



From Newspaper Op-Eds to Twitter Threads: The Changing Landscape of Opinion Expression and Public Discourse in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: The proliferation of social media has expanded opportunities for participatory journalism and transformed how individuals produce, disseminate and engage with media content. While existing scholarship has extensively examined the relationship between journalism and social media, comparatively limited attention has been paid to the emerging forms and genres of journalistic content circulating on these platforms. One such emerging form is the Twitter thread, which increasingly provides opportunities for sustained opinion expression beyond the traditional newspaper opinion-editorial format.

Objectives: This study examined how Twitter threads are being used as alternative platforms for opinion expression and the implications for public discourse in Nigeria.

Method: The study adopted a qualitative approach, examining opinion-oriented Twitter threads from three selected Nigerian Twitter accounts to explore their similarities with traditional newspaper op-eds and their contribution to public discourse.

Results: The analysis demonstrated that journalists and ordinary citizens increasingly use Twitter threads to articulate personal opinions, interpret public issues and contribute to ongoing societal conversations in ways that resemble newspaper opinion-editorial writing.

Conclusion: Twitter threads are emerging as alternative spaces for opinion journalism, broadening access to public commentary and reshaping the dynamics of opinion expression and public discourse in Nigeria.

Unique Contribution: The study extends scholarship on digital journalism by examining the Twitter thread as an emerging genre of online opinion expression and highlighting its relationship with the traditional newspaper op-ed.

Key Recommendation: Journalists, media educators and digital media practitioners should promote responsible, evidence-based and ethically informed opinion expression on social media to strengthen the quality of public discourse.

Keywords: Newspaper Op-Eds, Twitter Threads, Opinion Expression, Public Discourse, Nigeria



INTRODUCTION

The practice of journalism has undergone significant transformation with the emergence of the internet and the proliferation of digital media technologies. Social media platforms, in particular, have expanded opportunities for information production, dissemination and audience participation, blurring the traditional boundaries between professional journalism and citizen-generated content. Consequently, individuals can now report events, interpret public issues, express opinions and participate in public conversations without necessarily relying on established media organisations. While scholarly attention has increasingly focused on the implications of these technological developments for journalism and mass communication, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the nature, forms and emerging genres of content produced and circulated through social media platforms.

This concern aligns with Miller et al.'s (2016) argument in *How the World Changed Social Media* that understanding social media requires moving beyond the study of platforms and their technological features to examine the content people produce, share and communicate through them. They emphasise that content genres migrate across platforms, acquiring new forms and communicative possibilities in the process. This perspective underscores the importance of examining not only social media as channels of communication but also the evolving content forms through which users articulate experiences, opinions and interpretations of societal issues. One such emerging form is the Twitter thread, which enables users to connect multiple posts to develop extended arguments, narratives and commentaries beyond the limitations of individual tweets.

Of particular interest is the increasing use of Twitter threads for opinion expression in ways that resemble the traditional newspaper opinion-editorial, popularly known as the op-ed. Traditionally, op-eds provide a platform for journalists, academics, public intellectuals and other commentators to express personal viewpoints, interrogate public issues and contribute to societal debates. With the growing popularity of Twitter threads, similar forms of opinion expression are increasingly taking place outside conventional newspaper platforms. Nigerian journalists, activists and other socially engaged individuals now employ threads to interpret events, criticise public policies, interrogate institutional practices and advance arguments on issues of public interest. Although some threads reproduce or adapt previously published newspaper articles, speeches and broadcast commentaries, others constitute independently developed opinion pieces that bear striking similarities to the structure and communicative functions of traditional op-eds.

Despite growing scholarly interest in social media, citizen journalism and digital participation, the use of Twitter threads as an emerging vehicle for opinion journalism remains relatively underexplored, particularly within the Nigerian media context. Existing discussions have largely emphasised the technological affordances of social media, their implications for journalistic practice and their capacity to facilitate citizen participation, with comparatively limited attention to how specific content formats reproduce or transform established journalistic genres. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of how Twitter threads are employed as



alternative spaces for structured opinion expression and the implications of this development for public commentary and discourse. This gap provides the justification for examining the relationship between the traditional newspaper op-ed and the emerging practice of opinion expression through Twitter threads.

