



AN ASSESSMENT OF JOURNALISTS' USE OF BLOGGING FOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN OWERRI, IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how journalists who blog in Owerri perceived the influence of their blogs on political development in Imo State, Nigeria. It specifically examined their awareness of the potential of blogs as tools for promoting political development, their commitment to this cause, and the challenges they faced, such as fact-checking versus the dissemination of rumours. Utilising a quantitative methodology, the research surveyed 230 registered journalists from the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Imo State Council, employing a structured questionnaire. The Cronbach's formula was used to test the reliability of the research instrument with a coefficient of 0.82. Data gotten for the study was presented and analysed using table distribution, frequency, percentage and mean analysis. The findings revealed a high level of awareness among bloggers regarding the political impact of their platforms, with 73% recognizing their potential to influence political discourse. However, the level of commitment to consistently using blogs for political development varied, with 59.9% demonstrating commitment. The study also highlighted a strong adherence to fact-checking among bloggers, though 52.1% acknowledged that rumours sometimes received prominence. Challenges identified included resource constraints, censorship, and audience disinterest, all of which hindered effective political engagement. The study concluded that while bloggers in Owerri were keenly aware of their potential to foster political development, their efforts were hampered by various obstacles. Recommendations included enhancing training, support systems, and collaboration among bloggers to strengthen their role in political development. Future research was advised to address the study's limitations by exploring diverse contexts and methodologies to better understand the evolving role of blogs in political engagement.

Keywords: Blogging, Political Development, Journalists, Civic Engagement, Imo State

Introduction

Until 2009, blogging was predominantly the work of individual creators or small groups, often focusing on niche topics. The advent of web publishing tools in the late 1990s revolutionised this landscape, enabling users with minimal technical expertise to easily publish content online (AIContentfy Team, 2024). The rapid growth of blogging has since reshaped the media environment, fundamentally altering information dissemination and political discourse (Cohen, 2009 cited in Ofei et al., 2024). With this, the evolution of blogging has continued to transform how information is shared and consumed. Blogs now serve as significant platforms for political commentary, advocacy, and activism (Kovach & Osenstiel, 2018).

The impact of blogging upon the mainstream media is immense and has been acknowledged by governments (Ofei, *et. al.*, 2024). In 2009, the presence of the journalism industry worldwide began to decline; it got to the point that several newspaper corporations were filing for bankruptcy, resulting in less direct competition between newspapers within the same circulation area. The decline of print journalism and the increasing reliance on digital media for news heightened the role of blogs in public discourse (Ofei, *et. al.*, 2024). Indeed, journalists increasingly relied on them as a shortcut for discussing emerging

societal as well as political issue. These blogs provide frequently updated and easily accessible information about the attitudes of politically active citizens (Wallsten, 2005 cited in Nelson et al., 2018).

In recent years, scholars such as Boulianne, 2015 and Towner, 2017, have emphasised the role of blogs in fostering political mobilization and democratic engagement. Blogs often serve as forums for political debate and activism, enabling individuals to engage in political discourse beyond the confines of traditional media (Tufekci, 2018). Nelson et al. (2018) opined that the advent and popularisation of blogging has generated wide discussion of the meaning of blogs to interpersonal relationships, popular culture, and political development. Though blogs cannot be sorted into perfectly distinct categories, it is safe to say that the blogs dedicated to commentary on political issues and current events have established themselves as a relatively discrete genre (Park, 2009 cited in Nelson et al., 2018).

Although the term 'blog' (which refers to a regularly updated personal web site with posts appearing in reverse chronological order) has been around since 1997, political blogging seems to be a more recent phenomenon (Zeri, 2014). Since the Obama experiment in 2008, politicians and political candidates the world over have come to embrace the use of social media for political purpose, especially in mobilizing support and engaging potential voters towards active participation in the political and electoral process. As a matter of fact, Nigeria as a player in the global arena had the first test of social media use for civic engagement during the 2011 general elections, but it was in 2015 during the Jonathan administration that the country witnessed the unleashing of the potentials of the new media in the political environment (Onwe, 2016).

