



Social Media as a Tool for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examines social media as a tool for peace and conflict resolution. Some of the social media tools used for peace building are; Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, YouTube among others. The concept of peace, conflict and conflict resolution were highlighted. The use of social media in conflict resolution was discussed. The benefit of social media as well as its challenges such as deficit technical skills, low bandwidth and inadequate internet access etc was also discussed extensively in the paper. The paper concludes that social media has the capacity to impact positively in conflict areas hence, it is important to empower people and communities that are most affected with social media so that they can bring positive change and the way forward is that different stakeholders, NGOs and government parastatals should be trained on how to effectively and efficiently use social media to resolve and manage conflicts.

Keywords: Social media, Peace, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Social media is a collective online communication channels dedicated to community based inputs such as interaction, content sharing, collaboration websites, micro-blogging, social networking, wikis, social bookmarking and social curation (Chomba, 2017). Social media is an umbrella term for a wide range interactive websites and applications which enable users to create and share content and ideas within an online community. According to We are social and Hootsuite's digital (2019) reports, 56% of the world's population is currently online while 45% use some form of social media platform, a proportion that is likely to double over the next 20 years. Social media has effectively changed the role of traditional media, turning everyone into a potential creator, consumer and target of online content. Some examples of social media that can be used for peace keeping are: Facebook, WhatsApp and twitter. In recent time, social media has become an important mobilizing force as it drives debate, social movement and political change. It provides new tools for fostering dialogue, data collection and conflict analysis (Buchanan, 2020). Today, in most western countries and many developed parts of the world, social media has gained ground and become more popular. Many studies like Papasolomou & Melanthio (2009) and Purphy (2011) have indicated high rate of social media use in the developed world as people are now becoming increasingly engaged in online content creation and participation. Social media has become increasingly popular because of the combination of both technological development and social change and this has offered a lot of opportunities to users to create contents, build communities, resolve conflicts and establishes peace in their communities. However, in the developing countries like Nigeria social media



use is growing at a very slow pace as many people use social media wrongly to pass wrong information which can lead to disempowerment violence, conflict, etc.

Peace and Conflict Resolution

Peace and conflict resolution is an inter-disciplinary field of study aimed at analyzing, preventing, de-escalating and providing solution to conflict and violence by peaceful means and by seeking success for all parties involved in any given conflict (Abbas, 2015). In Nigeria, as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency, over twenty thousand people have lost their lives especially in the North Eastern region. Failure to significantly address evident cases of farmers, religious domination, political power struggle, corruption and inequality would further aggravate kidnapping, terrorism, political thuggery, armed robbery etc. The alternative to peace is chaos, instability, violence, war etc. with the current wave of violence in the globe and in Nigeria, Peace and conflict resolution (PCR) advances that individuals, religious groups and communities pursue peace by all means with every sense of responsibility as culture promotes peace, individuals prosper in peace, societies develop in peace and religions uphold peace (Galtung, 2011). There is no society where absolute peace exists; nevertheless peace still remains an important element that continues to receive the attention of all sectors in the society. To address some of these security challenges in Nigeria and drastically reduce any form of conflict and violence which has stagnated us as a country, Nigerians need to be social media compliant and strengthen the basis of PCR in Nigeria (Abbas, 2016). With a sense of PCR via social media like Facebook and WhatsApp, individuals can better learn peace building, peace advocacy, conflict management, peace and security so as to be adequately equipped to resolve conflict and instill peace in their individual communities.

Peace according to Ibeanu (2006) is a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community. In the same vein, Igbuzor (2011) defined peace as the absence of war, fear, anxieties, conflict, violence and suffering. Peace is a state of peaceful co-existence among individuals in the community. Galtung (2011) opined in his model that two types of peace exists, which are positive and negative peace. Negative peace refers to the absence of direct conflict violence, and war at international, national, community and individual level while positive peace refers to the absence of indirect and structural injustice, inequality and violence, inner peace at individual levels, policies and unjust structures. The word peace is relative.

Conflict according to Abbas (2018) is considered as an overall socio-economic development of any society, obstacle to progress, economic prosperity and political stability. Hence, conflict must be managed properly so it does not escalate into war. Conflict can be categorized into religions, ethnic, economy, religious and political conflict among others. Galtung (2011) sees conflict as a phenomenon that is built in human societies according to deep rooted structural dysfunction such as injustice, poverty, over population, inflation, unemployment, illiteracy, endemic corruption among others. Galtung argues that whenever economic and political discrimination and lack of tolerance are embedded in human relationships, conflicts are bound to occur. Conflict can be defined in this paper as escalation of disagreement which is brought about by a clash of interest.

Conflict resolution is a process of resolving conflict through diverse approaches aimed at terminating conflict which is expected to address deep rooted sources of conflict, resolve the behavior of violence and hostility and change the structure of the conflict (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). Some of the approaches to conflict resolution are negotiation which is a discussion



between two or more persons with the goal of reaching an agreement; mediation which involves a neutral third-party facilitator that negotiates an agreement; arbitration usually used in commercial and labor/management disputes, in a process of involving a third party neutral who reviews and listens to both parties and issues a decision to settle the case. All these approaches can be channeled through social media (Abbas, 2018). Other approaches are peer mediation among young people, community conferencing, collaborative law and negotiated rule making.

The Concept of Social Media

Social media can be defined as a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media has emerged as a term frequently used to describe different types of communication platforms and electronic ways of interacting. According to Anjugu (2013), social media is a group of internet based application that allows the creation and exchange of users generated content while Ezeah et al., (2013) defines it as modern interactive communication channels through which people connect to one another, share ideas experiences, pictures, messages and information of common interest.