Against this background, this study examines the use of Twitter threads as digital alternatives to newspaper opinion-editorial articles in Nigeria. Specifically, it analyses six selected threads from Nigerian Twitter accounts to establish how their structure, content and modes of argumentation reflect the characteristics of traditional op-eds. It further explores how this emerging form of digital opinion expression contributes to participatory journalism and the changing dynamics of public discourse in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mass Media, Social Media and the Development of Participatory Journalism

The growing prominence of social media and citizen journalism has been partly attributed to perceived limitations of traditional mass media, particularly their susceptibility to political and economic influences. The economic imperatives of media production, including the pursuit of patronage and commercial interests, often expose media organisations and practitioners to the influence of political and economic elites (Opuamie-Ngoa, 2010, pp. 141–142). Similarly, government interference through restrictive regulations, censorship and other forms of control can undermine press freedom and influence the quality and diversity of information available to citizens (Patterson, 2013; Sampaio-Dias, 2019). These constraints have strengthened the appeal of social media as alternative spaces for information dissemination and public expression.

Social media has consequently transformed audiences from passive recipients of media content into active participants in information production and circulation. Through these platforms, ordinary citizens can document events, publish reports, share multimedia content and reach global audiences in real time. Jenkins (2006) describes this development as the emergence of individuals as media creators. Similarly, Paterson (2013, p. 2) observes that social media provides politically engaged individuals with unprecedented opportunities to bypass and influence traditional information flows. Mudhai (2011) also notes that the increasing use of social media for real-time discussions has compelled conventional media organisations to adapt their news-gathering and reporting practices to remain relevant.

This transformation has implications for citizenship, public participation and the production of knowledge. Rosen (2006) argues that people formerly regarded as audiences have become active participants in media production, while Jenkins et al. (2007) conceptualise internet-based communication as a participatory social process through which individuals collectively produce and circulate information. Miller et al. (2016, p. 7) similarly emphasise that social media should be understood as much in terms of social interaction as communication. These perspectives



highlight the capacity of digital platforms to expand participation in public discourse and create opportunities for previously marginalised voices.

However, participatory journalism does not necessarily operate independently of mainstream media. Moyo's (2009) study of SMS messages and blogging during Zimbabwe's 2008 elections demonstrates that citizen journalism can assume hybrid forms, involving interactions between professional media organisations and citizen contributors. Patterson (2013) consequently questions whether such relationships represent genuine participatory journalism or merely an arrangement through which commercial media organisations benefit from freely supplied user-generated content. Furthermore, the democratisation of content production has created challenges relating to misinformation, disinformation, propaganda and accountability. Mare, Mabweazara and Moyo (2019) observe that the low barriers to digital expression have facilitated the mass production and circulation of misleading and malicious information.

Although these challenges warrant scholarly attention, they do not diminish the significance of social media as an expanding space for civic participation and public commentary. Rather, they underscore the need to examine the different forms of content through which individuals engage public issues. It is within this context that the present study situates Twitter threads as an emerging vehicle for opinion expression and participatory journalism.

Evolution of the Op-Ed

The opinion-editorial, popularly known as the op-ed, is an established journalistic genre through which individuals express personal viewpoints and offer interpretations of issues of public interest. Although the practice is traced to Herbert Bayard Swope of *The New York Evening World* in the 1920s, the modern op-ed page gained wider prominence when *The New York Times* introduced its own in September 1970. The newspaper's editors described its purpose as stimulating new thinking and discussion on public issues (*Op-ed Page*, 1970, p. 2). Its subsequent popularity encouraged other newspapers and journals to establish similar platforms (Scolow, 2010).

The term *op-ed* derives from the words *opinion* and *editorial* and refers to an article expressing the viewpoint of an author, usually someone outside the publication's editorial board. Over time, the genre attracted contributors from diverse professional and intellectual backgrounds, including academics, diplomats, military officers and public commentators (Scolow, 2010). This development broadened the range of perspectives represented in newspaper commentary and established the op-ed as an important platform for public debate.

