

Exposure to social media and separatist agitation in South-East states of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study seeks to determine the extent of exposure of supporters of separatist agitation in South-Eastern states of Nigeria to social media. A sample size of 384 adults of the five eastern states was drawn from a population of 5,137,738 using Krejcie and Morgan formula. The multi-stage, purposive and convenience sampling techniques were adopted in the selection of the sample size of 384. The questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Analysis was done using the simple percentage. Findings revealed that found that supporters of separatist agitation are highly exposed to social media and the platforms were used to propagate their cause. Based on the findings, the study concluded that social media reinforced the popularity of the renewed agitation for Biafra. The study recommends among others that government should map out strategies of censoring the social media content through legislation. This will help curb the menace of agitations across the country.

Key words: Social media, separatists, Agitation, Biafra agitation.

Introduction

The internet or the International network with its World Wide Web (www) gave birth to social media which has finally turned the world into a global village. The invention of social media no doubt has advanced communication process; it is now more convenient, flexible, and faster. Social media are groups of applications that employ mobile and web based technology to create highly interactive platform through which people share, discuss and modify user's generated content. They are the various online platforms that are used for social interaction. They use highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques and include the various online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily via the internet to share information and resources (Greendhow cited in Asemah & Edegoh, 2013). Social media have changed the communication scenario making anybody who has information and communication gadgets and access to internet a journalist. This is called citizen journalism, which Khamis and Vaughan (2011) define as the use of digital tools to report events on the ground. This involves uploading text and videos directly to the Internet or feeding the information and videos to media outlets. Minute by minute updates happen via the social media and people around the globe are kept informed on the developments in other countries.

Social media powered by the internet have also proven to be an important instrument for social change and transformation. Through online videos, pictures, and public comments posted on the various social media platforms, people are made to know more about the happenings and new innovations/inventions in other countries of the world and thus emulate them to improve their lifestyle. In other words, social media have immensely contributed to the rapid development experienced globally. The most fascinating aspect of the social media is the fact that they enable users to connect and organize themselves with little or no cost and share information, ideas and make decisions that are for the common good of such online community. Social media platforms are viable for information dissemination, they facilitate large scale conversation and aid in problem solving, thus creating waves and endless possibilities for collective social action. Social media have also enhanced mobilization of individuals of diverse background for a common cause. This informs why Faris (2010) described the use of social media

as 'revolutions of revolutionaries.' Several studies have shown that social media was used for social, political and economic changes in many countries of the world like Iraq and Egypt. For instance, Weist (2011), Sheedy (2011) and Hershey (2010) report that in Egypt, social media played a role in the success of the anti-government protests that caused the country's dictatorial leader Muhammad Hosni El Sayed Mubarak to resign. Mutanana (2016) also reports that social media was swiftly used to exchange and disseminate information to millions of people inside and outside countries involved in one form of uprising and crisis as was the case of Egypt. The speed and interactivity of social media unite protesters and they are also an outlet for seeking help when one is in a danger. According to Social Media Guide Africa (2012), social media remain powerful means for mobilization of citizens. Good examples are Twitter-supported Arab Spring of 2016, American presidential elections, and the recent viral controversial campaign against Uganda war criminal Joseph Kong. Weist (2011) also explains that the development of social media has fuelled cyber activism, a process of using internet based socializing and communication to create, operate and manage activism of any type. These are all evidence that social media can be used to mobilize and help build in the users or members of an online community the spirit of collectivism. It is for this reason that agitators especially the separatists use the social media platforms such as facebook, Twitter, WatsApp, and YouTube to propagate their course, arouse sympathy and mobilize members even outside their immediate environment.

Biafra, a secessionist state in old eastern Nigeria was declared by Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu on 30th May, 1967, leading to 30 months civil war that lasted between 30th May 1967 to January 1970. After the civil war, like all people who fought and lost a war, Biafra evokes a feeling of victimhood in an average Igbo person. These shared feelings of victimhood have led to the easy mobilization and organization of several movements among south-easterners to resuscitate the republic of Biafra beginning from 1999 till date.

