Social Change and Civic Empowerment

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COMMUNITY JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA: EMPOWERING LOCAL VOICES AND PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE

1. Introduction

Community journalism, a form of grassroots journalism, plays a critical role in Nigeria, where it gives a voice to local communities that are often overlooked by mainstream media. This form of journalism focuses on hyper-local issues, from public health and education to local politics and community events - providing a platform for ordinary citizens to express their concerns, share ideas and engage with their surroundings.

With the rise of digital platforms, community journalism in Nigeria has taken a new form through online platforms that empower citizens, raise awareness and promote social change. This article discusses the concept of community journalism, explores the growth of online community journalism in Nigeria, and presents case studies of online community journalism in amplifying local voices and fostering social change, as well as the challenges of online community journalism.

2. The Concept of Community Journalism

Community journalism is a subset of journalism that serves the interests and concerns of a particular community or locality. Unlike traditional journalism, which may have a broader audience, community journalism is deeply rooted in the local context. It aims to provide content relevant to a specific geographic area or demographic group. Its

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objectives include fostering civic engagement, promoting transparency, and improving accountability in local governance and community affairs.

Community journalism is distinguishable on account of its emphasis on local stories, participation and collaboration with the audience. It encourages ordinary people, community leaders and activists to engage in the creation of news and information.[2] In Nigeria, this has proven to be particularly valuable in amplifying local voices and shedding light on important issues that may otherwise be ignored by the national press.

3. The Growth of Online Community Journalism in Nigeria

Over the past decade, online platforms have revolutionized community journalism in Nigeria. The proliferation of smartphones, internet and social media has enabled ordinary Nigerians to participate in the production and dissemination of news and information quickly and efficiently. Online community journalism in Nigeria has gained momentum, with several platforms emerging to provide news, stories and information that are directly relevant to local communities.

Some of the primary drivers of this growth include:

a. **Widespread Internet Access**: With the expansion of internet access, particularly through mobile phones, Nigerians in both urban and rural areas are increasingly able to access online platforms for news and information.

b. **Social Media**: Platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp have become essential tools for disseminating news and organizing community activities, allowing individuals to connect and share content in real time.

c. **Citizen Journalism**: More Nigerians are becoming citizen journalists, reporting on local issues via social media, blogs and other online platforms. This shift has reduced the reliance on traditional media outlets, giving rise to a more diverse and decentralized media ecosystem.

d. **Lack of Mainstream Media Coverage**: Many Nigerians, especially those in rural or underserved areas, feel that their concerns are ignored by traditional media. Online community journalism offers an alternative to the mainstream media and provides a platform to address local issues that are of particular importance to specific communities.

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[2] Wikipedia (2025), "Community journalism" available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_journalism> accessed on 5th February, 2025.

4. Case Studies of Online Community Journalism in Nigeria

Several cases of online community journalism in Nigeria showcase the power of digital platforms in amplifying local voices and fostering social change. These initiatives have helped raise awareness about issues such as education, health, local governance and social justice. Below are some notable examples:

4.1 The Role of Nairaland in Community Dialogue

Nairaland, one of Nigeria's largest online forums, provides an example of how online platforms can serve as a space for community dialogue. Although it is a general forum, it has several subsections dedicated to different Nigerian regions, allowing users to engage with content relevant to their local communities. Discussions range from political debates to recommendations on local businesses and personal issues. It was, at a time, referred to by many as “the Nigerian Google” due to its wide-ranging capture/coverage of community and local events in Nigeria.

Nairaland has played a significant role in amplifying voices that would otherwise be unheard, helping to mobilize public opinion and create awareness on various community matters. For example, during the #EndSARS protests in 2020, Nairaland users actively participated in community discussions, information sharing on police brutality, and coordination of peaceful protests in various cities. This instance highlights how an online community platform can become a tool for social change and rights advocacy.[3]

4.2 The 'Sahara Reporters' Platform

While Sahara Reporters is more widely known as a national online news platform, it has been instrumental in the development of community journalism by focusing on local stories that affect different parts of Nigeria. Founded by Nigerian journalist, Omoyele Sowore, Sahara Reporters has become a key player in exposing corruption, human rights abuses and social injustice at the local and national levels.[4]

The platform gives ordinary Nigerians a chance to report on local issues, including stories about local governance, environmental degradation and the challenges facing rural communities. By allowing citizens to share their own stories and experiences,

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[3] Nairaland Forum (2020), “ENDSARS: What Do You See? (photo)”, available at <https://www.nairaland.com/6188812/endsars-what-see-photo> accessed on 19th February, 2025.

[4] See, MacArthur Foundation (2025), “Sahara Reporters Media Foundation - Grants” available at <https://www.macfound.org/grantee/sahara-reporters-media-foundation-10114345/> accessed on 19th February, 2025 and Wikipedia (2024), “Sahara Reporters” available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahara_Reporters> accessed on 19th February, 2025.

