The Social Media and Conflict Resolution

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Abstract: *In the North East of Nigeria to be precise on April 14, 2014 at a school in Borno State of Nigeria, about 276 secondary school girls were kidnapped while taking their final West African School Certificate Examinations (WAEC). The girls were taken by Boko Haram, (a terrorist Group) which when translated means Western Education is sinful. Soon after, social media users in Nigeria started repeating the hash "Bring Back our girls". This came as a result of the speech in Nigerian which Oby Ezekwesili, vice president of the World Bank for Africa made on 23 April 2014. This paper therefore is to highlight the role of the social media in conflict resolution.*

Key words: Social media, conflict resolution

Introduction

The social media is a means of interaction amongst various people of the world in which, they create, share and exchange information and ideas through an electronic mediums or hand held devices powered by the internet etc. This could not have been possible without the development in the means of communication. This development was facilitated by the breakthrough in rocket and space-craft technology. Rockets are launched into space for varying reasons including communication, etc. This means that, the Twenty First (21st) Century is a century of globalization which, ushered in the breaking down of barriers or boundaries as a result of the advent of the social media. The social media are among the benefits that the invention of the internet has brought into the communication sector. The social media are a group of internet based application that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 that allows the creation and exchange of user generated contents according to Kaplan (2010).

Social media depends on mobile and web based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user generated content. Social media has brought about changes in communication between organizations, communities and individuals according to Egbecho (2014).

In social media everybody has the possibility to become a content creator. Individuals can also advertise themselves forming friendship chain. Most people have associated the social media with positive outcomes which is not always the case. Social media cause more harm than good.

Social Media and Nigeria

Social media became popular in Nigeria in 1999 during the abortive regime of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida when the Bulletin Board System expanded largely and began breaking into the mainstream much sooner than it was planned to. With the fast response of people to the budding internet community, the Bulletin Boards which were usually used by companies started to

expand their roles by offering their service to more people around the globe. More and more people joined the online community with the innate goal of creating an identity in this space through websites which are now referred to as social networking sites (Egbecho 2014).

The launch of the then very popular Friendster.com elevated social media more creator of friendster, Jonathan Abrams concerted a perfect mix of popular features from earlier social networking predecessors. Friendster became an instant success and gathered about three million members who signed up in its early months of launch. Also, Facebook, Twitter and others emerged to make up for the lapses of friendstar. Thus, Facebook became the first recognized social network that emerged in Nigeria before others 2go, whatsapp, Eskimis etc followed suite. Currently, Nigeria is ranked tops in terms of social media usage with over 11 million users (Uzor, 2014).

However, Nigeria has also joined in the invention of social networks. Just in 2012, a 15 – year old high school student in Jos, Terk Ura Ephraim Unongo invented "IMONGO" social network, a replica of the social media platforms transforming world information today (Vanguard, 2013).

This is just an offshoot of more of the social media that are yet to be developed in Nigeria.

Definition of the Term: Social Media

Since the emergence of social media some years ago, numerous attempts have been made by various scholars to give a cogent and concise definition or meaning to what social media is or ought to be and like any other concept, this has been rather a herculean task since knowledge at various levels differs given the human characteristics of dynamism. Nevertheless, in an attempt to proffer a generally accepted definition or meaning to this contemporary phenomenon, many definitions has been given. Social media has been defined in the following way.

(A)   A website and application that enables users to create   and share contents or to share such contents in the   social networking.

(B)   A group of computer mediated tools that allow people to   create, share or exchange information, idea,   pictures/video in virtual network.

(C)   A group of internet based application that builds on the   ideological and technological foundation of 2.0 and which   allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

(D)   It depends on mobile web technology to create highly   interactive platforms through which individuals and   communities   share,   create   and   discuss   and   modify   user   generated content.

These and many more are the diverse postulated definitions of the social media each trying to highlight its characteristic importance. Example of some social media outlets includes; Facebook, Linked In, Google+, Skype, Whatsapp, Instagram, Snaptchat, etc.

Facebook for example, since its inception has over 10.63 million monthly active users with 680 million users as of February 2013. In the way, Google plus has 343 million active users. Other popular social media sites include, youtube, with about 4 million viewers per day. Twitter with about 500 million users among others.