Bryer and Zavatarro (2011) defined it as technologies that facilitate social interaction and make possible collaboration and enable deliberation across stakeholders. From the researcher's point of view, social media is an internet based interactive communication platform that allows people, communities to create, discuss and share generated content.

Anjugu (2013) classified social media into:

- Social networking that interact by adding friends, comments on photos, profiles, sharing groups for discussions (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)
- Social bookmarking- This interact by tagging websites and searching through website bookmarked by others.
- WIKIS- This interact by adding articles and commenting on them.
- Social photos and video sharing- Interact by sharing photos, videos and commenting on the users submission (Flicker and YouTube).

The Use of Social Media for Conflict Resolution

Journals, magazines, newspapers, televisions, radio among others have received much recognition for information dissemination but social media such as Skype, Linked-in, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Blogs, Google and other internet based media are becoming more popular media for information dissemination especially in conflicts situation across the world (Felix et al., 2013).

Facebook is one of the social media being used all over the world. It is started by a Harvard student, Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. In 2006, Twitter was launched and had over 300 million users in 2011 (Edwards, 2014). This is an online social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to exchange photos, videos and message of 140 or fewer characters. YouTube was founded in 2005 by Steve Chen and Chad Hurley. It provides a platform for the distribution of video content (Felix et al., 2013).

Social media is increasingly influencing how people all over the world access information, often at lower cost and with far wider reach than conventional media. Mobile phones and the internet are two way technologies which allow people to contribute information as readily as they consume it. Social media presents obvious opportunities to the youth to connect and



socialize with the rest of the world in a quick seamless, boundless and borderless way (Waihenya, 2017).

Social media internationalizes internal conflicts. Due to the ubiquity of the modern electronic media, the effect and cause of conflict are known instantaneously in different parts of the world. Social media is being used at a communication level to mitigate causes of violence. It is an invaluable tool in bridging the gap and enabling successful violence prevention campaigns such as fostering inter-ethnic dialogue, preventing gang violence, managing elections of different countries, preventing protesting violence and resource disputes among other (Abbas, 2015).

Social media is being used, especially by the Youth, to foster inter-ethnic dialogue through bridging divides between adversaries. This is aimed at getting ahead of cycles of conflicts for example, voting is actively being monitored for everything from violence to fraud using a range of social media platforms. Social media is also being used in transitional nations like Egypt to help build constitutions with public input (UNDP, 2016).

Social media services and independent blogging is easy to use, it can be used by an average person with little or no advanced computer skills. Content can be created and accessed with as little as a smart phone and it can be easily intertwined. Links to video posted on YouTube can be embedded in blogs, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp or twitter. A twitter post can appear on Facebook. Through social media, large number of people can be easily and inexpensively contacted via variety of services (Chombal, 2017). Social media can be used as a remedy to violent conflicts. This can be done by harnessing the networks to disseminate peace reinforcing messages, rebut destabilizing rumors and used to connect citizens to the state and security service providers.

Challenges of using Social Media as a Tool for Conflict Resolution

Egan (2018), stated the following challenges;

1. **Counterproductive regulations:** Legal and regulatory challenges can serve as an obstacle to peace building. With evolving government regulation around social media, peace building organizations or individual peace builder may limit their engagement on social media to avoid legal risk.
2. **Harvest to data and analysis:** harvesting raw data from social media and the complexity of some methodologies has made it hard for peace builder to engage in quantitative social media analysis.
3. **Technical skill:** a deficit in technical knowledge and skills with peace building organisations can represent a barrier to the use of social media
4. **Assessing impact:** monitoring and evaluating impact is also a challenge. There is need for deeper understanding of the connection between content posted, consumption of content by user and their related behavioral change.
5. **Epileptic power supply:** unstable power supply can hinder information meant to resolve conflict from reaching the right people at the right time thereby causing unresolved conflict.
6. **Low internet access and bandwidth:** Social media is powered and made functional by internet access brought about by the bandwidth, if it is low there will be no flow of information and access would have been hindered. This can lead to conflict as there is not access to information.
7. **Fake rumors and news:** Social media can be used to broadcast fake rumors and news that can escalate violence. Social media can be used to spread fake information that can spark off conflict.



The Benefit of using Social Media for Conflict Resolution

The hidden power of social media and how it can be used to transform individuals, societies and even government cannot be overemphasized. According to Shirky (2011) & Chombal, (2017). Social media can help spread peace, encourage dialogue among people from different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. Some of the ways of resolving conflict through social media include the following:

- It can affect perceptions on ethnicity, change attitude promote tolerance and mutual understanding.
- It can bridge the divide between ethnic groups that wouldn't otherwise communicate with one another.
- Social media can also prevent political violence through social media monitoring technology.
- Social media is a powerful tool for fostering connections between and within communities and enabling dialogue.
- Social media can be used as a double edge sword for mediation and peace processing.

Conclusion

Social media has the capacity to have a positive impact in conflict areas. Hence, it is vital to invest in these people and organizations who are most affected by conflicts, empowering communities through the use of social media and enabling them to bring positive change. It is the ordinary citizens, the change makers at grass root level that are key to effective action. Engaging them and making them aware of the power of communities and preventing conflict through the instrument of social media is fundamental.

Way Forward

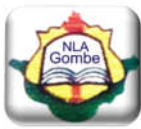
- There should be campaign to encourage the youth to make good use of social media platform to manage and resolve conflicts since it's popular among the youth.
- Different stakeholders, NGOs, government parastatals, political organizations should be trained on how to efficiently and effectively use social media to resolve and manage conflict
- Peace building organization should be supported to use social media more strategically and meaningfully as a space for dialogue, allowing for paring with offline interventions
- Technological companies, peace building organization and donors should increase efforts to leverage social media as a public space for positive political dialogue and countering misinformation and prejudice that can lead to violence.

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