

Influence of Online Media on Governance in Nigeria: The United States-Based Sahara Reporters as a Case Study

Authors : Sheriff Folarin, Oluwafunke Folarin, Hadassah Hussaini, Victor Jubril, Olaniyi Ayodele

Abstract : Using a famous, unrestrained and fiery United States-based, Nigerian-owned Sahara Reporters as a case study, this paper examined the impact of online-based media on governance in Nigeria. The discourse is premised on the thesis that the internet has changed the face of journalism and that the mainstream but online-based media have made journalism more participatory than ever. Everyone who has something to say finds it easy to say it quickly and conveniently, unhinged or without being censored. This has made online journalism very popular and the number of online-based news platforms to be on the increase. As these platforms have given the citizens a means to interact and added to the content of the news, they have also succeeded in promoting partisanship. It thus becomes necessary to study the impact of the rabid news platform, Sahara Reporters, on governance in Africa's biggest democracy, Nigeria. Few studies have examined the impact on governance of mainstream-online media platforms and those studies that did, have only focused on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. This paper is a product of a bigger study, in which the research design entailed semi-structured interviews with participants from different sectors of the society and an analysis of contents from the Sahara Reporters website, from which data were collected. The findings revealed that through uncensored reporting and citizen participation on the platform of Sahara Reporters, there had been a significant people influence on governance in Nigeria, with government at two levels (national and state) sometimes shifting or yielding grounds, particularly from 2011-2016. The study also recognized the presence of counter-forces in the online community who want to discredit the information on the site. Through the lens of media dependency theory, the study concluded that the public now increasingly depends on online news media for information and the more news these media provide, the more the people depend on it, making it easy for them to influence governance.

Keywords : governance, media, online news, Sahara reporters

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