

Mainstream Media, Social Media and Peace-Building in Nigeria: Old Challenges, New Opportunities?

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Abstract

Nigeria has had an interesting and significant conflict and crisis trajectory over the course of its existence. This is not far removed from the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multicultural and multi-political features of the country. While there is no argument about the importance of the media in peace-building, their role has often remained contentious among scholars and this centres around whether the media escalate or de-escalate conflicts and crises. This paper demonstrates that the mainstream media seem not to be living up to the bill of performing its expected role in peace-building. It suggests a number of ways in which the new media might be opening up opportunities that make it possible to manage and resolve conflicts, including the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that can substantially alter the contours of collective violence in developing nations. The study is situated within the Habermasian framework of the public sphere and interrogates the essence of the new media as a critical sphere in the digital age and in dealing with the question of conflict. The paper calls for peace education imperative and complementarity of both mainstream and alternative media in bridging the media-society-conflict gap.

Keywords: Mainstream Media, Social Media, New Media Technologies, Public Sphere, Conflict Resolution, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria has had quite an interesting and significant conflict and crisis trajectory over the course of its existence. This is not far removed from the country being a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. The nation's advances in democracy as an independent society have thus been characterised by told and untold stories of ethnic wars, discrimination, cultural clashes and most recently, terrorism epitomised

by the Boko Haram phenomenon. The downside is that these terrorist tendencies have increasingly taken their toll on the nation's national peace and development.

As various communication scholars have continued to posit, communication and the power of the media remain among the veritable answers to resolving conflicts in contexts such as Nigeria. However, considering that the bane of our mainstream media is epitomised by ethical issues of ownership and governmental control, it has remained questionable the extent these traditional media could continue to meaningfully contribute to engendering peace and violence-free Nigeria.

Nigeria's embrace of democracy in 1999 heralded to a large extent, some optimism that she may well be on her way to a better life in respect to sustainable peace and national development. However, the utopian, idealistic and democratic principles seem to have had little impact on the nation since that democratic opening (Agozino, 2009). Since the return to civilian rule, Nigeria being a multi-ethnic political entity with 36 states and over 250 ethnic groups, has experienced and continues to experience conflicts and crises between communities, ethnic and religious groups; the latest being the Boko Haram insurgence and the dreaded killer herdsmen. The resort to violence seems to be the answer to the many years of government neglect right from the military period, the defects in the colonial arrangements and the absence of concrete and credible institutional framework for addressing these conflicts. These contestations have frequently raised accusatory fingers to certain factors: the shrinking economic opportunities, exclusionary and divisive politics, the seeming nonchalance and repressive response to legitimate demands by the federal government, militarism, corruption and poor leadership over many years.

The media, in terms of a broad-based information-sharing capacity, remain one of the fundamental means of salvaging violent crisis situations. Granted, the media are adjudged as a powerful rallying point between the leaders and the led and serve as an integral part of political life; providing society with the information they need to make rational political decisions concerning their existence. The media are ever so hailed as the Fourth Estate of the Realm after the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary arms of government. What roles do the media play in conflict and crises situations as against their expected roles in helping to douse conflicts and bring back society to peaceful tranquillity? To what extent do the media engender sustainable national development? In this line of thinking, the media, as communication and conflict studies scholars posit, are expected to be the catalyst and antidote to violent crises that threaten the peace of a society.

While there is no argument about the importance of the media in peace-building, their role has often remained contentious among various scholars and this revolves around whether they escalate or de-escalate conflicts and crises (Salawu, 2009; Omenugha and Ukwueze, 2011; Vladislavjevic, 2014; Pointer, Bosch, Chuma & Wasserman, 2016; Wasserman, Chuma, & Bosch, 2018). Adam and Holguin (2003) argue that for conflict resolvers, the media are usually seen as a threat – keen to pounce on any indiscreet or conciliatory remarks by the negotiators and publish them without

any thought of the consequences. Media as a social institution are involved in conflicts in the society either as harbinger, channel of information and analysis of the conflicts, or as part of the escalation or resolution of the conflicts (Salawu, 2009, p.75). Ownership patterns, pressures, political influence, and other factors continue to challenge the media's consistent and committed role in peace-building in the nation, making it increasingly impossible for them to live up to the expected role in peace-building.