Despite some advancements in using social media and blogging for political discourses, there remain significant gaps in understanding of journalists' perception of this practice. While global research has extensively explored the influence of political blogs in Western contexts, less attention has been paid to how these dynamics play out in countries like Nigeria. Researches (Adebayo & Adeleke, 2020; Nwogbaga & Isichei, 2021) indicate the effectiveness of social media and a political blog - *nairaland.com* in promoting development and political engagement. Scholars have dedicated a large amount of attention to social networking platforms generally without paying attention to sub-categories such as political blogs. Some have examined the political implications of the technical aspects of blogging, treating the blog as a technology (Park, 2009 cited in Nelson et al., 2018).

In view of the fact that blogs have become an integral part of the changing face of political development, an evaluation of journalists' perception regarding the use of blogs to engender political development become imperative. Therefore, this research assesses journalists use of blogging for political development in Owerri, Imo State and how this engenders political expression and political development. This study helped to ascertain the influence of blogging by journalists on political development, and identifying the challenges they face in maintaining credibility and managing misinformation.

Statement of the Problem

With the advent of blogs, many people have turned to them as sources of infotainment. Unlike newspapers and other conventional media platforms, blogs are not censored, providing a space for all types of news, where people can interpret information without the interference of gatekeepers. This freedom has led to the increasing popularity of blogs in Owerri and Nigeria as a whole. However, this openness has also introduced significant challenges, as blogs have become platforms where misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information can easily spread. The prevalence of rumours, sensationalism, and unverified content has raised concerns about the authenticity and objectivity of the information disseminated on these platforms. Many blogs today focus more on rumours and hearsay, often lacking verification and presenting biased, one-sided reports.

Amid these challenges, there is a growing need to explore whether bloggers can redirect their focus towards more constructive purposes. Specifically, can they use their platforms to promote and encourage political development? A recent example during the 2023 Nigerian general elections demonstrated the potential of blogs to mobilize voters and advocate for political development. Several blogs played crucial roles in providing information on the electoral process, advocating for transparency, and encouraging civic engagement, thus highlighting the impact that well-constructed and strategic content can have on political development.

Journalists who have transitioned into blogging hold a unique opportunity to shape political narratives and contribute to political development in their communities. However, it is unclear whether these bloggers are fully aware of the influence they wield and whether they are committed to using their platforms responsibly and effectively. Concerns persist regarding their tendency to prioritize sensational content over fact-based reporting, raising questions about the overall impact of blogs on political development. Given these issues, this study is conducted to explore the awareness, commitment, and challenges faced by journalists who are bloggers in Owerri regarding the use of their blogs as instruments for political development. The central question guiding this research is: How do journalists who are bloggers perceive the role of blogging as a tool for political development in the Owerri metropolis, and to what extent have they harnessed the potential of their blogs in promoting political development?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine how journalists who are bloggers in Owerri perceive the influence of private news blogs on political development in Nigeria. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. To find out whether journalists who are bloggers in Owerri are aware of the potential of their blogs as a tool to promote political development in Imo State
2. To examine the extent to which journalists who are bloggers are committed to using their blogs as a tool to promote political development in Imo State
3. To determine if journalists who are bloggers place prominence on rumours and hearsays other than fact finding and checking on political matters.
4. To ascertain how journalists who are bloggers in Owerri perceive the need to use their blogs as a tool to promote political development in Imo State
5. To assess the challenges journalists who are bloggers in Owerri face using their blogs as a tool to promote political development in Imo State

Literature Review

Vibrant democracy across the world depends on having informed electorate who find it convenient to engage the government and the political class in dialogue on various social networking platforms. Globally, the internet technology has enhanced the ability of social networking platform to inform, educate and influence people towards participating in the democratic process (Owolabi & Suleiman, 2022; Okoro et al., 2019). Owolabi and Suleiman (2022) opined that the social media as one of these networking platforms have succeeded in democratising the media of communication, making everybody to become reporters, editors and publishers thus, resulting in information overload that may be counterproductive, especially for the citizens with low media literacy skills. Additionally, established that social networking platforms serve as vital channels for disseminating political information and mobilising citizens, with roles expanding from basic information sharing to active political campaigning. There is a significant influential role of social media in Nigerian politics, bridging generational gaps and mobilising

diverse segments of the population (Bello & Kolawole-Ismail, 2017, Opeibi, 2019, Ofei, *et. al.*, 2024; Matyek et al., 2022).

