

# AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF THE IMPACT OF BLOGGING SITES ON NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The proliferation of blogging sites has transformed the news landscape in Nigeria, offering a platform for diverse voices and perspectives. In the light of this, this study examines audience perception of the impact of blogging sites on news consumption habits in Nigeria. The researchers embarked on this study to examine the extent to which Nigerian audiences rely on blogging sites as sources of news; assess the impact of blogging sites on news consumption behavior and preferences and examine audience perceptions of the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation. Based on these objectives, three research questions were formulated to serve as a guide for this study. The study was anchored on the democratic participant media theory and supported by the alternative media theory. The survey research design was employed for this study, and data were collected through questionnaire. Findings reveal that Nigerian media audiences greatly rely on blogging sites as sources of news as these sites provide them with access to diverse perspectives and alternative viewpoints that may be underrepresented or marginalized in traditional media outlets. The study also found out that blogging sites have had a significant impact on news consumption behavior and preferences as they offer a diverse range of perspectives, often catering to niche interests or alternative viewpoints not covered by traditional news outlets. The study concludes that blogging sites have been celebrated for democratizing access to information, providing platforms for marginalized voices, and offering alternative perspectives not always covered by mainstream media. This inclusivity resonates with audiences seeking diverse viewpoints and a more comprehensive understanding of local and global issues. This study therefore recommends that media organizations and bloggers should implement initiatives to enhance media literacy among the Nigerian audience, focusing on critical thinking skills and fact-checking abilities. By empowering individuals to discern credible information from misinformation or biased content on blogging sites, they can make more informed decisions about their news consumption habits.

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## Introduction

Over the years, journalism practice has been squarely the preserve of professionals in the field of journalism. The professionals in this case are those who have acquired the nitty-gritty of the profession. However, as society began to grow, and modern technology improved, individuals began to exercise the functions of journalists. The growth of modern technology and the sophistication of society over a period of time became a big challenge for traditional media of communication. In other for the media to survive this challenge, they resorted to the coverage of

news with economic benefits as against the interest of the citizens. On the other hand, the citizens having discovered this development, decided to look for a way out in satisfying their quest to know the happenings around them.

The consequence of this development became a situation where the citizens would source for news themselves without it passing through the normal journalistic process. Adelabu (2018) captured the vivid picture of this development when he noted that many mass media organisations are busy repackaging and becoming more interested in meeting advertisers'

needs rather than readers'/audiences' needs, many people through the help of information technology most especially, the internet are redefining the rules and roles of the game. Another issue that led to the emergence of this development in Nigeria is the fact that the happenings around us far supersede the manifest content of traditional mass media. This simply means that most events occur without being reported either because there is no conventional journalist on site or none assigned to cover such beat. Burkholder (2010) captures the essence of this statement when she noted that more often than not, major news happens and there is no one around to report it. By way of interviews and records of the event, reporters are able to re-create it for the morning paper. Unfortunately, there is usually not the opportunity to capture news in the making with a photograph. But when the London underground was bombed on July 7, 2005, photos of the event were published on websites and blogs, and made their way to the mainstream media. It was the people with camera cell phones that captured the images, not reporters.

Today a lot of citizen journalists have resorted to blogging. Blogging is the art of scouting for and disseminating information on the internet which targets specific audiences. Hence, millions of blog pages exist on the internet covering a wide range of issues and providing up-to-the-minute reports on different subject matters (Rodman, 2016). Blogging is generating a lot of interest from journalists and the general public alike owing to a number of factors: one, people who are non-media practitioners, who are devoid of the relevant skills required to gather, process and disseminate news, have been turned into instant mass communicators; courtesy of the internet. The technology has given people equipped with internet enabled mobile phones the opportunity to witness and report news first hand as it unfolds devoid of all forms of gate-keeping that characterizes conventional news reportage. This, therefore, poses a new challenge to democratic societies because the freedom of expression which is so much cherished carries with it concomitant responsibilities as enshrined in the Nigerian constitutions and the constitution of many countries and sanctioned by relevant legislations.