It is therefore important to note that, given the above definition and despite the slight degree of variance that may exist amongst the definitions above, there is a conspicuous high

level of agreeability, coherence, similarity and purposefulness as to what social media may stand for.

One cannot but imagine the importance of social media in modern communication. Little wonder, some social scientist has postulated that the world has now become a global village by virtue of the emergence of the social media.

Nevertheless, despite this self-acclaimed importance of the social media categorized under the new media, many are of the view that, the social media is usually associated with some meager negativities such as cybercrime.

Types of Social Media

1.   **Facebook:** This is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. According to statistics from the Nielsen Group, internet users within the United States spend more time on Facebook than any other website.

2.   **Twitter:** Twitter is a free microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other users tweet.

3.   **Google+:** (pronounced Google plus) is Google's social networking project, designed to replicate the way people interact offline more closely unlike the case in other social networking services. The projects slogan is "Real-life shaving rethought for the web".

4.   **Wiki:** Wikipedia is a free open content online encyclopedia created through the collaborative effort of a community of users known as Wikipedian's. Anyone registered on the site can create an article for publication; registration is not required to edit articles. Wikipedia was founded in January, 2001.

5.   **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is a social networking site designed specifically for the business community. The goal of the site is to allow registered members to establish and document networks of people they know and trust professionally.

6.   **Reddit:** Is a social news website and forum where stories are socially curated and promoted by site members. The site is composed of hundreds of sub-communities, known as sub reddits. "Each subreddit has a specific topic such as technology, politics or music.

Reddit site members, also known as, "redditors", submit content which is then voted upon by other members. The goal is to send well-registered stories to the top of the sites main thread page.

7.   **Pinterest:** is a social curation website for sharing and categorizing images found online. Pinterest requires brief description but the main focus of the site is visual. Clicking on an image will take you to the original source, so, for example, if you click on a picture of a pair of shoes, you might be taken to a site where you can purchase item. An image of blueberry pancakes might take you to the recipe; a picture of a whimsical bird house might take you to the instructions.

Others are; survey monkey (survey monkey.com) for questionnaires and analysis and help interpret your data, Live Mocha (Live mocha.com) for learning and translations.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of the study is to explain that social media is a major contemporary means of communication and, is very much needed in conflict resolution. It will help to highlight the problems to the disputant and the public.

What is Conflict?

Conflict will always be present in the human society. As a result of different opinions and positions on issues. For no two individuals will take the same positions on issues. Conflict is therefore necessary to human existence. For the Chinese, conflict is necessary to enable the opposing group to know the stand of the other on issues so as to bring about its resolution. To the people in South Africa, with the theory of Ubuntu, conflict is not also too bad for it brings about its solutions and resolutions.

Origin of Conflict

Conflict is associated or characterized by disagreement, contending parties, perceived threat whether physical, emotional or otherwise to the wellbeing, need or interest of the people. It can equally be a struggle between people, organization or groups. It is important to note that conflict is a universal phenomenon. And at various levels it affects the socio-economic and political life of the people. That is why, it has been said that, conflict is as old as people.

Thomas Matthias in an attempt to explain the remote causes of conflict amongst other scholars came up with the conclusion that, the reduction in supply of the means of subsistence is the root cause of conflict. He argued that conflict is essentially caused by the increase of population in geometrical progression and the food supply in arithmetical progression. But evolutionary theorist like Charles Darwin believe that, the biological principles of struggle for subsistence and the survival of the fittest are the causes of conflict in any given society. This is because; every individual struggles or strives to sustain him/herself. They consciously and unconsciously trample on one another thereby initiating conflict.

Equally, Sigmund Freud a social physiologist opined that violence or aggressiveness is inherent or inbuilt in man and as a result, has the innate instinct for conflict. But for Karl Marx a political scientist and economist however thinks contrary. To him, it is inequality in the production sector between the bourgeoisie (the haves) and the proletariat (the have nots) that is the cause of conflict in any given society. Most political scientists believe it is the struggle for power and the control of scarce resources.

Conflict can be overt (visible) or convert (invisible). And its manifestation usually includes strikes, violence, demonstrations, quarrels and war.