In addition, blogging, which is an aspect of the social networking, has become global phenomenon and has exploded in popularity to the point where there are now more than 20 million blogs being tracked around the world (Safa et al., 2014). The term 'blog' bears the sense of 'personal news journalism'. They have risen in prominence as well as in numbers, with some leading blogs challenging the established order of the mainstream press. Nelson et al. (2018) explained that although the term 'blog' (which refers to a regularly updated personal web site with posts appearing in reverse chronological order) has been around since 1997, political blogging seems to be a more recent phenomenon. Indeed, at times the mainstream media has been put in the unusual position of reacting to news that bloggers generate. According to Safa et al. (2014), blogs have become a communicative alternative for society. Subsequently, blogs have quickly become prominent parts of the Internet landscape. Attention has largely been focused on a small subset of blogs: the politically-oriented filter blog (Zeri, 2014 cited in Nelson et al., 2018).

Following this, Nelson et al. (2018) examined the level of civic engagement through blogging using *Nairaland* users. In their study, the level of civic engagement was affected by the prominence given by the moderators of the *Nairaland* blog site to the stories that were published and this was measured by examining the number of views in relation to the prominence of the stories published. Issues of political conflict were prominently placed, usually on the front page of *Nairaland*. It was also observed that the subject matter with the highest amount of coverage, as well as participation, was the conduct, comportment, and activities of elected political officials in Nigeria. Inasmuch as misdemeanours, misappropriations, and questionable activities must be addressed by the media, it is equally important to acknowledge and commend that the activities and events reported on these social networking platforms are undertaken or embarked on to engender social change and development in Nigerian society.

Also, Onwe (2016) examined the impact of social media in engendering political engagement between the citizens and the political actors during the 2015 presidential election. Their findings showed that the participants in the study were not only aware but were actively involved in the 2015 electioneering campaigns through the social media. The consequence of the findings is the fact that the social media has enriched our political culture through the introduction of a form of revolution in political engagement. Olayiwola (2014) also, corroborated that Nigerians are found to use the social media extensively for political participation and communication during the general elections. He notes that key stakeholders in the electoral process, such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), politicians and political parties, the electorates, and civil society organisations have cultivated the use of the social media during elections, but there are strong arguments on the role of social media in politics and political participation.

Similar to this study, Johnson (2018) revealed that blogging facilitates political socialization by providing a platform for individuals to engage in political discussions and shape their political beliefs. To enhance political socialization and critical thinking, the author recommended that educators and policymakers incorporate blogging into curricula and online platforms. In addition, Lee et al. (2019) found that blogging significantly enhances political campaign outcomes by providing a platform for candidates to engage with voters and share their policies. As a recommendation, the authors suggested that political candidates and their teams incorporate blogging into their campaign strategies to improve voter engagement and campaign outcomes. Additionally, Brown (2017) investigated how blogging influences political representation, particularly in terms of online political representation. Through a qualitative case study of online political representation, the study found that blogging enhances political representation by providing a platform for underrepresented groups to voice their concerns and engage in political discussions. Furthermore, Patel et al. (2022) examined the relationship between blogging and

political knowledge, particularly among young adults. Their findings indicated a significant positive correlation between blogging and political knowledge among young adults.