According to Best (2013, p.30), peace-building is the collective processes to end or mitigate conflict, rebuild and reconcile post-conflict, and foster conditions that avoid conflict in the first place. Studies in peace-making or peace-building propose that in resolving civil conflict more is needed than merely 'negative peace', that is, absence of violence (Lodge, 2018). The term crisis is used to refer to security related situations whereby citizens may be in danger, or their everyday activities are disrupted and impacted. Accordingly, crises may include natural, man-made disasters and political crises (Watson & Hagen, 2015, p. 142). In this study, we allude to both peace-building and conflict resolution interchangeably, although we are aware that there may be marked difference between the two.

Watson & Hagen (2015, p.142) maintain that traditional media, such as radio and print journalism, is well-established as an essential element in peace-building programmes. As access to mobile phones and social media continues to expand exponentially, even in many conflict-inflicted environments in parts of the world, attention is increasingly shifting to the transformational potentials of new media technologies in enhancing or substituting old media in peace-building (Best, 2013). Growing evidence indicates that the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can substantially alter the contours of collective violence in developing nations (Waren, 2015).

Contested Role of Media in Conflicts

In 2002, a Nigerian journalist, Isioma Daniel sparked off a religious riot that could have led to a full-blown war, with a newspaper report in which Prophet Mohammed was allegedly denigrated. The then *ThisDay* fashion columnist who shortly went on a self-exile authored an Op-Ed on the Miss World Beauty pageant that was scheduled to hold in Nigeria in 2001. In response to the opposition by the Muslim community (that the scheduled contest was inappropriate by reason of religious implications), the journalist had made an incriminating remark about Prophet Mohammed in connection to the 92 beauty queens gracing the event from around the world. The article was met with a huge backlash from the Muslim community in Nigeria and the ripple effect was a very damaging ethnic war in which over 200 people were killed, over 1,000 persons wounded, and more than a score displaced. In addition, a *fatwa* (a compulsory mandate to kill) was issued on Isioma's life. This in effect illustrates the effectiveness of news reports which can either spark off a crisis or engender peace.

As Nigeria wades through the storms of insecurity worsened by the Boko

Haram insurgency and the Biafra agitations in some northern and eastern parts of the country respectively, the question begging for an answer is what the media are doing to nip these crises in the bud. Through its messages packaged in the form of news, opinions, commentary, opinion polls, programmes, developing stories, consistent in-depth reportage of news matters, commercials and so on, the media can set agenda for its audience. The audience of the media follows its trends, usually putting unflinching trust in the industry and its practitioners. However, in recent times, the media have been accused of favouring sensationalism and being influenced by commercial, ethnic, religious, and socio-political considerations, rather than the need to be neutral, independent, assertive, and resistant to manipulations.

Scholars accuse the media of being compromised by its neoliberal tendencies punctuated by profit-making, advertising and political associations (Petley, 2004; Omenugha & Oji, 2008; Uzuegbunam & Udeze, 2013; Omenugha & Uzuegbunam, 2015). Ethical criteria such as objectivity, balance, comprehensiveness, independence, and integrity, seem secondary to news reporters. As Sobowale (1992, p.9) observes, responsible journalism demands that while media practitioners combat and expose the ills of society, they should do so in a way that does not destroy that which they seek to build. The challenge of responsible journalism seems to have become most pressing in a new global order where the media are required to be agents and catalysts of peace and development.