The first attempt of such movement was the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) formed in 1999 and led by an Indian trained lawyer Ralph Uwazuruike. MASSOB was later renamed Biafra Independent Movement (BIM). This group attracted and mobilized people of

different background, tendencies and conflicting ambitions leading to fractionalization within the group. This fractionalization led to the emergence of Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) on 5th November, 2012 led by Benjamin Onwuke a United Kingdom based lawyer and lately the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu a British-Nigerian. It is claimed that IPOB have been in existence since 2012 by a group of people from the south-south and south-eastern states of Nigeria in London, but their existence became popularly known after the inauguration of president Mohamadu Buhari in 2015 and since then has become the heaviest and rudest shock to Nigeria's unity and cohesion.

At the centre of the movement for secession by members of IPOB is the use of social media. Although the IPOB has a radio station called Radio Biafra and a television station called Biafra Independent Media (BIM) which they use to propagate their cause, they were only able to reach a wider audience both in Nigeria and in Diaspora, and also achieve almost 99% compliance of certain propositions (such sit-at-home on every 30th May) made by their leader in most south eastern states of Nigeria through the use of social media platforms especially facebook, Twitter, whatsapp and Youtube. This study is an attempt to empirically examine the extent these agitators are exposed to social media and the role of social media in the separatists' agitation.

Statement of the problem

The availability and use of social media have created a paradigm shift in ways people communicate, particularly in the form activists, revolutionaries, separatists and their supporters propagate their cause. Social media had been employed in several protest movements around the globe; some of them are 2009 movement against fundamentalist vigilantes in India; 2008 beef protest in South Korea; 2006 protest against education law in Chile and the uprising in America after the global economic crisis in 2008. Revolutionaries, separatists and agitators in different parts of the world such as Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Syria, Bahrain and many others had used social media to advance their causes and record reasonable achievements. The level of exposure and the role of social media in these events of these countries of the world may not be the same in Nigeria. This could be attributed to the fact that they are technologically advanced or cultured and many of their citizens can to reasonable extents surf the internet and achieve their common goals via social

media. In similar event in Nigeria such as the renewed agitation for Biafra, could the social media record the same success as in those countries? There is therefore, the need to study whether the social media could replicate such in Nigeria.

Furthermore, of recent there has been noticeable vigour in the agitation, fingers are pointing towards greater use of social media by 'Biafran' agitators and supporters. The thrust is to what extent are supporters of separatists agitation exposed to social media and what has been the role of social media in the agitation such that it is gaining popularity among the people of South-East and in Diaspora?

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to investigate the extent of exposure of supporters of separatist agitators to social media.

Research question

To what extent are supporters of separatists agitators in South-East exposed to social media?

Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on the conflict theory, technological determinism theory and the uses and gratifications theory.

The conflict theory was propounded by Karl Max between 1818 and 1883. The theory posits that society is in a perpetual conflict as a result of competition for limited resources. The conflict theorists hold the view that order and coherence in societies are founded on conflict and domination of some over others resulting from the inequitable distribution of resources or the exploitative relationship prevalent in the society (Ezekiel-Hart and Adiele, 2010:45). This implies that the rich and powerful in the society try to dominate by all means possible, basically by suppressing the poor and powerless. Thus, the theory revolves around the concept of social inequality in the division of resources, political conflict and on the conflict that exist among classes.

This is the root cause for the separatists' agitation among the indigenous people of many south-east states of Nigeria for a sovereign state of Biafra. Members of this

group especially in the recent upsurge believed that the citizens of the south-east states have been marginalized and cheated in terms of revenue allocation, political office positions, resource control and development of the region.

The technological determinism theory on the other hand was coined by Thorstein Verblen and was made popular by Marshal MacLuhan in the 1960s. The theory postulates that technology and communication shapes and directs the way people think, act and feel, and how societies mobilize and organize themselves and operate. The advancement in information and communication technology and the invention of the use of internet on mobile phones has greatly changed the human society. Today, people no longer pursue information rather information pursues them. Obiora and Asadu (2015) had noted that 'the use of mobile phones for mass dissemination of information has changed the society tremendously' (p.25). It is quite obvious that with mobile phone and other internet gadgets, people can do a whole lot of things such as watching videos/films, sending pictures, recording and downloading music as well as reading online newspaper publications. An indication that there is a paradigm shift in communication channels which has cause change in the perception of individuals and the society at large.