While these studies provide valuable insights into digital political communication with so much emphasis on social media as a whole, these studies did not pay attention to specific platforms like blogging. Only a few studies did. The work of Safa et al. (2014) and Nelson et al. (2018) begins to bridge this gap by examining the rise of blogs as influential platforms, but they mainly focus on global trends or single platforms like Nairaland. Moreover, studies like Onwe (2016) and Olayiwola (2014) focus on social media use during specific electoral cycles, without addressing the continuous role of blogs in political discourse beyond elections. Therefore, this study intends to focus specifically on the use of blogging by journalists in Owerri, Imo State, as a tool for political development. Unlike the existing literature, which often emphasises the general impact of social media or specific platforms, this study examines how journalists use blogs to trigger political participation while navigating its challenges such as credibility, fact-checking, and rumour dissemination.

Theoretical Framework

Political Development Theory

Political development theory was propounded by a number of scholars like Pye (1966), Huntington (1971) and Finer (1988). Political development theory is one that relates the level of political development of a country to her development as a whole. Often than not, the theory is being adopted to explain the developmental process in a democracy. The fact that most Africa countries now practiced democracy makes the theory relevant in explaining the developmental process of most Africa countries, and Nigeria in particular. Somjee (1992) opines that political development is the growth of people's ability to hold their rulers accountable for their political action.

Huntington (1965, p.393) sees political development as “the institutionalization of political organizations and procedures”. Huntington says that the institutions of political organizations must be strengthened for there to be development. Pye (1966, p.45) contends that “Political development does involve mass participation and popular involvement in political activities”. Pye holds that for there to be development in a country, the majority of her citizens must participate in political activities. The relevance of the theory to developmental issues in Nigeria is that the theory is central in explaining developmental issues, especially in a democratic society like Nigeria notwithstanding the criticisms against political development theory on its application to the Third World Countries.

Methodology

The research method used for this study was the quantitative method using survey as the research design. The population of this study consists of registered journalists in Nigerian Union of Journalists, Imo state council. The population stands at 230 journalists in Imo state across 20 chapels (Nigerian Union of Journalists [NUJ], 2024). Since the population of the study is manageable, the census principle was adopted for this study. The instrument used to get information from the respondents was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed using the four-point Likert scale thus: strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The instrument was purposively administered to journalists who were also bloggers: either owners of private blogs or reporters for news media blogs. The Cronbach's formula was used to test the reliability of the research instrument. The Cronbach's coefficient for this study was 0.82. Data gotten for the study was presented and analysed using table distribution, frequency, percentage and mean analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Out of the 230 copies of the questionnaire distributed, one hundred and ninety-two copies were retrieved and valid for analysis. This accounted for 83.5% return rate which is considered ideal for this study.

Demographic Information

| Demographic Category | Options | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------|----------------|
| Age | 18-25 | 38 | 19.8 |
| | 26-35 | 60 | 31.3 |
| | 36-45 | 45 | 23.4 |
| | 46-55 | 29 | 15.1 |
| | 56 and above | 20 | 10.4 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>192</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Gender | Male | 120 | 62.5 |
| | Female | 72 | 37.5 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>192</i> | <i>100</i> |
| Educational Level | Secondary School | 10 | 5.2 |
| | Undergraduate | 80 | 41.7 |
| | Graduate | 70 | 36.5 |
| | Postgraduate | 28 | 14.6 |
| | Others | 4 | 2.1 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>192</i> | <i>100</i> |
| How long have you been blogging? | Less than 1 year | 15 | 7.8 |
| | 1-3 years | 50 | 26.0 |
| | 4-6 years | 60 | 31.3 |
| | 7-10 years | 40 | 20.8 |
| | More than 10 years | 27 | 14.1 |
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>192</i> | <i>100</i> |

Table 1 showed that the majority of bloggers in Owerri fall within the 26-35 age range, comprising 31.3% of the respondents. This is followed by those aged 36-45 at 23.4%, and the least represented age group is those 56 and above, making up only 10.4%. This suggested that blogging is particularly popular among young adults and early middle-aged individuals in Owerri, with older individuals less engaged in blogging activities. The gender distribution among bloggers indicates a significant disparity, with males representing 62.5% of the respondents, while females account for 37.5%. This substantial gender gap implies that blogging, especially regarding political development, is more male-dominated in this region.