Traditional Media and Crises in Nigeria: Stoic Challenges

Without question, the role of the traditional media in conflict and crises situations is accentuated in their assuming the role of a catalyst during these times. This catalytic role could be seen in the ways in which they are expected to help promote a peace culture. However, there appear to be factors and unchallenged practices that have remained stoic in the media system in Nigeria. These have stealthily forestalled the extent to which the Nigerian media can contribute or be used to foster peace in the system.

The first factor is ownership pressure and politics. Scholars have agreed on how fundamentally the political and economic interests of media owners have increasingly defined journalistic values in contemporary times (Badgikian, 1983; McChesney, 1989; Petley, 2004; Omenugha and Uzuegbunam, 2015). Nigerian media landscape has over the times been shaped by its ownership tendencies. Like in any other clime, the influence of ownership on media operation is real. The media ownership pattern is polarised along two main typologies namely the government-owned and the privately-owned media. The more privately-owned media are usually owned by rich influential individuals with the political and economic power to protect and advance; groups which could range from religious, cultural to ethnic groups. The government-owned media operate to serve the interests of the government of the day whereas the privately-owned operate to fulfil the whims and caprices of their proprietors and to push the particularistic interests of the groups that own them.

In all these, the common axiom “he who pays the piper, calls the tune” rings true. The ethnic and religious affiliation of an owner appears to have continuously influenced recruitment, editorial policy and audience base of media houses in Nigeria. This ownership pattern makes the media have the tendency for selective and bias coverage of crises and conflicts, including the representation of same. The Danish Cartoon crisis of 2006 is a good illustration. Early in 2006, a full-fledged crisis erupted in Maiduguri, North of Nigeria, over a cartoon that appeared in a Danish newspaper in which Prophet Mohammed was allegedly discredited. The crisis spread to other parts of the country, notably Onitsha in the eastern part of Nigeria. In a study conducted by Omenugha & Okunna (2008), the researchers examined the *New Nigerian* newspaper owned by the governments of the 19 Northern states and *Daily Champion* owned by Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, a paper considered to be dedicated to the cause of the Easterners. The findings of the study demonstrated that both newspapers were more interested in reporting “their own side of the stories”.

While the *New Nigerian* downplayed the number of casualties and human loss of the Igbo tribe, it was through the *Daily Champion* that the wreck on the Igbo people was brought to fore. On the other hand, *New Nigerian* reports were biased in favour of the Hausa/Moslem interest. The newspaper rather suggested the wrong meted out to the Muslim adherents by the Danish cartoon. Both newspapers failed to bring out the supposed cause of the crisis, very trivial as it were. According to both case studies, the overriding message was clear: 'difference'. The fervour with which the media use potentially divisive words like 'northerners', 'easterners', 'kinsmen', 'our people', were also instructive (Omenugha & Okunna, 2008).

The influence of ownership pressure and politics in media operation is also seen in their making the sources of stories 'official', apparent lack of diversity, drowning multiple 'voices' in the news, double standards, use of stereotypes that skew the coverage of crises, in addition to unchallenged and unverified assumptions (Omenugha & Okunna, 2008). Furthermore, the language in which conflicts were reported was often loaded, stories were out of context, headlines and stories did not match, etc. The tendency to protect sectional interests using the media was very rife.

The second aspect to consider is political or government control. From the earliest days of colonial rule until the current democratic dispensation, the relationship between the government and the media in Nigeria has continued to raise contentions and concerns. This has deteriorated to their relationship being described as 'cat and mouse', 'bitter-sweet', 'intimate strangers' and 'carrot-and-stick' relationship (Omenugha & Uzuegbunam, 2012). The history of the Nigerian media has been told and retold with stories of oppression from the government – censorship, killing of journalists, razing/demolition of media houses, confiscation of copies/sealing of media houses and other extra-legal measures. This situation stifles news reports and editorials, especially at crises times. The government's one recurring *raison d'être* being that, for national security, the media must not report news that could escalate crises or warrant contending forces continue to be at loggerheads. A more covert

intention might be to disallow the media from reporting issues that might reveal their association with the conflict or crises, or simply to pursue their propagandistic agendas. Warren (2015) argues that state influence and the difficulties associated with extending such influence over any space have long been noted as central forces underlying the geography of collective peace and collective violence.