Olorunnisola (2018) noted that one of the significant impacts of blogging sites on news consumption habits in Nigeria is the democratization of information. Unlike traditional media outlets that are often influenced by political and commercial interests, blogging sites provide a platform for independent voices and citizen journalists to share news and opinions freely. This has led to increased diversity in the news sources available to Nigerians, allowing them to access a broader range of perspectives on various issues. Also, Adesina (2016)

noted that blogging sites have also played a crucial role in breaking news stories and providing real-time updates on events as they unfold. This has made them a valuable source of information for Nigerians who seek up-to-date news content. Additionally, blogging sites often cover niche topics and issues that may not receive sufficient attention in mainstream media, thereby catering to specific interests of their audience.

Furthermore, blogging sites have created a more interactive and engaging news consumption experience for Nigerians. Readers can comment on articles, share their opinions, and participate in discussions with other readers and bloggers. This level of engagement fosters a sense of community among users and encourages active participation in the news consumption process.

Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study examines audience perception of the impact of blogging sites on news consumption habits in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The widespread use of blogs and citizen journalism materials has generated mix reactions. Some see it as positive development while others express strong reservation and fear. The fear is justified because technology has liberalized news gathering and dissemination business and has turned every user of mobile phone with internet access into a potential mass communicator. As a result, individuals these days give breaking news through social media which spreads like wild fire. If the report is a negative one capable of causing break down of law and order, as soon as it is released, it goes viral. And it would take time to do the damage control which is usually handled by professional newsmen working for the mainstream media.

With the proliferation of blogging sites in Nigeria, traditional news outlets are facing increased competition for audience attention. This shift in media consumption habits raises concerns about the reliability, credibility, and quality of news content available to the Nigerian audience. As blogging sites gain prominence as alternative sources of news and information, there is a pressing need to understand how this trend influences audience perceptions and behaviors regarding news consumption. The problem statement focuses on investigating the extent to which blogging sites have impacted the news consumption habits of Nigerian audiences, including their preferences, attitudes, and trust in different news sources.

The emergence of blogging sites in Nigeria has brought about new opportunities for media pluralism and diversity, offering alternative perspectives and voices in the news landscape. However, this phenomenon also raises concerns about the quality,

accuracy, and credibility of news content disseminated through blogging platforms. This problem statement addresses the need to examine how the proliferation of blogging sites influences the media ecosystem in Nigeria, particularly in terms of promoting or inhibiting media pluralism and diversity. By exploring audience perceptions of blogging sites as news sources and their impact on the overall media landscape, this study seeks to shed light on the implications for journalistic practices, democratic discourse, and public engagement in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are as follows;

- i. To examine the extent to which Nigerian audiences rely on blogging sites as sources of news.
- ii. To assess the impact of blogging sites on news consumption behavior and preferences
- iii. To examine audience perceptions of the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions were formulated to serve as a guide for this study;

- i. To what extent do Nigerian audiences rely on blogging sites as sources of news?
- ii. What is the impact of blogging sites on news consumption behavior and preferences?
- iii. How do audience perceive the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Blogs as News Outlets**

The Internet has brought about wide range of opportunities to every facet of human life. From the perspective of news, blogs have emerged to challenge the dominance of mainstream media (i.e. newspaper, magazine, radio and television) as news sources to the public. Blogs have been defined as a web journal that comments on the news - often by criticizing the media and usually in rudely clever tones - with links to stories that back up the commentary with evidence (Baran, 2010). Branston and Stafford (2016) say, web-blog (usually shortened to blog) is a web based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles (normally in reverse chronological order). Easy to set up and maintain, and often functioning in very personal ways like diaries, they often rely on existing news agenda and items, but arranged with a personal campaign focus.

The emergence of blog as news source has both positive and negative sides. To some people, it means

more access to news and information, while others lament that with the emergence of blog sites quackery now pervades journalism practice since all manners of people not necessarily trained professionals can operate blog. Other people also contend that the mainstream media has not been satisfying the yearnings and aspirations of the public news wise. Sullivan (2009) argues that blogging is changing the media world and could formant a revolution in how journalism functions in our culture, not only because individual bloggers have earned their readers respect, but because their personal touch is much more in tune with our current sensibilities than the opinionated magazines and newspapers of old.