In terms of educational attainment, most bloggers have at least an undergraduate degree. Specifically, undergraduates and graduates together constitute a substantial majority of 78.2%. Postgraduates make up 14.6%, while those with only a secondary school education represent the smallest group at 5.2%. This high level of education suggests that bloggers in Owerri are well-informed and likely possess the analytical skills necessary for discussing complex political issues. When considering blogging experience, a significant portion of bloggers have between 1-6 years of experience, comprising 57.3% of the respondents. This indicates a relatively seasoned blogging community, with a notable presence of long-term bloggers, as those with 7-10 years and more than 10 years of experience together account for 34.9%. The smaller proportion of bloggers with less than one year of experience (7.8%) suggests that while the entry of new bloggers continues, the community largely consists of experienced individuals.

Awareness and Perception

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total | Mean Score |
|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| I am aware that my blog can be used as a tool to promote political development in Owerri, Imo State. | 60 (31.3%) | 80 (41.7%) | 32 (16.7%) | 15 (7.8%) | 5 (2.6%) | 192 | 4.18 |
| I am knowledgeable about the potential of blogs to influence political development. | 50 (26.0%) | 70 (36.5%) | 40 (20.8%) | 22 (11.5%) | 10 (5.2%) | 192 | 3.81 |

Table 2 showed that a significant majority of bloggers in Owerri recognize the potential of their blogs to promote political development. Specifically, 31.3% of respondents strongly agree, and 41.7% agree that their blogs can be used for this purpose, totalling 73% who acknowledge this potential. This high level of awareness suggests that many bloggers are aware of their platforms' ability to positively influence political discussions and activities. However, the table also revealed a slightly lower mean score of 3.81 regarding the knowledge of how blogs can impact political development. Here, 26.0% strongly agree and 36.5% agree that they understand this potential, resulting in 62.5% who recognize the influence of their blogs. Meanwhile, 20.8% are neutral, 11.5% disagree, and 5.2% strongly disagree, indicating that while most bloggers see the potential, there is some variation in understanding. This suggests that not all bloggers fully grasp how to effectively use their blogs for political purposes

Commitment to Promoting Political Development

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total | Mean Score |
|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| I frequently use my blog to discuss political issues in Owerri, Imo State. | 30 (15.6%) | 60 (31.3%) | 50 (26.0%) | 40 (20.8%) | 12 (6.3%) | 192 | 3.18 |
| I believe that it is important to use my blog to promote political development in Owerri, Imo State. | 55 (28.6%) | 75 (39.1%) | 30 (15.6%) | 22 (11.5%) | 10 (5.2%) | 192 | 3.82 |
| I am committed to using my blog as a tool to promote political development in Owerri, Imo State. | 50 (26.0%) | 65 (33.9%) | 35 (18.2%) | 30 (15.6%) | 12 (6.3%) | 192 | 3.59 |

Table 3 showed that while many bloggers in Owerri recognised and were committed to the potential of their blogs for political development, there were significant variations in engagement and commitment levels. The table indicated that 46.9% of bloggers frequently discussed political issues on their blogs, reflecting that a significant number were actively involved in political discourse. However, nearly half of the bloggers (46.8%) either remained neutral or avoided discussing political topics, suggesting that while some were engaged, others were hesitant or faced challenges that limited their political content.

Regarding the belief in the importance of political content, 67.7% of bloggers saw it as crucial for political development. This strong belief showed that many bloggers understood the impact their blogs could have on political discussions. Yet, 27.1% of bloggers were either neutral or disagreed, indicating that some might not have fully grasped or prioritized the role of their blogs in political matters.

When assessing commitment, 59.9% of bloggers were dedicated to using their blogs for political development. This commitment was evident among those who strongly agreed (26.0%) or agreed (33.9%) with the importance of political content. However, 40.1% of bloggers were neutral or did not see their blogs as effective tools for political development, suggesting that barriers such as a lack of resources or confidence might have prevented some bloggers from fully committing.