The third factor is sensationalist media and fake news phenomenon. Sensationalism is one of the media practices which are increasingly undermining the critical role the conventional Nigerian media could play in building a culture of peace. Such practices not only implicate the media's credibility, they equally serve as avenues for snowballing conflicts. The *ThisDay* publication on the controversial Miss World beauty contest in Nigeria, in which the reporter made derogatory remarks about the Holy Prophet of Islam, is a case in point. The publication led to riots resulting in the destruction of lives and property.

Sensationalism is a type of editorial bias in mass media in which events and topics in news stories are over-hyped to increase viewership or readership figures (Uzuegbunam & Udeze, 2013). Sensationalism may include reporting about generally insignificant or trivial issues and events that do not influence overall society, and which advance biased presentations of newsworthy topics in a sensationalist, trivial or tabloid manner. This definition has also been stretched to include reporting serious issues such as the outbreak of wars, conflicts, and crises in a sensational manner to attract more audiences. This has been dubbed “market-driven or commercial journalism” by scholars like Sparks and Tulloch (2000), Omenugha & Oji (2008), Kleemans & Hendricks (2009), and Yadav (2011). *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* (2011) agrees that sometimes sensationalism can lead to a lesser focus on objective journalism in favour of a profit motive, in which editorial choices are based upon sensational stories and presentations to increase advertising revenue.

This shift towards entertainment-based journalism style could mean that the important issues such as healthcare, education, objective coverage of crises, economy, and politics are given the backseat to entertainment. Furthermore, sensational journalism could have a negative effect on the audience. Sometimes, in their use of words, language, pictures, and other illustrative contents, the media could trigger in the public certain alarmist tendencies especially at crises times. At such critical times, rather than serving to quench tension and panic, the media could be helping to fan the cinders of war from different opposition groups in the unquestionably multi-ethnic Nigerian society. In more recent times, fake news phenomenon has equally arisen as a sub-factor of sensationalism. Uzuegbunam (2017) argues that some mainstream media patronise fake, unverified news circulated by mischief-makers especially online, and in so doing amass wide views and readership from unsuspecting audiences in a bid to “make impact”.

Social Media As Alternative Public Sphere

The public sphere theory forms the framework for this study. Created in the 18th

century, the public sphere is a discursive space where people could interchange their opinions so as to create a common, mutual judgment (Hauser, 1988). In his seminal work, *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere*, German sociologist and critical theorist, Jurgen Habermas viewed public sphere as various avenues where citizens can freely express, participate, communicate and share their understanding, ideas and information that involve political, social issues and other diverse things that affect their social coexistence; peace and conflicts inclusive.

Ideally, these platforms comprise but are not limited to, clubs, coffee joints and saloon joints, assemblies and hangouts. In Nigeria, motor parks, viewing centres, tea joints, and market places could be instances of possible public spheres. Kperogi (2011, p.60), referred to such platforms as “open, inclusive, dialogic arena of rational-critical discourse untrammelled by either the state or the private sector and that acts as a check on state power.” Nevertheless, with the advancement in information and communication technology, the character of Habermas' public sphere theory has been advanced and transformed from an easily physical, locational stage to a more sophisticated, cyber-based but complicated communication space.

This is a space where concerned members of the social organisation gather (not physically) to exchange opinions regarding public affairs and deliberate sometimes in a critical and analytical manner (Ubayasiri, 2007; Allan, 2010; Abubakar, 2012). In other words, technology has created an alternative media for the expansion of public sphere. In a similar manner, Neal (2012) writes that the critical nature of the public sphere is endangered by the power of the traditional, mainstream mass media that transform most of the society into a passive public, the objectives of a consumer culture.