War is the extreme manifestations of conflict. And according to Robert C. North (Academia.com), "all human relationships may be viewed as interlaced by two closely related processes. The conflictual and the integrative". He went on to say that, in such cases, the parties involved has two options. For example, the parties involved had to make the relationship integrative harmonious, cordial. While in a conflictual situation, hostility and uncompromising becomes the order of the day.

North is of the view that, whenever two or more individuals or groups come in contact with each other, they may choose to make relationship primarily conflictual or integrative. It is deduced therefore from the above that, conflict is associated with and characterized by disagreement, contending parties, perceived threat whether physical, emotional, etc, to their wellbeing, need or interest. It can equally be a struggle between people, organizations or groups.

Definitions of the term Conflict

According to Pruitt and Robbin (1986) conflict is defined as a perceived divergence of interest or believes. Some of our political leaders today, have divergent interests. For some of them are not there for the interest of their electorates. They are there for their own interests and this often leads to conflicts between them and electorates. Furthermore, Nwolise (2003) defined conflict as a clash, confrontation, battle or struggle, and these connotes disagreement, controversy in idea or view points held by two or more groups of people.

Causes of Conflict
1.   Class struggle
2.   Quest for power and position
3.   Social injustice
4.   Marginalization
5.   Social and environmental causes

These few causes listed above of conflicts are elaborated as follows (Ogoloma and Sampson; 2015).

1.   **Class Struggle:** The discussion of class struggle in conflicts hinges critically on the demonstration of the existence of social classes and the nature of class formation. This is particularly important in Africa where obscurantism and ideological distortions beclouds the rational analysis of classes.

The concept of class struggle anchored on the ownership of the means of production, where ownership includes both control and appropriation of surplus value by one social group from another.

One of the features of social class emphasized by this conception is the dynamic native. This arises both from the fact that the relations of social production that define classes are basically dynamic and a changing phenomena. Moreover, the process of class formation involves structural changes. Hence, class structure with society is further sub-divided into:
a)   The upper class
b)   The middle class
c)   The lower class

1.   **The upper class:** are those who conforms with the description given below, and these are the groups who continually dominates our political scene. These people are those who come to power either by democratic or by struggle, which advertently results in social conflict. This upper class people usually dominate those in the middle and lower class, and the struggle by which people get to the upper class consequently results in conflicts.

2.   **Quest for power and position:** The quest for power and position and the inordinate desire to get into power by all means often results in conflicts amongst some groups of people.

3.   **Social injustice:** This is an in human treatment meted out by those who through undemocratic process or who by their own struggle got into power to their representatives, or a denial of social justice by those in the upper class to those in the middle or lower class, which often leads to conflicts.

4.   **Marginalization:** This is a perceived denial of some rights, positions of trust, privileges, resources or social amenities and infrastructural facilities by some people, which lead to conflicts for example the Niger Delta crisis.

5.   **Social and Environmental causes:** This can also lead to conflict, when the environment is polluted, and there is no effort by the government in ameliorating the effect of such pollution on the people. This often leads to conflicts again as we have also seen in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

It can be seen that, conflict is a disagreement between a group of people in other to effect changes or to get things done, because people and nations are genuinely at variance about principles, and there is no ground whatever for supposing that such disagreement can be disposed of by a course of philosophy (Ogoloma and Sampson: 2015).

Definitions of Conflict Resolutions

There are many definitions of conflict resolution but according to Miller (2003:8), "it is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict"

Miall et al (2001:21) says that "in conflict resolution, it is expected that the deep rooted sources of conflict are looked into, settled, and behaviour is no longer violent, nor are attitudes hostile any longer while the structure of the conflict has been changed".

Mitchell and Banks (1996), refers to conflict resolution as an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties, that were previously hostile adversaries. Secondly, it is a process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved. (Jaja, et al, 2011).

Moreover, some people use the term "conflict resolution", to describe specialized field of study and practice as in the field of conflict resolution. In this way, it could be said that in principle, conflict resolution connotes a sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict is settled with the result of a settlement and the conflict is settled in a true sense.

How Social Media Aid In Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a serious disagreement between two or more groups, organizations or nations. It can also occur between two individuals or even within an individual because as humans some conflicting thoughts and opinion exist in our minds that keep us restless or troubled.

