transparency and accountability created by the public. In Nigeria today, political leaders fear they will be embarrassed or exposed if their activities get published by Sahara Reporters. They are wary and fearful because it can go viral easily and become international news. In the past they could shut down media houses or confiscate whole print runs or even declare the publication illegal to stop bad news from spreading. That has been taken away. Now, news is without frontiers or boundary.

¹²¹ Gillmor p61

¹²² Op.cit Adebayo W. The Blogger as Nemesis.

For a practice still very much in search of a theory, citizen journalism has come a long way and altered our way of news consumption and production. Though the amount of academic work on citizen journalism is still small, the few academic researches and papers done so far have all reached agreement that there is so much to gain by having the traditional media and citizen journalism work together in a mutual relationship. Already, many professional reporters now use open media to locate sources, communities and audiences.¹²³ Evidence from multiple sources, video clips from citizen journalists can all be combined with materials from the professional journalists to produce compelling investigative stories.

Indeed, from this study, it is clear that there is a strong case for citizen journalism and the traditional media to work out a beneficial relationship. It is evident that the future of journalism lies somewhere in the social media cum citizen journalism ecosystem which will increasingly rely on user generated content.

However, before the full benefits of the proposed mutual relationship can be harnessed by both parties, there are practical issues that need to be addressed. Nick Newman, in his work on social media lists the outstanding issues thus: *“editorial control; ownership of intellectual property; the blurring of professional and personal spheres; as well as concerns about the representative or unrepresentative nature of the networks shouting for attention”*.¹²⁴ By exploring areas they can work together, some of these issues can easily be addressed. Take for instance the fact that the mainstream media will get better at covering breaking news from timely and comprehensive angles if it encourages and monitors twitter and Facebook communities. Twitter especially with its 140-character limit is a wonderful platform for breaking the news and for distribution. Twitter is also a reporting tool, a great marketing tool and useful for conversations and building communities.

This collaboration could also enhance citizenship empowerment and the accountability of government. After a careful survey of the media landscape in Africa and democratic challenges Richard Sambrook agrees that citizen journalism can contribute to better journalism: *“I think it has a very strong role to play - particularly in a continent like Africa. The role of sites like Saharareporters.com to report what the established media are unable to do, the role of aggregators to enable reporting from outside borders where it would come under pressure, the role of sites to support independent investigations away from the local political pressures (e.g. Zimbabwe) must all contribute to a stronger journalism”*¹²⁵. In the Nigerian 2011 elections and other elections in Egypt and Kenya blogs, twitter, Facebook and other online user generated content are not killing democracy but enhancing it by deepening the conversation, creating awareness and providing ordinary citizens tools to monitor elections and protect their votes. The Ushahidi platform is being deployed for election coverage and crisis reporting and mobile telephony through SMS is being used to share information among citizens. All three Nigerian editors, Dapo Olorunyomi, Tunde Rahman and Professor Adebayo Williams, agree that citizen journalism has democratic value because of the access it provides and that information and

¹²³ Op.cit

¹²⁴ Op. cit. Newman

¹²⁵ Author interview

communication are central to the survival of any democracy. They see the traditional media and citizen journalism finding common ground.

Citizen journalism in Nigeria is still growing. It has arrived but it is not yet fully developed with millions of citizens and the legacy media yet to embrace its full potentials. Nigeria still has a lot of catching up to do. So also do the traditional media. Sowore, the publisher of Sahara Reporters, is particularly unhappy that there has not yet been a replica of Sahara Reporters and that the Nigerian media are not yet dominated by many Sahara Reporters. "I expect this type of journalism to force the traditional media to sit up and re-awaken the media bite of the past".¹²⁶ This study has shown that Sahara Reporters has blazed a trail in Nigeria as the foremost citizen journalism site, similar to the Korean OhMyNews site. A few similar sites have emerged. What is needed now is that more such sites populate the media space and that millions of Nigerians take to the blogosphere. The traditional media need to invest in this partnership and see that new media technology is cutting deep into their territory. According to Kevin Kelly, traditional media must make adjustments, "You can deny technology, but you can't stop it."¹²⁷