It is interesting to note, however, that the possibility of reaching larger numbers of persons allow internet users to create ties that would have been difficult to maintain, and these ties create 'networks'. Castells (2004) recognises the importance of networks, affirming that power does not reside in institutions, but is rather located in the networks that structure society. To have control, networks need to be created that counteract other networks, making it a question of “networks vs. networks”. It, therefore, suffices to note that for the new social media to thrive in Nigeria, the old networks characterised by the mainstream media, have to be challenged.

In making a case for the use of the social media as a tool for engendering peace-building in Nigeria, two principles of the public sphere should be critically considered. Firstly, it is independent of government and corporate control or interference. It is a platform that is free and devoid of restrictions that hinder freedom of expression. Secondly, the discourse in the public sphere could be amiable, critical and rational. Thus, participants in this platform avoid sentimental and coloured responses to issues as may be seen in the mainstream media because of its many gatekeepers and ownership policies. This gives participants the opportunity to question some of their personal assumptions that may not be in conformity with rational discourse. The absence of dogmatism is ensured, and the sphere is to some extent, inclusive and equal.

Possibilities of the New Media in Conflict Resolution and Peace-building

The mainstream media weighed down by challenges emanating from ownership pressures and neoliberal tendencies may do very little to play a significant role in resolving conflicts and building peace in Nigeria. Based on this assumption, one is tempted to turn to the new media: Internet and social media. The Internet, without question, has remained the single most revolutionary landmark in the communication arena, changing the way we communicate, access and distribute information, and the relationship between the traditional mass media and their audiences. It has empowered the user as both consumer and producer of information and communication content, giving rise to such terms as “prosumer”, “co-creator”, “produser”. In this context, the Internet is considered a new public sphere for the increasingly segmented, varied, and fragmented audiences of the new media.

For this study, Social Media Networks (SMNs) are defined as online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration (Newson, 2008). Additionally, social media tools are websites that interact with the users, while giving them information, the most popular of which are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blog. In a recent report released in January 2017 and which overviews the Internet, social media and mobile penetration and use in different countries (Global Web Index, 2017), Nigeria has a 51% Internet penetration (97.2 million) out of a population of 189 million. Active social media users stood at 18 million and another 157.7 million which account for 83% of the population have mobile subscriptions, whereas 67 percent of the population own and use smartphones. *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Instagram* remain the most widely used social media in Nigeria, in that order.

According to Oni (2013), with the proliferation of mobile telecommunications services in Nigeria, subscription to mobile internet services has been growing exponentially. Aside major platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, indigenous social media platforms such as *Nairaland*, *allAfrica*, *NAIJA.com*, *OnlineNigeria*, *YNaija.com*, among a plethora of blogs, have democratised information dissemination and sharing. This is in turn shaping informed “social-intelligence literacy” (Nwagbara, 2013). With these telling and growing statistics, it is not surprising that gaining access to the Internet is no longer as demanding as it used to be for some Nigerians, who by social or demographic status could not afford to be connected. Most telecommunications service providers now offer access to the Internet as part of their regular service package.

Today's mobile and social media technologies demonstrate how interactive dialogue is just as important, if not more important, in peace-building efforts. As one popular formula puts it: *as long as you are talking, you can't be shooting* (Best, 2013, p.30). Consolidating on the role of mobile and social media in peace-building, Best (2013, p.31) surmises it this way:

Mobile phones are becoming fundamental technologies in enabling this peace building dialogue... Somalia, often

topping the global list of failed states, has five mobile phone operators...Whether accessed on mobile phones, through cybercafés or other means, social media platforms, and methods to monitor them, are also emerging as important technologies for peace building. One critical component in building and sustaining peace are political developments and democratic reforms that set the stage for broader participatory governance. Social media can support these developments up to and including elections.