This implies that advancement in communication technology especially the advent if social media has provided primary platform for people to organize and mobilize themselves for common cause and engage in critical discussion which enhances their ability to undertake collective action. The separatists in Nigeria have immensely used social media to mobilize and organize more followers who use the media to generate public sympathy for their cause.

Literature Review

Social media powered by the internet has significantly changed the way people interact, work together, create and maintain relationship. It provides users with an opportunity to discuss issues that they consider very important to them in an online community. The social media is an essential tool for communication. The society can interact at all levels; discuss socio-economic and political issues affecting them in their daily lives (Mutanana, 2016). Describing social media, Haida and Rahim (2015) explained that social media is made up of two words 'social' and 'media'. To them, the word 'social' simply means the interaction of

people and groups who belong to different sects or society, while 'media' means a system of communication and interaction. Hence, they defined the social media as 'an interaction between people who share, create and exchange information, and ideas in a virtual communities and networks.' Social media provide many ways to disseminate information in a fast inexpensive and efficient manner. In other words, it provides a free and easy way to disperse large amounts of information to large group of people very quickly and efficiently.

Again, with social media, individual users can create and curate information in multiple contexts to be shared through one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many communications. This is to say that, with social media, individuals not only receive information through these platform but they can create their own content or forward content to others. By so doing, individuals can contribute directly to the media by providing eyewitness perspectives of an event, often bypassing the professional reporters on the scene, and providing unfiltered views of what is happening around them (Gordon,2007).

Social media platforms are used to connect group of people scattered around the globe. These platforms include: social networking sites such as FaceBook and Google plus (+); microblogs like Twitter; photosharing sites like Instagram and Pinterest and Video sharing sites such as Youtube and Vimeo. All these platforms enhanced with multimedia through Ipad, computer, tablet, smart phones or phones enable social media users to engage in real-time conversations. Hence, social media can be used as a primary means of communication or as an alternative or additional method of communication that promotes participation, conversation and connectedness. Baruah (2012) identified some advantages of using social media as a communication tool. These include online sharing of knowledge as well as information among different groups of people. Social media has the potential to change the character of our social lives, both on an interpersonal and communication level. Faris (2010) adds; they drastically reduce the amount of time it takes for information to travel. They increase the geographic and spatial reach of information. Similarly, Smidi and Shahin (2017) in their article '*social media and social mobilization in the middle East: A survey of research on the Arab spring*' conclude that Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other such modes of communication made the ordinary citizens believe they had a 'say' in public affairs. Social media allow

people to connect, mobilize and organize on a large scale against their regimes, which they had found extremely difficult, if not impossible, to do in the past. The interactive nature and unfettered access that the social media offers has made them indispensable tools in the hands of revolutionaries and agitators. To these sects, it is a viable tool for propaganda, mobilization, sensitization, group organization and scope enlargement.

Allam (2012) study on the 'role and impact of social media networks on Arab Spring: A case study of Egyptian revolution' which aimed at measuring the role of social networking websites during political crisis in Egypt. Found that: first, that more than half of the respondents believe that they are enjoying more freedom of expression through their use of social networking websites. They found a medium, whereby they can express their opinions freely, discuss political issues, taboos and criticize the government. Also, social networking websites give its people a greater sense of self-actualization. Secondly, that social networking websites were considered one of the essential elements that mobilized the Arab youth to start the Arab uprising. Finally, that social networking site is an essential medium for people to express political opinions, seek out political information, propagate for candidate and give political advice. However, the major finding of the study is that social networking websites helped political activists to be connected with the ordinary people to form collective action and demonstrate in streets not only in Cairo but also throughout Egypt as a whole. This corroborates Chebib and Sohail (2011) study on the 'reasons social media contributed to the 2011 Egyptian revolution' that focused on the role of social media and their impact on the 2011 Egyptian revolution. It found that social media main role in the revolution was a facilitator and an accelerating agent. It also found that social media helped the Egyptian youths in holding online discussions and meetings, organizing protests and staying updated. They are also considered a credible source of news and updates because most of the news and updates come straight from eye witnesses and are uncensored and unedited. Similarly, Williams (2014) studied 'the role of social media and the Egyptian uprisings'. The primary aim of the study was to discover the role of social media and how they impacted on the Egyptian uprisings. It further investigated innovative tactics utilize through social media by Egyptian protestors to endorse the message of change. The result displayed the mounting reliance societies are having on advanced digital technology,