Despite its established position in journalism, the op-ed has no universally prescribed structure or length. King (2014), in a survey of opinion articles published by selected newspapers and online platforms, found considerable variations in their word counts. Beyond length, the defining characteristics of the genre include individualised expression, argumentation, interpretation and the presentation of perspectives on matters of public interest. Scolow (2010, pp. 289–290)



documents editorial debates at *The New York Times* concerning the quality, diversity and intellectual depth of contributions. These discussions suggest that the value of an op-ed rests less on rigid stylistic conventions than on its capacity to provide meaningful analysis, informed perspectives and stimulating commentary.

The flexibility of the genre is particularly relevant to its possible migration to digital platforms. Whereas newspaper op-eds are subject to editorial selection, publication schedules and space limitations, social media enables individuals to publish extended opinions directly to audiences. Twitter threads, through their interconnected posts, provide a format for developing arguments and presenting commentary in ways that potentially reproduce important features of traditional op-ed writing.

Public Sphere and News Media

The relationship between opinion journalism and public discourse can be further understood through the concept of the public sphere. Habermas (1962), in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, conceptualises the public sphere as a space in which private individuals come together to discuss matters of collective concern and articulate societal interests. He emphasises the importance of open participation and public deliberation in the formation of public opinion. Historically, newspapers, coffee houses, literary societies and other forums have provided spaces for such exchanges.

The press, particularly through opinion and editorial pages, has played an important role in facilitating public debate. Scolow (2010) identifies the op-ed as a forum for opinion and commentary that contributes to the formation of public discourse. However, Habermas also cautions that commercial and privileged interests can undermine the democratic character of the public sphere by influencing the issues and opinions that receive public attention. This concern remains relevant to conventional media, where editorial gatekeeping and institutional interests can constrain the diversity of voices represented in public debate.

Social media introduces additional possibilities for public participation by enabling individuals to articulate opinions and engage public issues with fewer institutional barriers. Nevertheless, its democratic potential is accompanied by challenges involving misinformation, propaganda and unequal access to digital communication. Despite these limitations, social media provides an important contemporary space for public expression and interaction. Twitter, in particular, has facilitated the exchange of opinions, interpretations and arguments on social, political and economic issues, making it a relevant platform for examining the changing character of the public sphere.

Twitter and Public Discourse

Twitter, now known as X, has developed into an important platform for information dissemination, public commentary and social interaction. Its text-oriented format and emphasis



on concise communication have made it particularly useful for sharing immediate reactions and perspectives on unfolding events. The platform has attracted political leaders, journalists, activists and other public figures, thereby becoming an important space for public communication and debate (Smith, 2012; Bowman, 2016).

One significant feature of the platform is the thread, which enables users to connect multiple posts to communicate ideas that cannot be adequately expressed in a single tweet. By allowing users to develop extended arguments, narratives and commentaries, threads have expanded the possibilities of opinion expression beyond the brevity traditionally associated with individual tweets. They have consequently become useful instruments for discussing social, cultural and political issues, attracting public attention and stimulating engagement.

In Nigeria, journalists, activists, commentators and other professionals increasingly employ Twitter threads to interpret national developments, interrogate public policies and express opinions on matters of societal concern. Some of these threads exhibit characteristics associated with newspaper op-eds, particularly in their presentation of arguments, subjective interpretations and sustained commentary. This development raises questions about the extent to which Twitter threads are becoming alternative platforms for opinion journalism and how they contribute to contemporary public discourse.

Clarke and Grieve (2019), in their examination of Donald Trump's communicative use of Twitter, demonstrate the significance of online communication in understanding how public figures construct and communicate interpretations of unfolding events. Building on this perspective, the present study examines six selected opinion-oriented Twitter threads from Nigerian accounts to investigate how their authors employ the platform to articulate public concerns and provide analysis and perspectives in ways reminiscent of traditional newspaper op-eds. Through this examination, the study explores the emergence of Twitter threads as an alternative form of opinion expression and their implications for participatory journalism and public discourse in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts qualitative content analysis, with particular emphasis on textual analysis. The selected Twitter handles are @senwele, @g... and @SirWilliam, belonging respectively to Biyi Olusolape, a freelance editor and public affairs commentator; Gimba Kakanda, a columnist with *The Daily Trust*; and William, a social commentator and activist known on Twitter by that name. Three threads from each account, published within a two-month period (June – July 2021), were purposively selected for analysis.