Social media are opening up the Nigerian social space in new ways. It is now the new equaliser that is breaking the information production, dissemination, and consumption monopoly that was the mainstay of government and privately-owned mass media. In the process, it is unleashing hidden journalistic talents as we witness a burgeoning of bloggers, social commentators, digital activists, and social critics. These are part of a new generation of social activists who have now appropriated the new media technologies and now use them to create awareness, mobilise, network, share ideas, critique, vent frustrations and ultimately discursively set a new agenda for conflict resolution and peace in Nigeria. Those who were formerly voiceless could have a voice; the voices are possible and multiple once anyone can sign up for an account on a social media.

A new wave of information democracy is commonplace as social media has the capacity to support awareness creation, sensitisation, and social mobilisation. In appraising the influence of new media technologies, Downing (2008) cited in Olorunnisola and Martin (2013) offers some characteristics of new media technologies including the ability of individuals located in the Diaspora to construct new social and political relationships, marginalised groups influencing mainstream media coverage of their causes by strategically using new media, and enabling open citizen-created journalism.

As for Soriano and Sreekumar (2012), the multiple and composite features of the social media enable them to circumvent traditional barriers and censorship and alter the quality of debate between individual, minority nationalities, states and international communities and to challenge national limits and boundaries. Social media thus gives an opportunity for marginalised and minority groups to form a forum and let their voices out on Twitter and Facebook for instance. Olabamiji (2013) writes that Facebook is now available in over 70 languages including English and Nigeria's local Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo and that hash tags on Twitter are used to raise public awareness about a phenomenon, promote social events, share events and join trending topics and conversations in Twitter sphere. This is a clear strength of the social networking sites.

Again, since an increasing number of Nigerians are turning to YouTube to watch educational videos and varieties of entertainment content, YouTube becomes an example of a social network that could be effectively utilised to pass across developmental messages. Change agents, social workers, concerned citizens, activists, and users of the social media can take advantage of the visual aesthetics of

YouTube and other online platforms to share and distribute video messages, films and documentaries that drive peace and development agendas in the country. However, it is notable that propagators of violence and hate speech also utilise the Internet to push messages across to citizens and governments. Udeze (2005) quoting an anonymous German scholar writes that “[man] must always have an organ with which to express himself. If he is denied pen and paper, he raises his arm and writes with the sword rather than the pen, and instead of on paper, on men's bodies...”

Another significant thing to note is that social media could be used to generate breaking, first-hand stories about crises situations from various parts of the country which the conventional media might not be ready and equipped to cover owing to some limitations. Certain false and unverified news reports from some sectional quarters which sometimes offer overblown and superfluous accounts of crises and conflicts could be averted when citizen journalists are relied upon to give a first-hand news report of events. Social media have the advantage of reach and enormous space. Social media only operates with the virtual space and the chief characteristic of the virtual space is its vastness and ability to be everywhere at the same time. This overwhelming attribute could be exploited for the advancement of peace in the country. Citizens no longer are constrained by the availability of traditional media because the social media alter barriers from geographic distance. The new (social) media have been credited with the power to provide a platform which is accessible to a greater spectrum of citizens due largely to a reduction in geographical distance and the economic and physical costs of political participation (Olorunnisola and Martin, 2013). This power of space could be utilised to carry and spread developmental messages across various local and segmented contexts.

Social media have an enormous capacity for a discursive role. In Nigeria, Twitter has become among the political and corporate elites, a rallying point for provoking discourses and putting pressing urgent issues on the front burner. Other social media networks such as Facebook prides itself in its interactive opportunities. Twitter sphere has become a space where online audiences, including ordinary people, gather to engage and debate topical issues that affect them. Hashtag politics on social media encourage wider interaction and engagement via the Internet sphere. Unbeneficial or suspicious government policies and hate speeches are called out, challenged and condemned and alternative options may emerge in their place. Watson & Hagen (2015) has also enthused the possibility of social media persuading relationships amongst citizens and between citizens and crisis response organisations which can greatly enhance collective action and collaboration. Such relationships can only exist based on the principle of joint-interest and mutual trust (Watson & Hagen, 2015).