Indeed, the Nigeria media has never failed to re-invent itself like it did during the years of military dictatorship. As Adebayo Williams writes: "As the Nigerian state mutates, wearing several masks of tyranny while its fundamental nature remains the same, adversarial journalism, its dialectical mirror image, is also constantly transformed as a response to its own internal contradictions as well as historical developments. Now, the journalist as journalissimo has arrived: an insurrectionist with a laptop who has carried the battle to the state from global space. It is the age of the new kids on the blog".¹²⁸ This time around, it is expected that the media will close ranks and exploit fully the benefits of a new media world. Because there is very little choice according to Dan Gillmor, this is the future of news and "I am in favor of hybrid models and partnerships. The more participation by the traditional media in citizen journalism, the better the content that will be created".¹²⁹

Most importantly, the Fourth estate must recognize the emerging Fifth estate¹³⁰ that is the internet and related digital technologies. Together they empower what William Dutton identifies as, '...space for networking individuals in ways that enable a new source of accountability in government, politics and other sectors'.¹³¹ That Fifth estate is citizen journalism and the user generated media community. It is a community that is deploying citizens as an alternative source of authority to the traditional media and doing so at blinding speed. It is an estate the mainstream media in Nigeria will want to partner with in order to ensure both relevance and survival in the future. This research has attempted to provide compelling evidence that supports this trend and points us in the direction of the future.

¹²⁶ Author interview. London 2010

¹²⁷ Kevin Kelly- at Silicon Valley's TED conference, Feb. 2005.

¹²⁸ Op.cit. Adebayo Williams

¹²⁹ Author Interview.

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APPENDICES

Internet World Stats

Usage and Population Statistics

[New Facebook Statistics](#)

[World Stats](#) | [Africa Stats](#) | [America Stats](#) | [Asia Stats](#) | [Europe Stats](#) | [EU Stats](#) | [Mid East Stats](#) | [Oceania Stats](#) | [Links](#)

FACEBOOK USERS IN THE WORLD

Facebook Usage and Facebook Penetration Statistics
For The Main World Geographic Regions