Fact-Checking vs. Rumours and Hearsays

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total | Mean Score |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| I always verify facts before publishing political news on my blog. | 80 (41.7%) | 60 (31.3%) | 30 (15.6%) | 15 (7.8%) | 7 (3.6%) | 192 | 3.99 |
| Bloggers in Owerri place more prominence on rumours and hearsays than fact-finding and checking on political matters. | 40 (20.8%) | 60 (31.3%) | 50 (26.0%) | 30 (15.6%) | 12 (6.3%) | 192 | 3.31 |
| Fact-checking is very important to me when reporting political news. | 90 (46.9%) | 60 (31.3%) | 20 (10.4%) | 15 (7.8%) | 7 (3.6%) | 192 | 4.03 |

Table 4 shed light on the fact-checking practices and attitudes towards rumours and hearsays among bloggers in Owerri. The data indicated a strong emphasis on fact-checking, with 73% of respondents (combined Strongly Agree and Agree) affirming that they always verified facts before publishing political news on their blogs. This commitment to factual accuracy reflected a responsible journalistic approach, which was essential for upholding credibility and trustworthiness in political reporting.

Regarding the prominence of rumours and hearsays, the data presented a more nuanced perspective. While over half of the respondents (52.1%) acknowledged that some level of prominence was given to rumours and hearsays, a significant proportion (36.9%) expressed dissent. This suggested a divided perception within the blogging community about the prevalence of misinformation in political reporting and underscored the importance of prioritizing fact-finding and checking to mitigate its impact.

Furthermore, when examining the importance of fact-checking in political news reporting, the majority of respondents (78.2% combined Strongly Agree and Agree) affirmed its significance. This reaffirmed the commitment to upholding journalistic integrity and accuracy among bloggers in Owerri, highlighting the critical role they played in ensuring the dissemination of reliable information amidst the proliferation of rumours and hearsays.

Perception and Usage of Blogs for Political Development

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total | Mean Score |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| I perceive the need to use my blog to promote political development in Owerri, Imo State as very necessary. | 75 (39.1%) | 70 (36.5%) | 25 (13.0%) | 15 (7.8%) | 7 (3.6%) | 192 | 3.97 |
| I frequently publish content | 50 | 65 | 40 | 25 | 12 | 192 | 3.56 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------|-----|------|
| aimed at promoting political development. | (26.0%) | (33.9%) | (20.8%) | (13.0%) | (6.3%) | | |
| I collaborate with other bloggers or media to enhance political awareness and development. | 60 (31.3%) | 70 (36.5%) | 35 (18.2%) | 20 (10.4%) | 7 (3.6%) | 192 | 3.77 |

Table 5 showed the perceptions and actions of bloggers in Owerri concerning the promotion of political development and their collaborative efforts to enhance political awareness within their community. The data revealed a strong consensus among bloggers regarding the necessity of using their blogs as platforms for promoting political development. Specifically, 75 respondents (39.1%) strongly agreed, and 70 respondents (36.5%) agreed with the statement. This collective acknowledgment underscored the pivotal role bloggers saw themselves playing in shaping political discourse and fostering development within Owerri.

In terms of actual practice, a significant portion of respondents (59.9% combined Strongly Agree and Agree) indicated that they frequently published content aimed at promoting political development. However, the notable Neutral category (20.8%) suggested some variability or inconsistency in their engagement. This variability might have reflected differing priorities or challenges faced by bloggers in consistently producing political content, indicating potential areas for improvement in their efforts to promote political development.

Moreover, the data revealed a positive inclination towards collaboration among bloggers to enhance political awareness and development, with 67.8% (combined Strongly Agree and Agree) expressing a willingness to collaborate. This suggested a recognition of the collective impact that collaborative efforts could have in amplifying political messaging and fostering community engagement. However, the significant Neutral category (18.2%) hinted at some ambivalence or uncertainty towards collaborative endeavours, indicating a need for further exploration of potential barriers or challenges to collaboration.