The analysis is guided by three variables used to assess the extent to which the threads are structured to resemble newspaper op-eds: (a) quality of argument, referring to the seriousness, public relevance and topicality of the issues addressed; (b) formality of style, examining the structured presentation of commentary on matters of public concern; and (c) length and



connectedness, focusing on the number of tweets in each thread and the coherence of the sequence of posts. Each variable is qualitatively examined and interpreted in relation to three key dimensions: journalistic practice, the tradition of social commentary and the concept of the public sphere. These dimensions provide the analytical basis for understanding the op-ed as a journalistic genre.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quality of Argument and Contemporaneity of Themes

The themes addressed in the selected threads range from Central Bank policies, police reform, corporate corruption, governance, law and order to politics, social criticism, social relations, internet culture and ethnic bigotry. This thematic diversity reflects the use of Twitter threads to engage with issues of public interest and contemporary relevance.

For instance, on 12 June 2021, Nigeria's Democracy Day, @g... published a 13-tweet thread (approximately 1,320 characters) examining the intersection of history, democracy and dictatorship. On 1 July 2021, the same account published a five-tweet thread (approximately 700 characters) on political partisanship and civic responsibility in Nigeria. The thread criticised uncritical party loyalty among citizens and advocated a more discerning approach to political choices based on the quality of candidates.

Twitter (X) Thread Example 1a: Gimba Kakande (@gimbakakande)



Similarly, on 3 July 2021, @g... published a 10-tweet thread (approximately 1,290 characters) challenging the perceptions of some sections of the southern Nigerian media and commentators regarding attitudes towards terrorism and banditry in northern Nigeria. The author disputed



suggestions that northerners generally support or sympathise with the activities of these criminal groups.

Twitter (X) Thread Example 1b: Gimba Kakande (@gimbakakande)



Twitter (X) Thread Example 1c: Gimba Kakande (@gimbakakande)



On 23 July 2021, @senwele posted a 31 tweet-thread which juxtaposes budget data and focal points, indices of development and accruable revenues, political patronage and of Lagos state and other South-Western states and argues that despite the perception in some quarters of ethnic marginalization as bane of underdevelopment in the southwest, the southwest has indeed has a bountiful experience in the political rotation. If anything, mismanagement, like due prioritization and waste of resources, are factors that draw the region back. On July 28, 2021, @senwele posted a 32 tweet- thread approximating character count of 3,520 to criticize the secessionist agenda of the Yoruba Nation campaign, arguing that corruption in governance at all levels, particularly at state government level, is responsible to social inequality rather perceived ethnic domination/subjugation. Same day he posted another 11 tweet-thread 1265 in character-count, which is a sort of second part to the first thread where he tries to draw correlation between anti-corruption agencies, cybercrime, and national image, all of which he then links to the collapse of nation building spirit such as lacking in the Yoruba Nation campaign.

Twitter (X) Thread Example 2a: Abolodefeeloju (@senwele)



Twitter (X) Thread Example 2b: Abolodefeeloju (@senwele)



Twitter (X) Thread Example 2c: Abolodefeeloju (@senwele)



@_SirWilliam_'s threads are usually 2 tweet-long, but he sometimes writes longer threads patterned in the form of standard article. One of such is the 4 tweet-thread of 560 characters he posts on June 22 2021 where he mounts a biting criticism on the laxity and irresponsibility of the government in tackling the banditry and massacre in North central of Nigeria. On July 12 2021 he posts another 4 tweet-thread, totaling 528 characters, in which he argues that Music and Telecoms/IT sectors are evidence that if the government allows and incentivizes the youth through decentralization of the broad spectrum of economic landscape, there will be phenomenal growth in the economy and job provision. On July 15 2021, @_SirWilliam_ weighs in with another 4 tweet-thread 515 characters on the issue of the Pay-As-You-Go cable television before the legislature, arguing that the problem is not that the cable TV is too expensive in the Monthly Subscription model, but it is just that people have been impoverished and their purchasing power reduced by draconian economic policies of the government.



