

Social Media Communication and National Integration

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Abstract:

Social media is a relatively new media that has transcended physical boundaries in a short time, transforming the way we communicate and fostering unprecedented opportunities for national integration. With the rapid growth of social media platforms, their potential to facilitate communication and bridge societal divides has gained significant attention in recent times.

This study therefore, explores the role of social media in fostering national integration, and how media serve as a platform for social interaction via virtual communities, online discussions, and collaborative initiatives. Through the lens of the Media Systems Dependency (MSD) Theory, the research combines qualitative analysis of relevant literatures collected through mixed methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and content analysis; to understand the mechanisms through which media influence individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to national integration.

The findings of this study sheds light on the various ways media can be leveraged to promote national integration.

The study recommends that individuals, communities, and policymakers should maximally social media platforms to foster inclusive dialogue, bridge cultural divides, and promote a shared sense of identity and feeling of belonging.

The study concludes that social media has the potential to be a powerful tool for fostering national integration. However, it is important to note that social media can also be used to promote division and conflict. Therefore, it is important to use social media in a responsible and constructive way.

Keywords: Social media, National integration, Communication

Introduction

Communication plays a vital role in national integration by facilitating understanding, dialogue, and collaboration among diverse groups (Castells, 2012). Effective communication channels,

including social media platforms, enable individuals to connect, exchange ideas, and bridge cultural divides (Al-Rawi & Mohan, 2014).

In today's contemporary world, social media has become the world's new order as it serves as the major avenue in which different interest groups come together to form consensus and arriving at consent on a particular issue be it politically, socially and economically despite their geographical locations. The emergence of social media is quite a recent phenomenon and became popularized only when the Internet became ubiquitous and accessible to consumers worldwide (McMillan 2004).

Social media platforms offer opportunities for citizen engagement, collective action, and the formation of virtual communities that promote national integration (Hobbs & Owen, 2018).

"In an era characterized by the rapid growth of social media platforms, the power of digital connectivity has transcended physical boundaries, transforming the way we communicate and fostering unprecedented opportunities for national integration. From hashtags that unite diverse voices to viral campaigns that bridge cultural divides, social media has emerged as a dynamic force in shaping the fabric of nations."

Social media communication has revolutionized the landscape of public discourse, allowing individuals to connect, share information, and engage in conversations on a scale never seen before. It has democratized the flow of information, enabling citizens to participate actively in shaping their national narratives, mobilizing social movements, and promoting inclusive dialogue. The speed, reach, and accessibility of social media platforms have facilitated interactions among individuals from different regions, ethnicities, and backgrounds, fostering the potential for national integration.

Conceptual Framework

Social Media

The concept of social media has been defined by various scholars based on their understanding and respective point of view. The concept of social media allows for an open web-based and user-friendly application which provides for new possibilities in the co-creation of content, social networking, the sharing of text and relevance, and aid connectivity and collective intelligence gathering (Verdegem 2011)

Social media is a popular media that recently emerged. It has significantly changed the degree of flow of information in the media. Anyone who is connected to the internet and on social media account can communicate to the rest of the rest of the world. Hence, it is a many to many communication process. According to Holloman (2012), social media is all about what people do with the technology, the software, the tools and the channels: sharing pictures and videos, writing product reviews, collecting content, connecting with old friends, sharing with new friends, collaborating in the workplace. 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, 2014: 57). Similarly, Kaplan & Haenlein cited in Asak & Ohiagu (2013) defines social media as ‘a group of internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 which allow the creation of user-generated content.’ Describing social media, Nwammuo in Asemah and Edegoh (2013) opined that social media is a web and mobile-based technologies which are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organization, and communities. This informs why Dow in Asemah (2014) asserted that social media essentially refer to ‘a category of online media where people are talking, participating, sharing, networking and bookmarking online.’ Healthfield cited in Asemah and Edegoh (2013) observed that social media are the tools and platforms that people use to publish content and interact socially online. Nwammuo in Asemah and Edegoh (2013) stated that the concept of social media therefore, finds its meaning in the ability of users to generate, interpret, restructure and disseminate content. From the foregoing, social media is a highly interactive medium which provides users a great freedom in producing and reproducing the content and form of the information during the interaction. It enabled people from every corner of the world to represent themselves in a particular way and stay connected in cyberspace. Thus, majority of people use social media to interact and seek for information. The benefits of social media on human society and the youths especially can never be over emphasized. For instance, social media has made lots of youths to be better informed by helping them keep abreast with the happenings around the globe. It has also made many unemployed youths to be aware of job opportunities around the world with many of them being gainfully employed. Additionally, social media has immensely assisted those in the academics. Complex research tasks can be easily accomplished through social media.