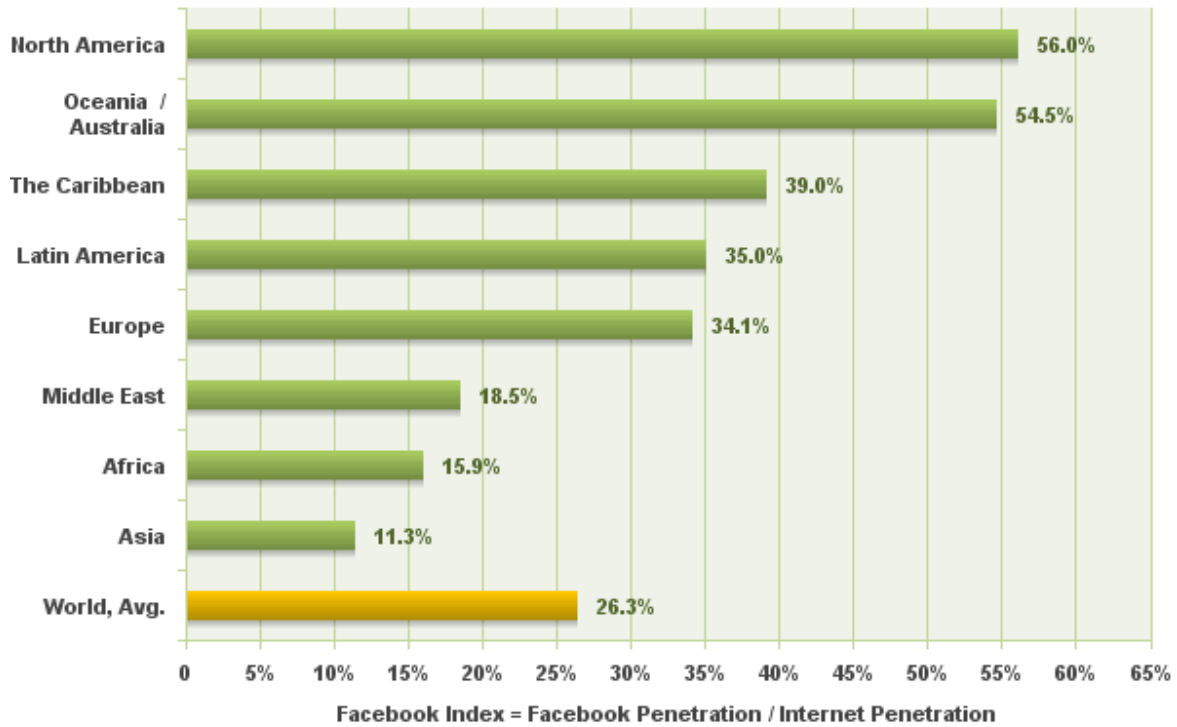
New Facebook Stats

FACEBOOK USAGE AND INTERNET STATISTICS FOR AUGUST 31, 2010						
Geographic World Regions	Population (2010 Est.)	Facebook Users	Facebook Penetration	Facebook Index(*)	Internet Users	Internet Penetration
Asia	3,834,792,852	93,584,580	2.4 %	11.3 %	828,930,856	21.6 %
Africa	1,013,779,050	17,607,440	1.7 %	15.9 %	110,948,420	10.9 %
Europe	813,319,511	162,104,640	19.9 %	34.1 %	475,121,735	58.4 %
Latin America	550,924,250	68,189,920	12.4 %	35.0 %	195,042,230	30.4 %
North America	344,124,450	149,054,040	43.3 %	56.0 %	266,224,500	77.4 %
Middle East	212,336,924	11,698,120	5.5 %	18.5 %	63,240,946	29.8 %
The Caribbean	41,632,722	3,925,060	9.4 %	39.0 %	10,055,240	24.2 %
Oceania / Australia	34,700,201	11,596,660	33.4 %	54.5 %	21,272,470	61.3 %
WORLD TOTAL	6,845,609,960	517,760,460	7.6 %	26.3 %	1,970,837,003	28.8 %

NOTES: (1) Facebook World Users and Facebook World Penetration Statistics are consolidated for August 31, 2010 from the official number of Facebook users reported in each country or world region. (2) The "Facebook Index" corresponds to the ratio of Facebook users in relation to the total number of estimated Internet users in each country or world region, expressed as a percentage. (3) World Demographic (Population) numbers are based on mid-year 2010 data from the [US Census Bureau](#) . (4) Internet usage information comes from data published by [Internet World Stats](#), from estimates by the [International Telecommunications Union](#), by [GfK](#), by local Regulators and by other reliable sources. (5)

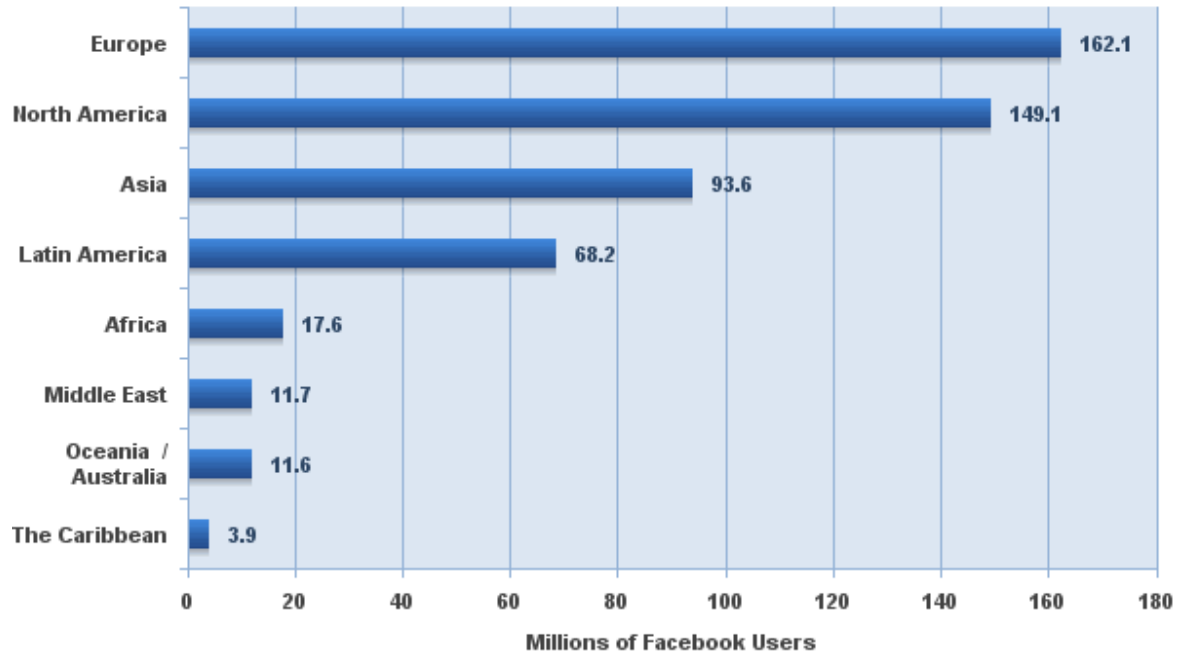
For definitions, disclaimers, and navigation help, please refer to the [Site Surfing Guide](#). (6) Information in this site may be cited, giving the due credit to www.internetworldstats.com. Copyright © 2000 - 2010, Miniwatts Marketing Group. All rights reserved worldwide.