As a fertile ground for a subversive form of protest communication, the social media have the power to afford opportunity and platform to citizens who may be unable to speak truth to power. Fahmi (2009) asserts that new ICTs have “created new geographies of protest” and have “shifted their [activists'] campaigns and resources to

alternative virtual venues" (p.90). With online networks, activists can locally and globally push grassroots ideas, organise and coordinate action, such as during the Occupy movements (Baruh, 2015). To combat the difficulty of travelling long distances to participate in social movement activities, online platforms allow for the creation of virtual spaces within which citizens can engage in debate and demonstrations. In Fahmi's (2009) study of the use of new ICTs by Egyptians who participated in the 2006 protests in Tahrir Square, Cairo, the author asserts that the Internet allowed social movements to transcend monitoring and control due to a lack of hierarchies and centralisation of power. Similarly, Sohrabi-Haghighat (2010) agrees on the ability of social media to reach transnational audiences and to circumvent traditional top-down political hierarchies that have increased the capacity of dissidents to frame their movements and mobilise citizens in local and Diaspora domains.

Chiluwa and Adegoke (2013) examines the reactions of people who twittered and commented on some crisis events in Nigeria, including tweets by self-acclaimed Boko Haram sect members who twittered on the Boko Haram Twitter page. Their findings show how people can reveal their attitudes about significant events by expressing themselves through the alternative and inclusive platform offered by social media. While some individuals and groups express their feelings as victims who have been attacked, other tweeters and commenters express their views on how the uprisings may be put down. These findings demonstrate how an opportunity for people to vent their frustrations online could delay or stall exacerbation of war and conflict.

In South Africa, Wasserman, Bosch & Chuma (2018) through a quantitative content analysis, explored the print media coverage of service delivery protests. Service delivery protests were protests by citizens fuelled by government's inability to provide the basic social services but which in turn, is seen as a manifestation of a deeper disillusionment with the post-apartheid democracy. They found that the community protests represent a form of bottom-up resistance, raising issues of the politics of inclusion and exclusion. This is shaped by media coverage of the protests and the nature of how these groups are given voice in mainstream media – when the media focuses only on violent protests, or frames protests as nothing more than a traffic disturbance. Their findings suggest that the print media largely mute the voices of citizens on the margins of the public sphere and that the language of emotion and activism is often not recognised as legitimate political speech.

Social Media and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: Challenges

Like many things, this new romance with technology can be abused and indeed appears to be as intoxicating as new wine. Restraint and decorum are vanishing quickly from online spaces. In a brazen new media order, liberty and expressive culture are now confused with license and capacity to insult and disparage. People could easily also confuse the propensity to defame and slander for courage as exemplified in a not-so-recent social media incident in Nigeria where a top official of the National Security and Civil Defense Corps was relieved of his duty as a consequence of an interview clip

released online by Channels TV and which attracted much ridicule, demonization, and abuse from social media users.

The emerging blog culture is also one of the social media engagements that favour ridicule, character smear, and abusive language. The writing style also implicates a penchant for provocation and sensationalism, something which appears to enjoy Internet users' acclaim and appreciation. If the social blogger is so perceived as the crusader for nationalism, do the disillusionment with the political class, the depressing strain with the failures and dysfunctions in the nation, and the outrage at the blatant misappropriation of national wealth excuse such social blogger's style, language choice and conduct? Commitment to nationalism does not absolve the social blogger from any responsibility to show restraint in conduct.

According to Olabamiji (2014), expression of ethnic and religious sentiments in the new (social) media has led to some inter-ethnic, inter-religious disputes and crisis in the northern part of the country. For instance, the Boko Haram insurgents have been able to use the social media to post gory pictures and videos of threat, murder, bombings and other activities of the sect. When the social media are used in this way it creates a state of violence and the intent of revenge which inadvertently turns the country into a state of anarchy. Koller (2005) equally posits that the new (social) media can trigger, escalate and intensify conflict and unwittingly cause political violence.