### **Functions of Blogs**

It is a known fact that blogs offer alternative versions of events in countries where government exercise tight control over the media. In the latest uprising in the year 2011 tagged Arab revolution in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Baharain and Libya, the mainstream media got most of their stories about the unfolding events through blogs and amateur video footages. The reason is that the despotic regimes have barred the media from covering the uprising and even detained Aljazeera correspondent in Cairo for allegedly instigating the crisis there. Libya also detained two reporters of BBC Arabic in rebel held city of Benghazi.

Blogs have an agenda setting effect. They can draw the attention of traditional media on selected events and keep those events in the news cycle. CNN has designated a special reporter who monitors blogs to see the current issues they have on their agenda. In 2005, blogs have drawn attention to a bribery scandal at the United Nations and kept it in the news for several weeks.

Another function of blog is that it provides check on the activities of traditional media. For example, during the 2004 election campaign in the US, bloggers had questioned the authenticity of the documents CBS had publicized in a story about President George W. Bush's National Guard service. As a result of this scrutiny, CBS eventually admitted that the document could not be authenticated. Dominick (2009) notes that the established media are not used to this kind of scrutiny from particularly the people the media regard as amateurs. This therefore generates element of friction between bloggers and traditional journalists.

### **Impact of Blogging Sites on News Consumption Habits**

Blogging sites have had a significant impact on news consumption in Nigeria, reshaping the media landscape and influencing how people access,

consume, and engage with news content. Etim and Ogaga (2018) noted that blogging sites have expanded the range of news sources available to Nigerian audiences beyond traditional media outlets. With the proliferation of blogs covering various topics, interests, and perspectives, audiences have access to a diverse array of news content that may not be covered by mainstream media. This diversification allows individuals to explore different viewpoints and narratives, fostering a more informed and pluralistic understanding of current events. In fact, traditional media outlets like newspapers, radio, and television stations have been supplemented by blogs that cover a wide range of topics and offer alternative perspectives on news events. This has allowed Nigerians to access a broader range of information and opinions than what is available through traditional media alone.

Yusuf and Akindele (2016) opined that blogging sites have empowered citizen journalists and independent bloggers to contribute to news coverage and commentary in Nigeria. These platforms provide a space for ordinary citizens to report on local events, share personal experiences, and express opinions on social, political, and cultural issues. As a result, blogging sites have amplified alternative voices and marginalized perspectives, challenging the dominance of traditional media in shaping the public discourse. This has helped to democratize the news media landscape in Nigeria and has given a voice to those who may not have been able to participate in traditional media.

Blogging sites have introduced new competition to mainstream media, challenging the traditional gatekeeping role of established news organizations. With the rise of citizen journalism and independent bloggers, mainstream media outlets face increased competition for audience attention and advertising revenue. Bloggers often cover niche topics, provide alternative viewpoints, and offer real-time reporting on breaking news, posing a threat to the dominance of traditional media in shaping the public discourse. Aluko and Amedu (2017) noted that blogging sites have diversified news coverage by offering alternative perspectives and covering topics that may be overlooked by mainstream media. Bloggers, including citizen journalists, activists, and subject matter experts, contribute to a more pluralistic and comprehensive understanding of current events, filling gaps in mainstream media coverage and amplifying marginalized voices and issues.

Mainstream media organizations have increasingly collaborated with bloggers and online influencers to expand their digital reach and engage with new audiences. Partnerships between traditional media outlets and bloggers may involve content sharing agreements, guest contributions, or sponsored

content arrangements, leveraging the unique strengths of both parties to enhance storytelling and audience engagement across platforms. Blogging sites have compelled mainstream media to adapt to the digital age by embracing online platforms and multimedia storytelling formats. Traditional news organizations have launched their own blogs, multimedia content hubs, and social media channels to reach audiences across digital channels. This shift towards digital-first journalism reflects changing audience preferences and consumption habits in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

Blogging sites have increased interactivity in news consumption. Readers can often leave comments on blog posts, share articles on social media, and engage in discussions with other readers and the bloggers themselves. This has helped to foster a sense of community among those interested in particular news topics. While blogging sites offer opportunities for diverse voices and perspectives, they also present challenges related to the verification and accuracy of news content. Due to the decentralized nature of blogging, there is a risk of misinformation, rumors, and fake news spreading rapidly through these platforms. Consequently, bloggers, journalists, and audiences must exercise critical thinking and fact-checking skills to discern credible information from unreliable sources.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Democratic Participant Media Theory.