However, when an individual begin to face one form of conflict or the other, they look for the easiest means to get it off. Thus, the social media becomes the most handy and easiest avenue. People do this through their status or display pictures which will in turn elicit advice and comments from their friends. Disagreeing couple might as well log into one of their favorite relationship talks group on Facebook to get an advice about their completing interest. One reasonable thing to know is that with social media less time is wasted.

Conflict arising between or among people divided by geographical landmarks can also be quickly resolved via chatting on social media platforms, calls might be made but, there is a fact that conflict resolution doesn't happen in few hours, it takes processes. What social media do is to bridge the gap, provide an interactive forum thereby unifying people again.

The stress one passes through everyday both inwardly and outwardly can even be lessened while accessing one social network or the other. For instance, when scrolling down one's Facebook page, one will see posts of meaningful passages or uploaded pictures that can amuse or enlighten someone. Social media has been so sweetened and decorated that it is hard to find a soul engaging in it with a heavy face.

As individuals engage in social networking so also does organizations. Nowadays, most business enterprises, cooperate bodies, companies have their own social networking groups where they establish and try to maintain mutual relationship with their clients/audiences. Various organizations find it necessary to hire professionals to manage their social media accounts. Managers who have some experience or training in conflict management and resolution are employed to handle any disagreement between the organization and their customers. Most times when conflict escalates very fast, there is a need to use the social media to effect constant publicity. Social media contents travel very wide and fast.

Also, in most organizations, it is necessary to maintain a healthy informal relationship among colleagues or between the employers and the employees in order to enhance cooperation and productivity, social media platforms also aid in this kind of achievement.

Even at the national level the social media aid in resolving conflicts. Suffice it to say that without social media citizen journalism becomes a figure head because it is through the various social media that citizens of a country air their candid opinion about the policies or activities of their government.

Incase of any disagreement between the government and citizens about any issue, the social media is always a means of airing opinion. Citizens employ this medium to make their voices heard and the government can as well announce their deliberated decisions through this same means.

Why Social Media?

Communication in conflict resolution is favorable when it creates shared meaning and includes interactions. This is obviously what chatting on any social media platform entails.

During conflict resolution, face to face communication may become more aggressive and might even lead to fights but the social media tends to prevent this by appearing as an imaginary world where everyone has lost their hands to typing reasonably in order to convert others to their own opinion or to settle the disagreement amicably. The social media goes a long way in preventing physical combats.

Again, the reason that make some people to prefer conflicts settling using the social media is to avoid open confrontation. Most individuals seem to have lost their boldness when it comes to face to face argument. Some argue that they don't possess the much courage needed for open confrontation of their opponents. Hence, they resort to chatting in any social network.

The social media might not be the best communicative means but it surely goes a long way in preventing and resolving conflicts faster considering its popularity in the world today.

It is the most possible way that citizens air their opinion without fear of the authority or public officials. This is as a result of the fact that 80% of individual's personal information on social networks is bogus. Individuals air their views candidly having it in mind that they can't be spotted. This is exactly where the social media strengthens democracy and freedom of speech especially in a country like Nigeria where democracy has been swept under the carpet.

Many broadcast station has their own social media pages today in order to keep being in watch of what citizens will say concerning the daily conflicts that occur in their various societies and in the same vein express the decisions of the government which makes it a two way media just in one interactive platform.

The social media has become so outstanding as a place where people appear more light-hearted and settle the slightest conflict with their opponents as fast as possible.

Conclusion

The social media plays an important role today in the world in diverse areas. For example, in the area of transmitting information to people. There are many twitter handles that we can send and receive information to the world. As a result, the use of social media should be encouraged in settling conflicts. It is not expensive and, therefore, can easily be used to settle disputes when face to face issues are not involved. It is in this area that social media can go along way in settlement of disputes.

Recommendations

1.   Social media is not suitable for one on one settlement of conflicts. There are people who can not easily express their minds on issues of personal contacts. These groups of people can do well in expressing themselves when they are not in contact with their opponents.
2.   From the opinions of the people as expressed in the social media, those involved in the conflict can take advice from the broad spectrum of opinions of people.

Finally, people should be encouraged to twit their disputes by tuning into any of these numerous social media houses today for more information.

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