Social media encompasses various types of online platform and applications that allow users to create unique and dynamic social contents and uses Web 2.0 technologies, which contrast significantly with the more passive, top-down technologies that characterized Web 1.0 web pages. The different types of social media include weblogs microblog, content communities, podcasts, wikis, social networks and more (Asak et.al, 2013).

National integration

National integration encompasses the social, political, and cultural processes that bring diverse groups together, fostering a sense of belongingness and solidarity within a nation (Giddens, 2018). It plays a vital role in maintaining social stability, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering peace and development (Chaturvedi, 2013). National integration is crucial for building a strong and resilient nation that can address societal challenges collectively.

It is also a process of fostering unity, cohesion, and a sense of shared identity among individuals belonging to diverse social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds within a nation (Giddens, 1990). It encompasses the promotion of social harmony, mutual respect, and a collective commitment to the nation's values, goals, and aspirations (Parekh, 1998).

National integration is a dynamic and ongoing process that requires the active involvement of individuals, communities, institutions, and the state (Grosby, 1994). It involves promoting intergroup

interactions, fostering dialogue, and creating platforms for constructive engagement among different segments of society (Gundara, 2011).

National integration is a multidimensional concept that involves the inclusion and recognition of different cultural and ethnic groups within a nation-state, while also emphasizing the importance of common citizenship, rights, and responsibilities (Kymlicka, 1995). It goes beyond mere coexistence and strives to create a society where individuals feel a sense of belongingness and participate actively in the nation's social, economic, and political life (Parekh, 1998).

Scholars have emphasized the significance of national integration in maintaining social stability, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring the overall development and progress of a nation (Altbach & Knight, 2007). National integration is seen as a means to address conflicts, minimize social divisions, and build a harmonious and inclusive society (Narayanan & Nair, 2017).

Efforts towards national integration encompass various dimensions, including the recognition and accommodation of diverse cultural practices and traditions, the promotion of equal opportunities and rights for all citizens, and the cultivation of a shared national identity that transcends regional, ethnic, and religious differences (Kymlicka, 1995; Datta, 2014).

National integration is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses the promotion of unity, social cohesion, and a shared sense of identity among individuals from diverse backgrounds within a nation. It involves recognizing and respecting cultural diversity, ensuring equal rights and opportunities, and fostering intergroup interactions. Achieving national integration is crucial for social stability, harmony, and the overall development of a nation.

Importance of Communication in National Integration

Communication is vital and essential in national integration. Communication is the means of interaction between two people and more, and its results to changes in human prosperity, national unity and peace development.

Communication plays an important role in promoting national integration by facilitating the exchange of ideas, fostering understanding, and building a sense of shared identity among individuals within a nation (Ongkiko & Magno, 2017). Effective communication strategies and channels contribute to social cohesion, minimize conflicts, and bridge divides among different groups (Singh, 2015).

Research suggests that open and inclusive communication practices, such as dialogue, public discourse, and media engagement, can enhance social integration and nation-building efforts (Darchen, 2012). By providing platforms for interactions and shared experiences, communication enables individuals to connect, empathize, and develop a collective consciousness (Appadurai, 1996).

These platforms include, but not limited to our traditional media such as radio, television, newspaper, magazine consist of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Whatsapp and they are very important tools of communication to large audience.

Another tool is the new media, best termed the social media which is rapidly taking the place of the conventional media because they are more vulnerable, accessible and cheaper hence contribute to National Integration.

The role of Social media in national integration

The social media operates beyond posting about lifestyle and photos of friends as it educates, informs, enlightens and also contributes to national development and integration in the following ways:

- Government educate citizens about national issues, health and security for national cohesion.
- Human rights activists and government use social media handles for advocacy and human rights activities
- Use to expose corruption and malady in governance
- Track court proceedings and charges for proper judgement
- Elevate national unity and peace among people of different tribes, region and culture
- Foster unity and acquaint the masses about activities of governance through presidential and governors' handles
- Social media promote the growth of democracy and good governance thereby dissuading political apathy among the citizens.