### **Democratic Participant Media Theory**

This theory was proposed by Dennis McQuail in recognition of new media developments, criticisms against the vertical flow of information and the dominance of the press by private and public monopolies. The main thrust of the theory lies in its insistence that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down so as to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers (Folarin, 2005).

McQuail (1983) proposed this theory to take account of many ideas expressed to take care of the needs of citizens. The theory found expression in the 1960s and 1970s in pressure for local and community radio and television. It challenged the dominance of centralised, commercialised, state-controlled and even professionalized media. Making a reference to Ezensberger (1970), McQuail notes that the key to applying this theory was seen to lie in the new technology of the times. It favoured media that would be small in scale, non-commercial and often committed to a cause. Participation and interaction were key

concepts.

The theory has been against the system of parliamentary democracy which has seemed to become detached from its grassroots origins, to impede rather than facilitate movement in political and social life. It also takes exception to a mass society which is over-organised, overcentralised and fails to offer realistic opportunities for individual and minority expression.

McQuail (1987) noted that the central point of this theory lies with the needs, interests and aspirations of the active receiver in a political society. It has to do with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back, the right to use the means of communication for interaction in small-scale settings of community, interest group, and sub-culture. Essentially, the theory's cautions that communication should not be left in the hands of professionals alone find practical expression in the structure and general operations of citizen journalism.

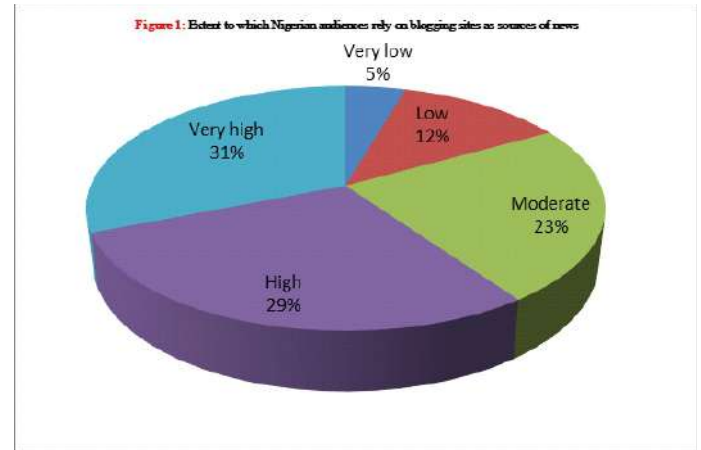
The relevance of this theory to the discussion is based on the fact that in order for the hegemony and monopoly of information by the mainstream media to be broken, there need to be a platform for a horizontal and participatory form of communication which enables people to freely take part in discussions on issues in the state. The media previously played their gate keeping role, deciding which information to shun out from people or not but as peoples need for participation grew, citizen journalism emerged through the help of technology to play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting and analysing news and information. As the media entered into the public sphere, it brought a change which gave a voice to the side-lined members of the public sphere. However the people needed more than what the media offered; they wanted to actively take part in the discussions in the society without needing an interpreter or a link between them and the state.

### Methodology

This study adopted survey research design. 400 copies of questionnaires were purposively distributed to residents of Auchi who have access to different blogging sites.