With the social media platforms, negative comments, speculation, misinformation, half-truths, and rumours could be spread with little or no chance of evaluating their veracity; and in some types of crises, citizens could potentially place themselves, or others, in danger of physical or social harm (Famutimi, 2013; Watson & Hagen, 2015). Similarly, there is the threat of online vigilantism. Writing about this phenomenon, Watson & Hagen (2015, pp.147-148) describe conflict situations where individuals who are interacting with others in social media group settings, discuss and share pictorial evidence such as pictures and videos from conflict situations and this consequently leading to some individuals taking it upon themselves to try to locate those responsible for the attacks. Such unregulated, crowd sourcing behaviour in the face of some types of crisis, the authors (ibid) argue, could lead to the risk of innocent individuals being inappropriately labelled and targeted, and suffer from physical harm, emotional distress and social stigma.

As a developing country, Nigeria is equally faced with the question of digital divide, unequal access to digital technologies and resources. Commenting on this problem, Odu (2013) writes:

Internet access in Nigeria is still not fully “democratic or equitable” as there are clear geographic inequities in its distribution. Social media, for now, are increasing only the voice of an educated urban-based population in their clamour for greater political say and space. The voice of the rural people in Nigeria is still dim and under-represented in this development. A desirable development would be for the

privileged elite to find ways to engage more with the less-privileged and increase the latter's share of the dividend of this new information democracy and freedom. This, however, can be achieved when the tools for the public sphere are made available and accessible to the less-privileged.

There is also a possibility of much engagement and celebration of social media's potentials to lead to what Morozov (2011) refers to as slacktivist and clicktivist tendencies. According to Morozov, this is a feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact and one which is characterised by mere pointing, clicking, uploading, liking and befriending on social media without a commensurate amount of effort to mobilise for change offline.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn attention to the deficiencies as well as the strengths of both of mainstream and new media in dealing with the question of peace-building and conflict resolution in Nigeria. The traditional media have been implicated in this analysis especially as they are assumed to be “naturally attracted” to conflicts albeit in a distasteful way. On the one hand, several studies have confirmed that conflict appears to be the bread and butter of journalism because it sells. On the other hand, this study has made a case that with all its potentials and strengths, social media can play a huge role in Nigeria with regards to stimulating peace-building, and to seal the discrepancies occasioned by differences within the nation.

However, a responsible and peaceful social media interaction must be advocated and pushed for before this can happen. In this wise, peace education using digital media tools is critical. Digital media technologies could play a role in improving the effectiveness of peace education. Policy makers in Nigeria need to consider giving peace education adequate attention and to embark on peace advocacy projects through new digital media to serve as preventive measures (Okolie-Osemene, 2012). Part of peace education must include the creation of awareness; this would need the traditional media to wedge in also to create a consciousness on the indisputable powers of the social media and how user-generated content might go a long way to either ignite war or build peace. Currently, there appears to be no such sort of conscious awareness creation in the traditional media. Undeniably, there is a pressing urgency for new media audiences to have some literacies such as media literacy and digital literacy skills and competencies that are essential for living and working in media- and information-rich societies. Unless this is done, the many potentials integral to the new media, including those required for peace-building and conflict resolution, may remain largely untapped.

In the end, what we have achieved in this paper is not to demonise one media system and favour the other, but basically to illustrate that both media systems have potentials and pitfalls for peace-building and conflict resolution especially in a state such as Nigeria. It was equally the intention to open up a conversation on the uncertainties surrounding the much-touted use of new media as an alternative to old

media in peace-building and conflict resolution. Indeed, the debate about the role of the media in conflict resolution may remain inconclusive for a long time, considering that there seems to be no perfect fit choice between the old and the new media. The new media landscape is constantly changing, and it is increasingly difficult to remain very optimistic and celebratory of its vast potentials, without taking into account the many downsides it could manifest. Some complementarity is hence required to bring about a synergistic criss-cross of both new and old media in achieving this crucial goal.

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