Social media platforms provide a space for individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in open dialogue, share their perspectives, and exchange ideas. This enables people to gain a better understanding of different cultures, traditions, and viewpoints, fostering mutual respect and enhancing national integration (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

Social media allows individuals to connect with others who share common interests, regardless of geographical boundaries. These virtual communities can transcend regional, ethnic, or cultural differences and contribute to a sense of national unity and shared identity (Shah, Cho, Nah, & Gotlieb, 2018).

Through social media, individuals can share their cultural practices, traditions, and artistic expressions with a wider audience. This promotes cultural exchange, encourages appreciation for diversity, and fosters a sense of belongingness to a larger national community (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media platforms provide a space for marginalized groups to amplify their voices, share their experiences, and advocate for their rights. This inclusion of diverse perspectives helps address social inequalities, promotes social justice, and contributes to a more inclusive and cohesive society (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2020).

Social media platforms have been instrumental in mobilizing citizens for social and political causes. They facilitate the dissemination of information, encourage citizen participation, and foster a sense of collective responsibility, thereby strengthening national integration (Chadwick, 2017).

Social media helps bridge geographic divides by enabling individuals from different regions to connect and interact. This virtual proximity promotes understanding, empathy, and cooperation among people from diverse geographical backgrounds, contributing to national integration (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

Social media platforms provide opportunities for individuals to express their national pride, celebrate national achievements, and engage in discussions about national issues. This collective expression of national identity fosters a sense of unity and solidarity among citizens (Saxton, Guo, & Kintigh, 2015).

Social media is a good means of development for national integration through various handles and its importance can never be over emphasized, though for social media to achieved its objectives, the users should conform to the laws and ethics of media operations that consist the following: Defamation, Sedition, Contempt of court, Law of copy right, Law of privacy, Restricted report of minor, investigation before report.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on The Media Systems Dependency (MSD) Theory. this theoretical framework explores the interplay between individuals and media systems. It emphasizes the idea that individuals are dependent on media for information, entertainment, and social interaction, and that this dependency influences their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The theory examines how individuals' reliance on media shapes their relationship with the larger social system.

The theory suggests that individuals turn to media to fulfill specific needs, known as gratifications. These gratifications can be instrumental (e.g., seeking information, acquiring knowledge) or socio-psychological (e.g., entertainment, social interaction, identity expression). Individuals select and use media channels that they perceive as best able to satisfy these needs, which in turn influences their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

In the context of national integration, the Media Systems Dependency Theory helps explain the role of media in shaping individuals' perceptions and interactions related to their national identity and sense of belonging. Media systems can provide information about diverse cultures, promote intergroup understanding, and foster inclusive dialogue, thereby facilitating national integration efforts. Individuals who rely on media as a source of information about their nation and its diverse communities are more likely to develop a broader understanding and appreciation of cultural differences, leading to increased social cohesion and national integration.

Additionally, media can serve as a platform for social interaction and the expression of diverse voices, allowing individuals from different backgrounds to engage in conversations and collective action related to national issues. Through social media platforms, individuals can participate in virtual communities, share their experiences, and collaborate towards common goals, contributing to the process of national integration.

Conclusion

Social media is a strong force that brings people of various economic, political and social backgrounds together. It has allowed people to build relationships, share ideas, problem and embrace best practices. It has in several ways benefited the human society however, when wrongly used, it can cause chaos and national disintegration. Nigeria is unique and her strength lies in the diversity of her people. The main goal of every government since the creation of the country is to preserve and enhance unity in diversity, fostering national integration and there is no better way, and time to use social media to direct people towards attainment of political, economic and religious cohesion to enhance national integration than now. It is important to note that while social media has the potential to foster national integration, its impact can vary based on factors such as digital divide and access to technology. Nonetheless, these positive roles of social media in fostering national integration highlight its potential as a tool for promoting social cohesion, understanding, and unity.

Recommendations

To avoid misuse of social media which may cause chaos and national disunity, the following suggestions are therefore made:

1. Nigeria government should set up a regulatory body that will help check-mate the post and comments on social media to reduce spreading of fake information that can create fear, tension and doubt on the minds of other users which can lead to national disintegration.
2. Such regulatory body should be set up to curb spreading of anti-security information by the military.
3. The government should consider passing Cyber Crimes Act of 2015 bill into law.

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