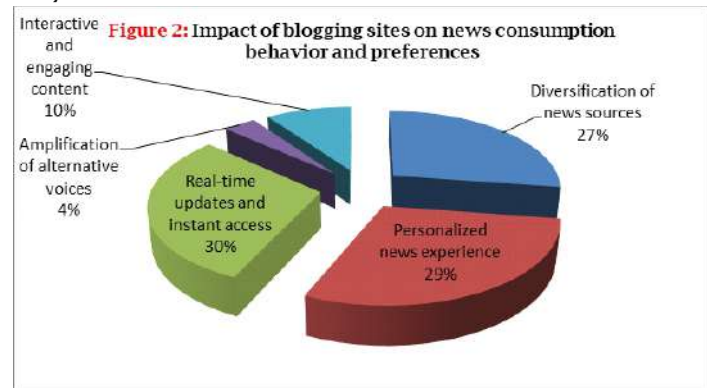
### Data Presentation and Analysis

During this research, 400 copies of questionnaires were printed and distributed to the respondents. Out of the above figure, 380 copies were returned and 20 copies were wrongly filled. This reduced the total number of questionnaires collected to 380 copies. The data collected is shown in the tables below;



(Source: Field Survey, 2024).

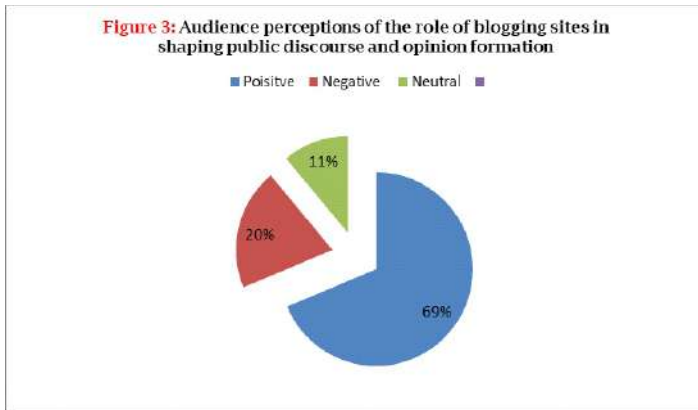
The data on figure 1 shows that a majority of the respondents (31%) rated the extent to which Nigerian audiences rely on blogging sites as sources of news as very high. This was followed by 29% of the respondents who rated it as high while 23% of the respondents rated it as moderate. Also, 12% of the respondents rated it as low while 5% rated theirs as very low.



(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

The data on figure 2 reveals that 27% of the respondents noted that the impact that of blogging sites has on news consumption behavior and preferences is the diversification of news sources; 29% choose personalized news experience; 30% choose real-time updates and instant access while 4% choose amplification of alternative voices 10% choose interactive and engaging content.

**Table 3:** Audience perceptions of the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation



(Source: Field Survey, 2024)

The data on Table 3 reveals that 69% of the respondents which constitute a majority of the respondents perceived the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation as positive while 20% of the respondents perceived it as negative and 11% of the respondents could not tell if it's positive or negative; so, they decided to stay neutral.

### Discussion of Findings

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do Nigerian audiences rely on blogging sites as sources of news?

The objective of this research question is to examine the extent to which Nigerian audiences rely on blogging sites as sources of news. The data on Table 1 was used to answer the research question. The data on Table 1 shows that a majority of the respondents (31%) rated the extent to which Nigerian audiences rely on blogging sites as sources of news as very high. This was followed by 29% of the respondents who rated it as high while 23% of the respondents rated it as moderate. Also, 12% of the respondents rated it as low while 5% rated theirs as very low.

Based on the above, Nigerian media audiences greatly rely on blogging sites as sources of news as these sites provide them with access to diverse perspectives and alternative viewpoints that may be underrepresented or marginalized in traditional media outlets. Independent bloggers, citizen journalists, and niche bloggers often cover topics and issues that are overlooked or ignored by mainstream media, offering audiences a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of current events, social issues, and political developments. Also, these sites deliver real-time updates and coverage of breaking news events, enabling Nigerian audiences to stay

informed about the latest developments as they unfold. Unlike traditional media, which may have limitations in terms of resources and broadcasting schedules, blogging sites can publish news content instantaneously, providing audiences with timely and up-to-date information on a continuous basis.