Facebook Index Rates by Geographic Regions - August, 2010



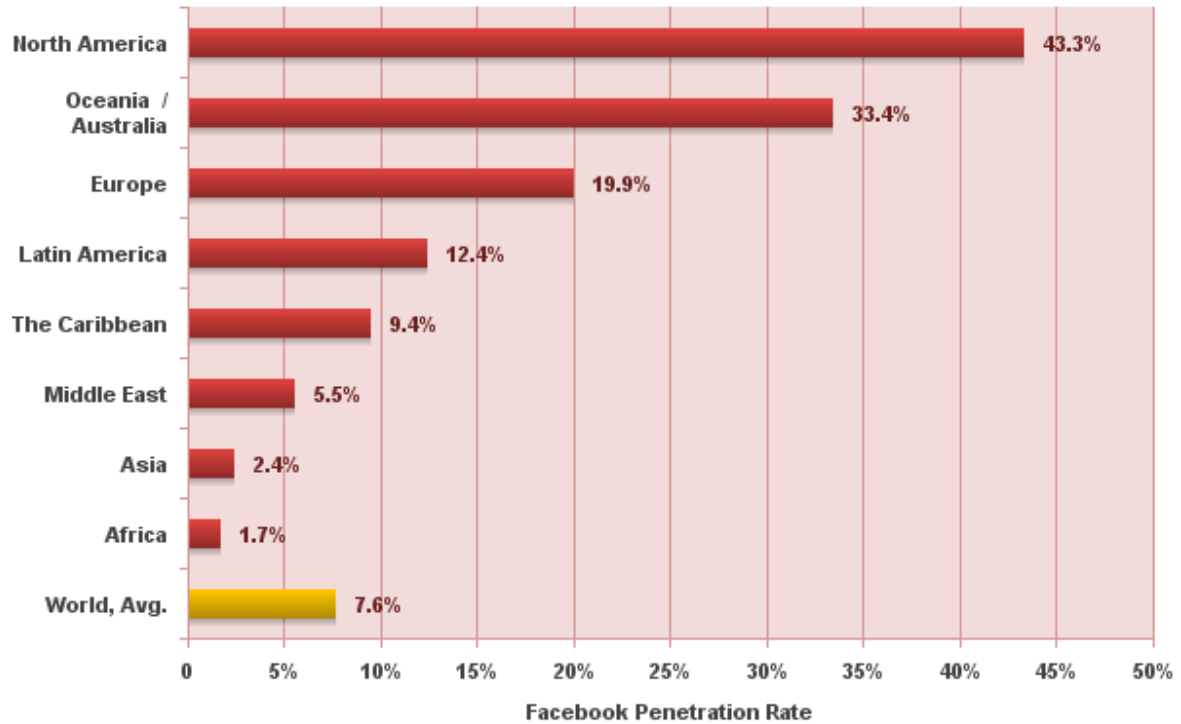
Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats25.htm
Facebook Index Rates are based on a world population of 6,845,609,960
and 517,760,460 estimated Facebook users on August 31, 2010.
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Facebook Users in the World by Geographic Regions - August, 2010



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats25.htm
Estimated Facebook users were 517,760,460 on August 31, 2010
Copyright © 2010, Miniwatts Marketing Group

World Facebook Penetration Rates by Geographic Regions - August, 2010



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats25.htm
Penetration Rates are based on a world population of 6,845,609,960
and 517,760,460 estimated Facebook users on August 31, 2010.
Copyright © 2010, Miniwatts Marketing Group



SaharaReporters is conceived as a groundbreaking online forum whose mission is to pursue transparency, accountability and democratic ethos in Africa's public and private spheres. The forum's major aim is to empower all citizens of various African nations to actively demand and defend their democratic rights. Our journalistic mission is to beam a critical searchlight on the people and practices that undermine and subvert the democratic process.