specifically in the Arab community in regards to social movements and future alterations with their national government.

The reviews show that social media are used by revolutionaries across the globe to advance their cause, mobilize supporters and attract sympathy of people outside the countries. It revealed that social media alone does not trigger revolutions in these countries where they were used rather they were catalysts that lend credence to their popularities. The foregoing has shown studies on social media and their utilization in revolutions in various countries but none of such study has been carried out on the extent of exposure of supporters of separatists agitation going on in South-East Nigeria. Hence, this study is an attempt to empirically identify the extent of exposure to the use of social media by supporters of the agitation.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The information gathered was analyzed and used to interpret the result of research. The population of the study comprised adults from 18 years and above drawn from the five Eastern states of Abia (1,850,000), Anambra (2,800,000), Ebonyi (132,170) Enugu (304,359) and Imo (51,209). This will give a total population of 5,137,738 (source: INEC 2015 voters register). Krejcie and Morgan formula was adopted to determine the sample size. To ensure fair representation of the population, the multi-stage, purposive and convenience sampling techniques, were used. The multi-stage technique enabled the researcher to first, select by ballot one senatorial district each from the five Eastern states giving a total of 5 senatorial districts; 3 Local Government Areas each from the senatorial districts giving a total of 15 Local Government Areas. 3 electoral wards each was further selected from each of the selected LGAs giving a total of forty-five wards.

Purposive sampling technique was adopted because the researcher was looking out for respondents who were only supporters of Biafra agitation while the convenience sampling technique was used to select 8 respondents from each of the selected wards because there may be more than 8 supporters of the renewed agitation for Biafra in each of the selected wards. Therefore only those (supporters) that are available at the time of research responded to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was the source of data collection. Data collected was calculated using simple percentage. The test-retest method was adopted to determine the reliability of the instrument. The result collected were correlated using the Pearson moment correlated coefficient. The result yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.83, hence the instrument was adopted and used for the study.

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

Where X and Y stand for the original score

N= Number of pairs of score

The computation showed r to stand at 0.83

Data presentation

To investigate the extent of exposure of supporters of Biafra agitation to social media.

Table 1: Exposure of supporters of Biafran agitation to social media.

States	Exposed to social media		Unexposed to social media		Grand total	
	Frequenc y	Percenta ge (%)	Frequenc y	Percenta ge (%)	Frequenc y	Percenta ge (%)
Abia	48	12.5	15	3.9	63	16.4
Anambr a	102	26.6	10	2.6	112	29.2
Ebonyi	12	3.1	29	7.6	41	10.7
Enugu	53	13.8	12	3.1	65	16.9
Imo	85	22.1	18	4.7	103	26.8
Total n	300	78.1	84	21.9	384	100

From the table 1, supporters of separatist agitation are highly exposed to social media up to 78.1%

Table 2: Extent of exposure of supporters of separatists agitation to social media

HOUR OF EXPOSURE	DAILY		WEEKLY		FORTNIGHT		MONTHLY		OTHERS		TOTAL N	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%
Below 1 hour	10	3.3	5	1.7	10	3.3	2	0.7	–	–	27	9
1-2 hour	12	4	10	3.3	8	2.7	11	3.7	2	0.7	43	14.3
2-3 hour	22	7.3	30	10	15	5	10	3.3	5	1.7	82	27.3
3-4 hour	30	10	28	9.3	20	6.7	17	5.7	12	4	107	35.7
Above 4 hours	10	3.3	20	6.7	9	3	2	0.7	-	-	41	13.7
TOTAL	84	28	93	31	62	20.7	42	14	19	6.3	300	78.2