**Research Question 2:** What is the impact of blogging sites on news consumption behavior and preferences?

The objective of this research question is to assess the impact of blogging sites on news consumption behavior and preferences. The data on Table 2 was used to answer this research question. The data on Table 2 reveals that 104 respondents (27%) noted that the impact that of blogging sites has on news consumption behavior and preferences is the diversification of news sources; 111 respondents (29%) choose personalized news experience; 114 respondents (30%) choose real-time updates and instant access while 14 respondents (4%) choose amplification of alternative voices and 37 respondents (10%) choose interactive and engaging content.

Based on the above, blogging sites have had a significant impact on news consumption behavior and preferences. They offer a diverse range of perspectives, often catering to niche interests or alternative viewpoints not covered by traditional news outlets. This has led to a more fragmented media landscape, where individuals can choose sources that align with their specific interests and beliefs. Moreover, blogging sites have democratized news production, allowing ordinary individuals to become content creators and share their perspectives with a global audience. This has challenged the monopoly of traditional media organizations, fostering greater diversity of voices and opinions in the public sphere.

**Research Question 3:** How do audience perceive the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation?

The objective of this research question is to examine audience perceptions of the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation. The data on Table 3 was used to answer this research question. The data on Table 3 reveals that 69% of the respondents which constitute a majority of the respondents perceived the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation as positive while 20% of the respondents perceived it as negative and 11% of the respondents could not tell if it's positive or negative; so, they decided to stay neutral.

Based on the above, Audiences often have a positive perception of the role of blogging sites in shaping public discourse and opinion formation for several reasons. Firstly, blogging sites provide a

platform for diverse voices and perspectives that may not be represented in mainstream media. This inclusivity fosters a sense of empowerment among readers, as they have access to a wide range of viewpoints, ideologies, and expertise. Secondly, blogging sites often offer more in-depth analysis and commentary on issues compared to traditional news outlets, which may prioritize brevity and sensationalism. This depth allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of complex issues and form more nuanced opinions. Also, blogging sites encourage interactive engagement through comments sections and social media sharing, facilitating dialogue and debate among readers. This participatory aspect of blogging enhances democratic discourse by allowing individuals to contribute to public conversations and shape collective understanding.

### Conclusion

In Nigeria, the audience perception of the impact of blogging sites on news consumption habits reflects a complex interplay of factors shaped by the country's unique socio-political context and the evolving digital landscape. While blogging sites have undoubtedly influenced how Nigerians consume news, the overall perception is multifaceted and nuanced. Firstly, blogging sites have been celebrated for democratizing access to information, providing platforms for marginalized voices, and offering alternative perspectives not always covered by mainstream media. This inclusivity resonates with audiences seeking diverse viewpoints and a more comprehensive understanding of local and global issues.

However, the perception of blogging sites in Nigeria is not without skepticism. Concerns about the credibility and reliability of information shared on these platforms persist, as not all bloggers adhere to journalistic standards or fact-checking practices. This skepticism is exacerbated by the spread of misinformation and fake news, which can undermine trust in online sources and distort public discourse. Despite these challenges, the overall perception leans towards recognizing the positive impact of blogging sites on news consumption habits in Nigeria. They have contributed to a more pluralistic media landscape, encouraged citizen engagement, and fostered a culture of information sharing and dialogue. Moving forward, addressing issues of credibility and promoting media literacy will be crucial in maximizing the potential of blogging sites to enrich public discourse and enhance informed citizenship in Nigeria.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- i. Media organizations and bloggers should implement initiatives to enhance media literacy among the Nigerian audience, focusing on critical thinking skills and fact-checking abilities. By empowering individuals to discern credible information from misinformation or biased content on blogging sites, they can make more informed decisions about their news consumption habits.
- ii. Stakeholders in the media industry should encourage collaboration between blogging sites and traditional media outlets in Nigeria to uphold journalistic standards and ethics. By working together, they can ensure the accuracy, fairness, and reliability of news content disseminated through both platforms, thereby enhancing audience trust in online news sources.
- iii. Stakeholders in the media industry should promote policies and programs that support the diversity of voices and perspectives on Nigerian blogging sites. Encouraging the representation of marginalized communities and alternative viewpoints can enrich public discourse, foster empathy, and mitigate the spread of misinformation or polarizing narratives.

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