
EMERGING GENRES IN ONLINE NEWSPAPER COMMENTS: A CHALLENGE OF REGIONAL DIVIDES

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Abstract

This study investigates patterns of reader engagement in the comment sections of six major online newspapers in Nigeria: The Punch Online, Daily Trust, Premium Times, The Guardian, Vanguard, and The Nation. Five common genres of reader discourse are identified by the study using a discourse-analytic approach: political alignment, moralising speech, humorous or ironic intervention, ethno-regional positioning, and deliberative involvement. With the use of exemplary extracts, a comparative examination of their distribution shows how contextual elements and rhetorical methods differ across the outlets. The findings indicate that, Nigerian online comment sections serve as dispersed forums for public discussion that are influenced by editorial style, political affiliation, and regional identity. Examples of serious and extended discussion, especially in Premium Times and The Guardian, demonstrate how comment sections can support civic discourse and democratic practice even while satire and partisan debate predominate. The study comes to the conclusion that in Nigeria's changing media landscape, online comment spaces should be acknowledged as significant venues for public discourse and citizen involvement, notwithstanding their divisive characteristics.

Keywords: Genre, Online, Newspaper, Comments, Regional Divide

Introduction

As online journalism evolved, the audience interactions with news have changed, giving rise to spaces where readers are both consumers and co-producers of meaning. The comment sections of online newspapers are among the most important of these areas; they have developed into interactive platforms where a variety of voices can connect, debate, and create. The online comments are not merely continuations of the "letters to the editor" tradition; rather, they create new modes of communication that merge social media, journalism, and casual chat. According to Newman et al. (2024), these remarks can be viewed from a genre perspective as new rhetorical practices influenced by sociocultural settings and digital advantages. Some choose to write deliberate short essays, while others mimic editorial writing, satire, or the condensed style of social media memes. These mixed genres demonstrate the creative thinking of online audiences as well as the shifting of genre lines in the digital

era. However, the way these genres develop is not consistent; reader comments, the genres that flourish, and how they are viewed are all influenced by regional linguistic styles, media cultures, and civic discourse traditions.

This uneven landscape indicates regional differences in online participation: conflicting styles characterised by polarisation, irony, or hostility, predominate in some regions, while comments contribute to social debate and deliberation in others. These differences raise significant concerns regarding representation, inclusivity, and the role of digital platforms in either reducing or escalating communication gaps (Reuters Institute of Digital Report, 2024). This paper therefore looks at how regional divides influence the emergence of new genres of online newspaper comments. It aims to comprehend how online communities manage legitimacy, identity, and authority by combining actual investigation of discussing behaviours in various contexts with theoretical insights from genre studies. Through this, it makes the case that comment sections ought to

be viewed as both reactions to journalism and independent cultural treasures, places where regional differences are debated, expressed, and reconstructed through changing genre practices. Such unbalanced landscape creates important questions: what are the emerging new genres within online newspaper comment sections, and how do they differ from traditional forms of reader response? How do regional divides whether linguistic, cultural, or political shape the genres that appear and the ways they are practiced? And how do these emergent genres challenge or reinforce journalistic authority and the role of newspapers in facilitating public debate? By addressing these questions, this paper aims to show that comments published online should be viewed as cultural heritage of themselves, as well as reactions to journalism. They serve as platforms for the expression, debate, and reinventing of regional divides through changing genre practices. A theoretical framework for examining online newspaper comments as a unique communicative form is provided by research on register and text linguistics. In order to ascertain the degree of functional and structural differentiation, this field of study carefully analyses the linguistic, rhetorical, and interactional aspects of online comments and compares them with other registers. This method views online comments as an emergent register whose patterns of evaluative language, opinions, and conversational organisation reflect both platform affordances and community norms, drawing on multi-dimensional analyses like those of Ehret et al. (2021).

Methodology

This study used a discourse-analytic approach to analyse emerging reader comment genres in Nigerian online newspapers. Data from six leading outlets, including *Punch Online*, *The Guardian Nigeria*, *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times*, and *The Nation*, were employed to identify recurrent rhetorical patterns and their variation across regional, cultural, and political contexts. The study applied a Genre–Discourse–Contextual Integration Framework (GDCF), combining genre theory (Swales, 1990; Miller, 1984), discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), and

media system perspectives (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The model captured recurrent rhetorical forms in comments, examined how power and identity were discursively negotiated, and situated these patterns within Nigeria's regional divides, editorial orientations, and platform logics.