This table indicates high level of exposure to social media by supporters of separatists agitation on daily basis at an average of 3-4 hours

Data Analysis

The result of the data in table 1 shows that about 9% of those exposed to social media use it below 1hour, while a significant number 27.3% of the supporters are exposed to the social media between 2-3hours on weekly basis. The result equally shows that 35.7% of those exposed to social media use it between 3-4hours on daily basis. This is an indication that supporters of Biafra agitation derive much pleasure in using the social media to get information about the Biafra struggle and other related issues. This finding is in line with the uses and gratification theory which suggest that an individual exposes him/her more on the media that gratifies his interest.

The findings in table 1a above is reinforced by the findings in table 1b which shows a breakdown of social media exposure by state. The result revealed that the level of exposure was high in Anambra, Imo, Enugu and Abia states and poor in Ebonyi state. This shows that the states that recorded high level of exposure has the highest support base and therefore the agitation for Biafra via social media was more pronounced there.

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that supporters of Biafra agitation were highly exposed to the use of social media considering the fact that a good number of them expose

themselves to the various social media platforms available to them for over two to three hours on daily basis. This implies that, they use the various platforms to access important information about events and happenings as they relate to Biafra agitation, political information concerning Biafra agitation, religious messages in support of Biafra agitation, getting factual and detailed account of Biafra issues and contributing to discussions relating to the renewed agitation for Biafra.

This findings affirms Okon et al (2016) and Ochonogor in Asak at al (2013) views that the advent of social media have indeed transformed the communication sphere. People who ordinarily would not have a 'say' in national matters that directly affects them now have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in such discussions which have given rise to many revolutionaries and agitations across the globe.

Social media offer people several platforms to express their views, opinions and ideas and have enabled them gain more impetus in participating and pursuing their cause. This agrees with the findings of Jost et al (2018) which found that social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook served as important tool for information exchange and the coordination of collective action in the protest movements that took place in the United States, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine. The present findings corroborate earlier study by Mutanana (2016) which found that social media were effective tools of communication among citizens of Zimbabwe that during the July 2016 Zimbabwe Shut Down which enabled them achieve their goals of social, political and economic freedom. It equally corroborates Smidi et al (2017) study which found that social media made citizens in the Middle East believe they had a 'say' in public affairs and their very presence helped common people feel empowered. The study also reinforces earlier study by Chebib et al (2011) which revealed that social media helped Egyptian youths in holding online discussion and meetings, organizing protest and staying updated. It is also in tandem with Allam (2012) study which discovered that many Egyptian citizens believed that they are enjoying more freedom of expression through their use of social networking websites and that they found a medium, whereby they can express their opinions, freely discuss political issues, taboos and criticize the government.

These imply that social media equip the people who are exposed to the various platform with the feeling of self expression, fulfillment and the zeal to contribute to national discuss. Hence, supporters of separatists agitation embrace these media as an avenue to propagate their cause and achieve their goals.

Conclusion

The major concern of this study was to ascertain the extent of exposure of supporters of separatists agitation to social media in South-East Nigeria. Within the framework of the study, it was found that supporters of separatists agitation are highly exposed to social media and the platforms were used to propagate their cause. Based on the findings, the study therefore concludes that: Social media reinforced the popularity gained by supporters of Biafra and aided the recognition of the Biafra struggle.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made by the study.

1. The level of exposure to the use of social media for the agitation for Biafra is an eye opener to government authorities and therefore presents the need for government to map out strategies of censoring the social media content through legislation. This will help curb the menace of agitations across the country.
2. Government should also counter propaganda of any agitation group on social media.
3. The finding which showed that facebook, whatsapp, YouTube and Google Plus were used among other media of communication, present the need for government and even educational institutions to begin to think outside the box on how these platforms can be used more for educational and other positive purposes rather than for agitations. This will yield more positive result in terms of individual and collective social development.

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