Challenges Faced in Blogging for Political Development

| Statement | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Total | Mean Score |
|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-------|------------|
| I face a lack of resources in using my blog to promote political development. | 70 (36.5%) | 60 (31.3%) | 30 (15.6%) | 22 (11.5%) | 10 (5.2%) | 192 | 3.77 |
| I face censorship issues in using my blog to promote political development. | 50 (26.0%) | 65 (33.9%) | 40 (20.8%) | 25 (13.0%) | 12 (6.3%) | 192 | 3.50 |
| I face audience disinterest in using my blog to promote political development. | 55 (28.6%) | 60 (31.3%) | 35 (18.2%) | 30 (15.6%) | 12 (6.3%) | 192 | 3.54 |
| I face personal safety concerns in using my blog to promote political development. | 65 (33.9%) | 60 (31.3%) | 30 (15.6%) | 22 (11.5%) | 15 (7.8%) | 192 | 3.72 |

Table 6 showed the challenges encountered by bloggers in Owerri while utilizing their platforms for political development. A significant concern highlighted was the lack of resources, with 67.8% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they faced this challenge. This shortage of resources—whether financial, technological, or informational—posed a barrier to effectively engaging in political discourse and advocacy.

Additionally, 59.9% of bloggers reported experiencing censorship issues, indicating that restrictions on freedom of expression or online content regulation hindered their ability to freely express political opinions. Another notable challenge was audience disinterest, with 59.9% of respondents perceiving it as a barrier. This suggested that despite their efforts to engage the audience in political discussions, a significant proportion may not have been actively interested, potentially limiting the impact of their advocacy efforts.

Furthermore, personal safety concerns were prevalent among bloggers, with 33.9% strongly agreeing and 31.3% agreeing that they faced such concerns. This underscored the risks associated with voicing political opinions online and highlighted the importance of ensuring bloggers' safety and security in their advocacy efforts.

Discussion of Findings

Table 2 revealed that a substantial majority of bloggers in Owerri are aware of their blogs' potential to contribute to political development. Specifically, 31.3% of respondents strongly agreed, and 41.7% agreed with the statement, resulting in a total of 73% who recognize the political impact of their blogs. This high level of awareness supports the conclusions of Nelson, Loto, and Omojola (2018), who found that platforms like Nairaland significantly influence civic engagement by highlighting political issues. Johnson (2018) also supports this, emphasizing that blogging enhances political socialization and engagement. According to the political development theory (Huntington, 1965; Pye, 1966), understanding the potential of media platforms is crucial for democratic engagement and accountability. The high level of awareness among bloggers in Owerri indicates a clear recognition of their role in shaping political discourse and fostering development.

Table 3 showed a mixed level of commitment among bloggers regarding their role in political development. While 26.0% strongly agreed and 33.9% agreed that they are committed to using their blogs for political development (totalling 59.9%), a significant portion (40.1%) was neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. This variation suggests that although many bloggers acknowledge the importance of their blogs for political engagement, actual commitment varies. Onwe (2016) observed that while social media users are actively involved during electoral periods, consistent engagement can be inconsistent. The political development theory emphasizes that continuous participation is essential for political advancement (Pye, 1966). The mixed commitment among bloggers may be influenced by factors such as resource constraints or personal challenges, affecting their ability to consistently promote political development.

Table 4 indicated that 73% of respondents (combined Strongly Agree and Agree) consistently verify facts before publishing political news, demonstrating a strong commitment to maintaining credibility. However, 52.1% of respondents acknowledged that rumours and hearsays still receive some level of prominence, with 36.9% disagreeing, reflecting a divided perception regarding misinformation. Johnson (2018) found similar tensions between factual reporting and misinformation, and Brown (2017) highlighted challenges in maintaining credibility amidst rumours. The political development theory (Huntington, 1965) stresses the importance of accurate information for enhancing political participation and accountability. The high commitment to fact-checking among bloggers suggests a strong adherence to

responsible journalism, though the ongoing prominence of rumours indicates a need for continued efforts to balance accuracy and the pressures of digital media.