Twitter (X) Thread Example 3a: William (@_SirWilliam_)



Twitter (X) Thread Example 3b: William (@_SirWilliam_)



Twitter (X) Thread Example 3c: William (@_SirWilliam_)



Length and Connectedness of Threads

A survey of tweet threads between the months of June and July 2021 on the three accounts reveals that @senwele posted about 18 threads with the average word count being 2450 per thread; @g... posted 15 threads with word count averaging 715 and @_SirWilliam_ posted 18 threads with word count average of 420. By sheer length, it is observed that if these tweets are put together say as a word document, they will be equal to or longer than the average op-ed in conventional newspaper going by King's empirical study.

Formality of Style

The tweet-threads examined here are different in tone and mood to most tweets that emanate from the "Nigeria Twitter". The average tweet includes banter, news announcement, business promotion, motivational nuggets and inter-personal ripostes. The 140-character limit means the use of abbreviation, slanging, memes and son is in surplus supply in tweet composition in order to fully utilize a single tweet to a desired result. Similarly, many tweets are light-hearted comments and jokes, with others indulging in wordplay and punning. The tweet-threads



examined here are also different from threads that are now becoming a common fixture in Nigerian Twitter sphere i.e. threads announcing and promoting foreign education and migration prospects. The tweet-threads that we consider are purposively written with intentions that they are formal documents that are supposed to serve as forms of critique, advocacy or moral conscience in the challenging climates of the country's social, religious and political life. With that weight of responsibility in mind, the authors of the tweets can be seen to have adapted a formal style shorn of daily linguistic infelicities that normally characterize social media lingua.

CONCLUSION

The idea of op-ed involves a purposive blending of critical and socio-political commentary with the idea of reconstituting a public sphere. The use to which threads that we have examined here are put reaffirms this notion. The logic and frequency of commentary on issues of public importance show the need to participate in socio-political discussions in the country at this material time and influence public opinion and perception.

One key finding of this study is that Twitter-threads are used instead of or concurrently with op-eds in the mass media. For instance, one of the account-owner discussed here, @g..., maintains regular column with the Daily Trust and his tweets, including those we have examined for this article, are often used as the spring-board to test the opinions that would later be published for his public in the newspaper. @senwele has also published some of his opinions as op-ed in *Premium Times*, the Nigerian online newspaper. A precursor tweet to one appraised above in which he criticizes Yoruba Nation's activism as misplaced agitation in fact appears on the site on *Premium Times* on April 11, 2021 with the title "The Boy Who Cried Wolf in Sheep's Clothing". It cannot be ascertained if @_SirWilliam_ publishes his opinions in the mass media, but if he does, those tweets would definitely make splendid op-eds.

If one of the traditional objectives of the op-ed is to provoke critical engagement with the subject under discussion and influence opinion about an issue of public importance, what is the nature and quality of reception and engagements of subject matters of Twitter-threads? Compared to another mass media genre, "Letter to the Editors" which often serves as rejoinders to op-ed in newspapers, do interlocutors' responses or comments under tweets measure up to the seriousness of the threads or does it get subsumed in the avalanche of typical social media jokes and memes? These are more perspectives that demand critical enquiry and further studies in the understanding of the relationships and differences between the Twitter-thread and the op-ed.



Ethical Clearance

The researchers adhered to all applicable research ethics requirements throughout the conduct of this study.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Moronke Ogundele conceived the study and developed its research questions, design and methodology. Eserinune McCarty Mojaye provided guidance in compiling the literature and preparing the initial draft of the manuscript, while Samaila Mande guided the interpretation of the data. All authors critically reviewed and approved the final manuscript and accept responsibility for its overall content and similarity index.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly and Quillbot for paraphrasing and restructuring. The authors carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all outputs generated by the tool and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript content.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request subject to ethical and confidentiality requirements.

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