Overview of Genre Studies

The fundamental genre studies consider genres as socially embedded actions and dynamic patterns of behaviour rather than static forms, instead of just viewing them as fixed, formal categories. From formal taxonomy to the situated, action-oriented role of genres in directing human behaviour and communication, Carolyn Miller's 1984 essay redefined genre as "typified rhetorical action" resulting from frequent rhetorical situations (Milani, El Hadi, and Tognoli, 2025). Building on this, the SFL and ESP traditions also highlight genre as a productive social activity, as shown in Swales's viewpoint on genres as classes of communication events with shared purposes and Martin et al.'s description of genre as "staged, focused, social processes." When combined, these terms highlight how genre influences not just its structural norms but also expectations, goals, and social activities.

According to Azarshab, Ghahramani, Abolghasemi, & Azimi (2024), the theory of genre as social action in digital age remains not only relevant but ever more necessary. Contemporary researchers suggest that digital behaviours like documenting, identifying, and searching constitute communicative genres every day, conventional social actions embedded in our interactions with digital platforms. By carrying out these on a regular basis, users establish common standards and expectations for how to arrange, find, and understand digital content. Thus, user engagement and reality of digital media actualise genre in new ways: they become digital social acts where users' behaviours and platform technological affordances co-create communicative situations that are influenced by established norms and expectations.

The fundamental ideology of Miller is further expanded by contemporary genre theory, which frames genres as being created by driven

perception and collective intention in recurrent contexts. Genre is an embodied, responsive action rather than a passive recognition from a phenomenological point of view. A "felt sense" of how to behave or speak, is frequently based on social norms that have been absorbed (Saraf 2020). Theorists stress that these social-cognitive processes help people connect with their communities: genres encourage participants to use perceived, socially learnt responses to orient themselves to roles, settings, and group goals. This viewpoint links the social action model of genre to embodied cognition and emphasises how genre expectations influence our perceptions, reactions, and participation in addition to what we generate.

New Genres and Evolving Discursive Practices

The features of online platforms (character restrictions, reaction buttons, linking, and editable images) encourage hybrid forms, which transform news discussion into a range of reply-types, from thoughtful "short essays" and fake editorials to humorous remarks, sarcasm, and viral comments. The way viewers express their opinions and "do" discussion in threads is changing as a result of recent Nordic tracking that shows news interaction shifting from text-heavy Facebook towards video-centric platforms like YouTube and TikTok, where short-form, visual replies dominate. According to meta-studies of comment sections, what appears to be "just form" is actually socially patterned behaviour with a wide range of quality, with deliberation and rudeness frequently coexisting irregularly across contexts (Gettman, Hales, Voss, Toppen, Tumati, & Deloitte Consulting, 2016).

A favourable outcome for moderated PSM spaces was obtained in a realistic 2024 case study of Finland's public-service outlet Yle (Svenska Yle), which systematically coded 565 comments and determined that the overall deliberative quality was rather high compared to previous benchmarks. However, the authors highlight conflicting results from the larger literature as well as significant disclaimers within the case: moderators are said to reject between 26 and 30 percent of submissions, dialogic discussion can be sparse in some

regions, and measurement limitations still exist. In summary, quality is contingent and not guaranteed across threads or channels, but it is achievable with careful moderation and design (Lähdesluoma, 2019).

According to Barker and Jurasz (2025), memetic genres, such as image snapshots, modified clips, and catchphrase formats now serve as the foundation for a lot of political discourse surrounding news. These genres combine opinions, influence, and structures that spread quickly at high-frequency. Based on scholarship published in 2024–2025, message creation is not spontaneous "noise," but rather a strategic element of modern politics that is often openly presented as affecting public opinion and inspiring groups. It is intended to normalise positions, trigger in-group identity, and steer interpretation. The deliberate mainstreaming of extremist discourse through images and humour, as well as the portrayal of image makers as independent political actors, are particularly clear examples of this (Richard Milner, 2025).

Geographical Divides and International Variations

Cross-national studies consistently show significant variation in news consumption patterns, platform mix, and preferred means of participation between countries and regions. The changes in news preferences are "not always evenly distributed" among the 47 markets surveyed by the Digital News Report 2024. This unevenness provides a crucial context for the emergence of genre variation in comment sections and other user participation forms (Claessens, Lammens, Barbier & Huys, 2024). Lipatova (2024) further asserts that, meanwhile, platforms such as Instagram and TikTok play especially important roles for **younger audiences** in regions like Africa, Asia, and Latin America, pointing to how **regional and demographic differences** shape the news landscape.