Sahara Reporters has made significant contributions to local community journalism and has empowered Nigerians to hold their leaders accountable.

4.3 'The Guardian Nigeria' and Community Engagement

The Guardian Nigeria, a prominent national newspaper, has also embraced the concept of community journalism through its online presence. While it is primarily known for its national and international coverage, its online platform frequently publishes stories that address local concerns and community issues. It engages directly with communities, often inviting them to submit stories, op-eds and reports about their regions.

For instance, *The Guardian* has covered stories of local issues and development projects, educational challenges in rural areas and local government performance in various states. This platform not only informs but also empowers citizens to engage with community matters and initiate local solutions to problems that affect their daily lives.[5]

4.4 The Role of Social Media Activism in Community Journalism

Social media has proven to be one of the most powerful tools for community journalism in Nigeria. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp have provided a space for Nigerians to discuss issues ranging from social vices to corruption in local communities. The emergence of hashtags like #EndBadGovernance, #EndSARS, #BlackLiveMatters, #BringBackOurGirls and #SaveSokoto has shown the power of online activism in driving social change and raising awareness about community issues.

For instance, during the #EndSARS movement, young Nigerians used social media to mobilize protests, share information and document incidents of police brutality. Social media acted as both a tool for community journalism and a means of organizing collective action. The viral spread of these movements highlighted the effectiveness of online community journalism in sparking public debate and influencing public policy.

4.5 Local Blogs and News Websites

There has been a growing number of local blogs and websites that focus on community news and issues. Websites/blogs like BellaNaija, Linda Ikeji Blog, Gistlover, YabaLeftOnline, Ijaw News, 360nobs, Pulse Nigeria etc., allow citizens to share news

[5] Abiodun Ogundairo (2025), "LASBCA Demolishes illegal structures in Ikorodu" available at <https://tv.guardian.ng/lasbca-demolishes-illegal-structures-in-ikorodu/> accessed on 27th March, 2025.

from their localities, keeping their communities informed and engaged. These platforms often publish stories from citizens in different parts of Nigeria, including rural areas, providing them with an outlet for their concerns, local developments and learning opportunities.[6]

Some of these online platforms focus on specific communities, such as Lagos-based bloggers focusing on local politics, while others serve a more national audience but still highlight regional/local issues. These blogs and websites often cover issues like education, public health, infrastructure development, lifestyle, fashion and local governance, ensuring that important local issues are not overlooked.

5. Challenges of Online Community Journalism in Nigeria

Online community journalism in Nigeria may have its positives, there are several challenges that must be addressed for it to reach its full potential:

5.1 Access to Technology

Despite the increasing availability of smartphones, not all Nigerians have equal access to the internet or the technological skills needed to participate in online journalism. This digital divide, especially between urban and rural areas, limits the reach of online community journalism.

5.2 Misinformation and Fake News

One of the major challenges facing online community journalism in Nigeria is the spread of misinformation and fake news. The ease of sharing information on social media platforms and blogs can lead to the dissemination of false, unverified or misleading content, which can harm communities and undermine the credibility of online community journalism.

5.3 Government Censorship and Repression

The Nigerian government has sometimes been critical of online news and social media platforms that report on local issues and expose corruption. The threat of censorship, harassment, or even arrests of online journalists has created an environment of fear and caution among some community journalists.[7]

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[6] FeedSpot (2025), "100 Best Nigeria Blogs and Websites in 2025" available at <https://bloggers.feedspot.com/nigeria_blogs/> accessed on 10th March, 2025.

[7] Ejike Ejike and Tarkaa David (2024), "Security Agencies Arrested 45 Nigerian Journalists In 2 Years – Investigation" available at <https://leadership.ng/security-agencies-arrested-45-nigerian-journalists-in-2-years-investigation/> accessed on 25th March, 2025.

5.4 Lack of Professional Training

Many citizen journalists lack formal training in journalism, which can sometimes result in the publication of poorly researched or inaccurate content. Some of them are uninformed about the nuances of media and information gathering, thereby raising several questions about the news content they churn out. There is a need for more education and capacity-building in community journalism to ensure that content being disseminated to the public for consumption are accurate, ethical and well-presented to avoid misinforming or disinforming the public.

6. Conclusion

Community journalism in Nigeria has flourished in this present age of digital media, providing a platform for ordinary citizens to share their stories and engage with local issues. Through online platforms, social media and citizen journalism, Nigerians have gained the ability to hold local leaders accountable, expose injustices and advocate for social change in their community. Whilst there are still challenges such as misinformation, digital inequality, lack of professional training for citizen journalists and government censorship - the power of community journalism to effect change in Nigeria is undeniable.

As Nigeria continues to evolve in its digital landscape, online community journalism will remain a powerful tool for empowering local voices and promoting social change. By providing communities with the resources and platforms they need to tell their own stories, the country and its administrators can ensure that no voice goes unheard and that local issues are given the attention they deserve.

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