We are Citizen Reporters, not professional journalists. We are, above all, citizens compelled by our desire for transparent governance and justice to scrutinize African leaders and to expose their unlawful activities that tragically undermine the developmental aspirations of African peoples. Our commitment is to ceaselessly report corruption and other kinds of official malfeasance. We are convinced that, by drawing attention to the corrupt and illicit activities of private and public officials, we not only arm the citizenry with the information to demand change but also force leaders to become more responsive to the tenets of accountability. The exposure of crime is the first step in its dismantling and elimination.

We depend on the efforts of concerned citizens who act whistleblowers as well as the main sources for our exposes. In a continent where much of the "professional" media is compromised, we make a point of investigating and reporting stories that the mainstream media dare not or will not report.

Whilst our ultimate goal is to cover all of Africa, our immediate focus is Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and one of its most generously endowed in terms of human and natural resources.

There is no question that a well-managed Nigeria would inspire, nourish and energize all of Africa and be an exemplary global citizen. A Nigeria that adheres to the tenets of democracy enshrined in her constitution can be a shining star to its neighbors in Africa and to people of African descent around the world.

Launched in 2006, SaharaReporters now serves as an indispensable watchdog for the mainstream media. Thanks to its influence and impact, professional journalists in Nigeria and elsewhere are challenged to do more investigative reports, to be more attentive to a multiplicity of perspectives, and to eschew partisan bias and conflicts of interest.

We believe that a fully reported society is key to a functioning society, and that a shackled press and uninformed citizenry constitute a liability to democracy.

In the context of Africa's often fettered, government-controlled, or crippling under-funded press, we believe that the Internet elevates the hopes of our citizens but also of the world beyond that change can be achieved in our time.

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. Comments on our stories are updated 24 hours a day. SaharaReporters accepts story ideas from Nigerians and friends of Nigeria, particularly if they include documents that would facilitate our investigations. SaharaReporters maintains the faith that ordinary citizens, reporting a country about which they truly care, can build that country by opening up all the dark corners where both criminals and detractors try to hide.

Although most of our stories are sourced through ordinary citizens, we adhere to strict standards of verification in order to present authentic and evidence-based reports to our readers.

SaharaReporters neither pays for stories nor accepts payment for stories. We do not believe that financial value can be exchanged for patriotism or justice. In the interest of safeguarding our complete independence in editorial matters, we do not accept adverts from any governments – whether at the federal, state or local government levels – or from governmental agencies.

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

We are sampling the opinions of a cross section of Nigerians on the effectiveness of Citizen Journalism in the country, the Use of the Social media such as Face Book, Blogging, Twitter and YouTube and the impact of SaharaReporters.com

Information gathered will be treated with utmost confidentiality

Please see table below:

NAME	OCCUPATION	AGE	GENDER	EMAIL ADDRESS	PHONE NUMBER (OPTIONAL)

DRAFT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Where do you go first for breaking news on Nigeria: Newspaper or Internet?

2. If it is the Internet which website and why? And if Newspaper, what Newspaper and why?

3. What do you use the internet for more? News, Entertainment, OR Email Communication?

4. How many hours do you spend on the internet/online every day?

5. Have you heard of or visited Sahara Reporters?

6. Why do you visit Saharareporters and do you trust them?

7. Can you recall one important story your read on Sahara reporters?

8. Do you trust the Internet news from sources like Sahara Reporters more than you trust the newspapers?

9. What other websites similar to Sahara reporters do you visit and what are you looking for on these web sites?

10. Do you think Sahara reporters.com has given you a voice in the way your country is governed? If Yes, Why?

11. Have you ever posted a comment, sent a story or picture or written an opinion piece on Sahara reporters? How many times?

12. Do you use Face Book: YouTube: Twitter: Blogs? Circle as appropriate.