The baseline levels of hostility and rudeness vary depending on the country and culture, according to research on rudeness and emotional tone in news comments. Comparing comment sections of German news outlets to those in the US, cross-national research

revealed some reduced levels of negative sentiments (Humprecht et al., 2020). Further research comparing comment platforms, like Facebook and news websites, shows systematic differences: Facebook comments are frequently less hostile, perhaps as a result of platform moderation differences and lower anonymity, while news site comments are typically more elaborate but also very rude (Ke, Tong, Cheng, & Peng, 2025). These results highlight the important influence of platform-specific features, media system structures, and local political cultures on the style and politeness norms of comment participation.

Importantly, the media contextual structure specifically, whether news consumption is still centred on television or moves towards social media helps explain trust trends more effectively than demographic factors. While media settings increasingly dominated by social media news correlate with a decline in trust, countries where television news remains central exhibit rather steady levels of trust. This offers crucial context for comprehending how, depending on changing trust and consumption patterns across cultures, newly developing comment genres, norms, and forms of engagement may either support or undermine journalism.

Examining Rudeness via Content Awareness, Platform Features, and Anonymity

Research continuously shows that topic selection, platform conveniences, and anonymity all predict increased rates of rudeness in online comment areas. According to a thorough 2024 synthesis, there is "consistent evidence that anonymity...drives rudeness," yet there is also evidence that rude remarks tend to decline when journalists are present through citations or direct interaction. This tendency is supported by previous empirical research, which shows that more rudeness occurs in more anonymous settings on platforms like Facebook, where many people use real names, compared to Twitter, where fake identities are more common. These results are consistent with ideas such as online disconnection effect, which holds that social barriers are lowered by anonymity, making unpleasant or behaviour more likely.

Negative Participation and the Evolution of Popular Culture

Mensonides et al. (2024) state that Thorsten Quandt's "negative participation" concept places mockery, propaganda, and other harmful actions within the larger context of public interaction in order to extend the perspective beyond standards of politeness. According to Krause-Galoni and Rucker (2025), Thorsten presents "negative participation" as an alternative to ideal civic involvement, a type of user behaviour that increases in line with growing popular culture dynamics. Recent overviews have expanded on this idea to examine how these abnormal interaction patterns, which are frequently fuelled by popular cultural appeal, erode reasoned discourse and alter the relationship between the media and the public.

Journalists' Resistance and Moderation Style

Moderation techniques have a big impact on how polite public comment spaces are. Evidence from European contexts supports the efficacy of interactive, counter-voicing interventions by journalists: when journalists actively engage in comment threads rather than just removing offensive content, they help to reduce public-level rudeness in quantifiable ways (Kosmulski 2025). Additionally, experimental studies show that in both the U.S. and Germany, comments that acknowledge commenters' feelings (instead of ignoring them) tend to produce more positive evaluations of the news outlet and its treatment of conversations (Medina & Kimber, 2025). However, because monitoring requires a lot of resources, can damage brand trust, and expose journalists to harassment, many media outlets choose to completely block comments.

The Role of Algorithms in Organising, Ordering, and Classifying Genres

Recent research highlights the significant influence algorithms have in deciding which material categories or genres become popular. Ranking systems serve as barriers to visibility and behaviour reinforcement, as demonstrated by a comprehensive empirical audit of Reddit's r/popular feed that examined how elements including the volume of recent comments affect

ranking and, consequently, user engagement (Akram, 2024). The powerful ability of algorithm to elevate particular genres and forms of content was further demonstrated by Huang and Ji's 2025 random field experiment, which involved over 2.1 million WeChat users and found that algorithmic selection significantly increased engagement with original content when compared to peer-sharing. According to Akram (2024), algorithmic impact can occasionally be advantageous or balanced. The collaborative filtering in music recommendation systems has been demonstrated to maintain popularity inequalities by often highlighting renowned artists or genres while ignoring others, thus reducing the diversity of exposure. Visibility disparities have arisen in academic contexts even in the absence of explicit bias. For example, search and retrieval systems have been found to subtly favour male academics by providing them with more consistent visibility than women. This is due to differences in algorithmic gathering practices and data completeness. According to these results, algorithmic structures may mistakenly affect visibility across groups and types of material, highlighting the necessity of equitable methods. Recent discussions examine ways that consumers and producers can respond to these worries. A comprehensive review highlights how algorithmic literacy might enable audiences to intentionally handle visibility dynamics by classifying user responses to algorithmic media, ranging from passive compliance to active disruption and resistance. In the meantime, the argument over computer vs human filtering is still gaining ground. Initiatives like P.I.F.Y.I and Spread seek to revive personalised chronological content feeds as alternatives to interactive ranking algorithms, while media platforms like TikTok, Spotify, and Amazon demonstrate the supremacy of algorithmic feeds (Qu, Yang, Zhang, Xiang, Pang, & Song, 2024).