Table 5 showed that 39.1% of respondents strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed (totalling 75.6%) with the need to use their blogs for political development, indicating a positive inclination towards leveraging their platforms for this purpose. Additionally, 67.8% expressed willingness to collaborate to enhance political awareness and development. These findings support the political development theory, which emphasizes the role of media and collaboration in fostering democratic engagement (Huntington, 1965; Pye, 1966). However, the 18.2% who were neutral about collaboration suggests some ambivalence or barriers that could affect collaborative efforts. Addressing these barriers could improve the effectiveness of political engagement among bloggers in Owerri.

Table 6 identified several significant challenges for bloggers in Owerri. The lack of resources was noted by 67.8% of respondents (combined Strongly Agree and Agree), indicating a major barrier to effective political discourse. This finding aligns with Johnson (2018), who identified resource constraints as a common issue. Censorship was reported by 59.9% of respondents, highlighting restrictions on free expression, consistent with Smith et al. (2020). Audience disinterest was also noted by 59.9% of respondents, suggesting that despite efforts, engagement levels may be low, which limits advocacy impact. Personal safety concerns were reported by 33.9% who strongly agreed and 31.3% who agreed, emphasizing the risks of online political expression, as noted by Brown (2017). The theory of political development (Pye, 1966) underscores the need for a supportive environment for effective political participation. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the role of blogs in promoting political development and ensuring that bloggers can contribute meaningfully to political discourse.

Conclusion

In today's political landscape, blogging has emerged as a transformative force, profoundly altering how political information is disseminated and consumed. The rise of digital media platforms has enabled journalists who blog to serve as both commentators and watchdogs, providing real-time updates and analyses that traditional media may not always offer. This democratization of information has amplified public participation and scrutiny, making blogging a critical component of modern political engagement and development.

This study highlights the pivotal role that journalists in Owerri, Imo State, perceive and undertake in promoting political development through their blogging activities. The findings reveal a high level of awareness among these journalists regarding the potential impact of their platforms on political discourse. Despite this awareness, the extent of their commitment to using their blogs for political development shows significant variability, indicating areas for improvement in engagement and consistency. The strong emphasis on fact-checking and the recognition of the importance of collaboration underscore the responsible journalistic attitudes prevalent among the bloggers in Owerri. However, challenges such as resource constraints, censorship, audience disinterest, and personal safety concerns pose significant barriers to their efforts.

Nevertheless, the study has several limitations. First, its focus on journalists in Owerri may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or broader contexts. The specific cultural, social, and political dynamics of Owerri could influence the results, and similar studies in different areas might yield different outcomes. Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias or inaccuracies in respondents' perceptions, which could affect the accuracy and reliability of the findings. Additionally, the study does not account for the rapid advancements in technology and changing social media trends, which could impact blogging practices and political engagement in ways not captured by this research.

Addressing these limitations in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of blogging in political development. By considering different contexts, utilising diverse methodologies, and exploring the impact of external factors, future studies can enhance the relevance and applicability of findings to broader contexts and evolving trends in digital media. Through sustained support and collaborative efforts, journalists who blog can significantly contribute to fostering political awareness and development within their communities. Future studies would benefit from longitudinal approaches that track these changes over time.

Recommendations

The study recommends:

1. Implementing training programs to further enhance bloggers' understanding of how to effectively leverage their platforms for political engagement and impact, given their high level of awareness about the potential of their blogs.
2. Establishing structured support systems and resources to encourage consistent and dedicated blogging efforts towards political development, addressing the observed mixed levels of commitment.
3. Forming collaborative fact-checking networks to bolster the accuracy and credibility of political content, in response to the ongoing prominence of rumours despite strong fact-checking practices.
4. Creating opportunities for collaboration among bloggers to enhance collective efforts in political awareness and development, in light of their significant recognition of the need for political development.
5. Advocating for increased support and resources, including legal protection and financial aid, to effectively address the barriers of resource constraints, censorship, and audience disinterest faced by bloggers.

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