Impact on Journalism and Public Conversation

Comparative contextualisation study reveals that media systems vary significantly in their level of integration with major platforms, and

that these levels of integration influence the audience practices and genres that become stable over time (Fu, Zhou, Yu, Chen, Wang, Zhu & Wang, 2023). The reach of platforms and the commercial/technical logics that determine distribution and visibility are mediated by historical legacies (such as the continuing existence of public broadcasters or legacy newspapers) and policy environments, according to global analyses. As a result, the same platform features produce different genre outcomes in different media systems. Handbooks that show how cultural and economic configurations direct platform effect on content circulation and current international work that contrasts "platforms" across markets systematically map these dynamics (Morita, 2024).

Case studies at the newsroom level frequently highlight conflicts between editorial control over audience speech and calls for algorithmic openness. Research based on interviews and ethnography on how newsrooms use platform APIs, automated tools, and recommender systems reveals problems: newsrooms differ greatly in whether and how they reveal or challenge platform algorithmic decisions, and editors struggle with opaque ranking logics while attempting to enforce editorial norms over what is amplified (and over what types of audience interaction are foregrounded or suppressed). These conflicts are made more difficult by public anxiety over AI-driven curation and the boundaries of journalistic openness, as both journalists and viewers demand more precise justifications for the appearance of particular stories and audience participation (Zanzabila, 2024).

Analysis

The study analyses the emerging reader comment genres in Nigerian online newspapers. Thus, it presents the data analysis and findings of the study.

1. Punch Online (Southwest Nigeria based in Lagos)

Comment I:

“This APC government has failed woefully. Fuel subsidy gone, inflation rising, ordinary Nigerians are dying while leaders travel abroad for medical check-ups!”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Mini-Editorial (structured critique)
- **Features:** Policy reference (fuel subsidy), appeal to hardship, formal English, total description.
- **Regional markers:** Lagos readership emphasises accountability in administration and reflects the history of community involvement.

Interpretation:

This comment is an excellent instance of the mini-editorial genre, in which users imitate critical analysis from journalists. It resonates with urban fears in Southwest Nigeria by contrasting elite wealth with widespread hardship and placing failure in terms of policy.

Comment II:

“Every election season, they remember the masses. Once in office, they forget us completely. Same story since independence!”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Cynical Satire
- **Features:** Historical sweep, ironic tone, collective “they” vs. “us” framing.
- **Regional markers:** Lagos-based political distrust, rooted in long experience with electoral politics.

Interpretation:

This comment exposes comment culture of the Punch as both historically aware and suspicious of authority by using irony to generalise betrayal across political generations.

Comment III:

“Instead of fighting corruption, they are fighting opposition voices. If this continues, democracy itself is at risk.”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Alarmist/Deliberative

Features: Argument framed in institutional terms, “corruption vs. opposition” binary, constitutional concern.

Regional markers: Reflects Lagos civil society’s emphasis on democratic freedoms.

Interpretation:

This comment warns of the systemic deterioration of democracy and reflects a deliberative register. It draws attention to the function of the Punch as a platform where readers uphold democratic values.

2. Daily Trust (Northern Nigeria, based in Abuja/Kano)

Comment I:

“Our leaders forget that one day they will stand before Allah to answer for every naira they stole.”

Coding:

Genre: Moralizing Discourse

Features: Qur’anic allusion (divine accountability), religious register, informal syntax.

Regional markers: Northern readership foregrounds Islamic moral frameworks.

Interpretation:

This statement criticises corruption by invoking divine judgement. The dependence on moral authority demonstrates how readers of Daily Trust view religion as the last line of defence against political power.

Comment II:

“People from the South always think restructuring will solve everything, but our real problem is leaders who are selfish and corrupt.”

Coding:

Genre: Ethno-Regional Positioning

Features: Regional binary (“South” vs. “our”), cultural defence, populist register.

Regional markers: Northern defensiveness against restructuring debates.

Interpretation:

The rephrasing of Nigeria's issues as widespread corruption rather than structural imbalance challenges the reformist rhetoric of the South. It illustrates how readers from the North navigate identity politics in comment sections.

Comment III:

“Security cannot improve when youths have no

jobs. Until they find something to eat, the banditry will continue.”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Practical Policy Critique
- **Features:** Socioeconomic reasoning, causal argument, simple syntax.
- **Regional markers:** Anchored in lived realities of Northern insecurity.

Interpretation:

This comment, which connects unemployment with insecurity, provides a socioeconomic analysis foundation for criticism. It uses practical logic instead of moralising speech, demonstrating that Daily Trust readers are aware of policy shortcomings.

3. Premium Times (Policy-driven, based in Abuja, Nigeria)

Comment I:

“The Central Bank’s monetary tightening cannot work in isolation. Without fiscal discipline from the government, inflation will remain high.”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Technocratic Deliberation
- **Features:** Economic jargon (“monetary tightening,” “fiscal discipline”), formal register, analytical tone.
- **Regional markers:** Educated, elite readership with policy literacy.

Interpretation:

The role of Premium Times as a deliberative forum where readers embrace policy-analytical conversation is reflected in this comment. It is an example of technocratic criticism that is not found in other publications.

Comment II:

“The constitution is Nigeria’s biggest obstacle. Unless we rewrite it, no leader can succeed.”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Structural Critique
- **Features:** Absolutist framing (“biggest obstacle”), constitutional focus, formal register.
- **Regional markers:** Abuja-based political elite discourse, oriented toward systemic reform.

Interpretation:

This structuralist comment emphasises the stand of Premium Times as a venue for reformist discussion by placing failure in the structure of the constitution rather than in specific people.

Comment III:

“Blaming Buhari or Tinubu is pointless. The real issue is our weak institutions that allow abuse of power.”

Coding:

Genre: Institutional Deliberation

Features: De-personalization of blame, institutional focus, rational argument.

Regional markers: Reflects policy-elite culture in Abuja.

Interpretation:

By ignoring leaders, this comment pushes conversation toward institutional weakness, highlighting Premium Times readers’ deliberative, reformist tendency.

4. The Guardian Nigeria (elite, based in Lagos Nigeria but national reach)

Comment I:

“Until we reform education and healthcare, Nigeria will remain a giant with clay feet.”

Coding:

Genre: Intellectual Critique

Features: Metaphorical phrasing (“giant with clay feet”), focus on structural reform, polished English.

Regional markers: Guardian readership is elite, often adopting literary or analytical styles.

Interpretation:

This comment, which uses metaphor and policy analysis, is a perfect example of the intellectual culture of the Guardian. It draws attention to the hybrid area, whereby elite readers frame discussions with cultural sophistication.

Comment II:

“Corruption is not just in politics, it is in our homes, churches, and mosques. We are all guilty.”

Coding:

Genre: Reflective/Moralizing Discourse

Features: Inclusive “we,” moral reflection, societal self-critique.

Regional markers: Lagos cosmopolitanism; tendency toward universal moral judgment rather than partisan attack.

Interpretation:

This surpasses societal reflection and political blame. The readership of the Guardian is emphasised as global and self-critical, rather than partisan, by its self-critical manner.

Comment III:

“If the National Assembly were truly independent, no president could ride roughshod over Nigerians.”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Institutional Deliberation
- **Features:** Conditional reasoning, institutional focus, critique of democratic practice.
- **Regional markers:** Elite Lagos readership foregrounds checks and balances.

Interpretation:

Here, the focus on legislative independence aligns with the elite public realm of the Guardian and reflects the interest of the readers for democratic principles and the separation of powers.

5. Vanguard (South-South/Southeast Nigeria oriented, populist style)

Comment I:

“Politicians are like comedians — they promise free food and jobs, but after elections we get hunger and taxes.”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Satirical/Ironic Commentary
- **Features:** Analogy (politicians = comedians), humour, populist register.
- **Regional markers:** Southeast/South-South populist cynicism.

Interpretation:

This satirical framing is a reflection of strong culture and humour-driven critique of the Vanguard, where the primary form of resistance is ridiculing rather than thoughtful analysis.

Comment II:

“APC, PDP — same old thieves in different uniforms!”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Partisan Cynicism
- **Features:** Reductionist equivalence, metaphor (“uniforms”), accusatory tone.
- **Regional markers:** Reflects South-South political frustration with elite recycling.

Interpretation:

This satirical framing is a reflection of strong culture and humour-driven critique of the Vanguard, where the primary form of resistance is ridiculing rather than thoughtful analysis.

Comment III:

“If the government cannot provide electricity

after 60 years, should we not privatize the entire sector?”

Coding:

Genre: Practical Policy Critique

Features: Rhetorical question, pragmatic reform suggestion, economic policy focus.

Regional markers: Resonates with South-South resource-driven frustrations over underdevelopment.

Interpretation:

While satirical and cynical tones dominate Vanguard, this example shows pragmatic critique. The rhetorical question strengthens the force of policy demand.

6. The Nation (Southwest Nigeria based, linked with APC elite)

Comment I:

“PDP destroyed Nigeria for 16 years. APC is fixing the mess step by step.”

Coding:

Genre: Partisan Defence

Features: Historical blame-shift, loyalty framing, absolution of ruling party.

Regional markers: Southwest elite readership; pro-APC narratives.

Interpretation:

This kind of political justification is common in the comment section of the Nation, as supporters of the APC use past opposition administrations to defend their current shortcomings.

Comment II:

“Critics forget that change takes time. Those shouting today will enjoy tomorrow’s reforms.”

Coding:

Genre: Optimistic Partisan Alignment

Features: Temporal contrast (today vs. tomorrow), defensive tone, pro-government reassurance.

Regional markers: Southwest discourse often aligns with ruling party narratives.

Interpretation:

This illustrates faith in gradual progress, which is consistent with the function of the Nation as a listening chamber for pro-government views. The forward-looking optimism contrasts with urban cynicism of the Punch.

Comment III:

“Nigerians complain too much. Even in

America there are problems. Let us support our leaders instead of always criticizing.”

Coding:

- **Genre:** Defensive Civic Alignment
- **Features:** International comparison, relativizing Nigeria’s problems, dismissive of critics.
- **Regional markers:** Loyalist rhetoric aligned with ruling party’s defence against opposition.

Interpretation:

Criticism is reframed here as being unpatriotic. The partisan defence common in the comment culture of the Nation is reinforced by the commenter's urge for obedience and devotion while reducing Nigeria's shortcomings.

Findings

This paper reports on a discourse-analytic study of reader comments posted in six major Nigerian online newspapers: *The Punch Online*, *Daily Trust*, *Premium Times*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard*, and *The Nation*. The analysis identifies five recurrent genres of reader discourse: deliberative engagement, satirical or ironic intervention, moralising speech, partisan alignment, and ethno-regional positioning. Their comparative distribution is examined, with illustrative excerpts highlighting contextual inflections and rhetorical strategies across outlets. The findings show that Nigerian online comment sections function as dispersed discursive arenas shaped by political affiliation, editorial orientation, and regional identity. Although partisan contestation and satire are predominant, the presence of reasoned and critical engagement—particularly in *Premium Times* and *The Guardian*—indicates that these spaces also hold potential as sites of deliberative democratic practice.

Conclusion

The study analysed Nigerian online newspapers' reader comments, identifying five genres: deliberative engagement, satirical interventions, moralising speech, partisan alignment, and ethno-regional positioning. It found that Nigerian online comment spaces are important arenas of public discourse, influenced by political affiliation, media orientation, and regional identity. This analysis of reader comments across six leading Nigerian online newspapers demonstrates that comment

sections function as fragmented yet significant arenas of public discourse. The five discourse genres identified as deliberative engagement, satirical/ironic interventions, moralising speech, partisan alignment, and ethno-regional positioning—illustrate the diverse ways in which citizens negotiate political, social, and cultural questions in digital spaces. While satire and partisan contestation dominate, the presence of sustained, rational debate, especially in *Premium Times* and *The Guardian*, underscores the deliberative potential of these platforms. The findings suggest that online comment spaces, though often marked by polarization and rhetorical play, should not be dismissed as trivial or chaotic. Rather, they provide valuable insight into the dynamics of citizen participation, revealing how political affiliation, media orientation, and regional identity shape everyday engagements with news. For scholars and practitioners of media and democracy, this points to the need to reconceptualize comment sections not merely as extensions of journalism but as evolving micro-public spheres where both the challenges and possibilities of democratic discourse are made visible.

Nigerian news outlets should improve online comment spaces by promoting moderation, reducing hate speech, and promoting deliberative engagement. They should also use comment sections for civic education and media literacy. Transparency in editorial orientation is crucial. Further research is needed to understand comment cultures across platforms and demographic factors influencing online discourse. This will help create safer and more inclusive digital spaces

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