SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONFLICT: A STUDY OF YOUTHS PARTICIPATION IN DOMINANT POSTS OF BLOODY KILLINGS DURING 2017/2018 MAMBILLA PLATEAU CONFLICT IN NORTH EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media has come to stay as it has continued to gain acceptance among people of different age groups in the society, thereby affecting every facet of human activities. Youths have not only embraced social media but social media has become part of their lives. However, social media usage has both advantages and disadvantages. Social Media helps in opening the participation in sharing information without much hindrances. On the other sides, social media if negatively used can be dangerous. Youths that are at the forefront of social media usage, if not checked, can misuse social messages during crisis to escalate such crisis. This paper looks at the participation of youths in sharing bloody wordings, pictures, videos and audios on Facebook/WhatsApp during 2017/2018 herders/farmers conflict on the Mambilla Plateau using content analysis method. Technological Determinant Theory is the theoretical framework for this study. The paper found that youths between the age bracket of 15-35 years posted most of the bloody wordings, pictures, videos and audios on Facebook/WhatsApp during 2017/2018 herders/farmers conflict on the Mambilla Plateau which helped in escalating the crisis. The paper recommends that in as much as youths can be allowed unhindered access to the use of social media, such access should be checked during crisis to avoid misuse that can lead to escalation of such crisis.

Key words: Social media, conflict, youths, dominant posts and bloody killings.

Introduction

Herders/farmers conflict is one of the major conflicts confronting Nigeria today. This has led to many losses of lives and property as there seem to be no immediate solution to it from the part of the Nigerian government. People are losing confidence in the competence of government to provide justice, law and order as can be supported by the level of murder and arson taking place in the name of fighting for right which always results in violent conflict all over the country. (Iyorwese, 2003; Adamu, 2007; Bashir, 2014; Jibrin, 2019). According to Jean (1998) and Lenshie and Johnson (2012), series of land conflicts between herders/farmers have occurred on the Mambilla Plateau in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State since the 1970s resulting in shortage of land for grazing and farming.

Daily Trust (2018), Amnesty International Report (2018), Nasir (2017), Saleh (2017), *Thisday* Newspaper (2018), and *Premium Times* (2018) traced the incident that triggered the 2017/2018 conflicts from 17th to 20th June, 2017 to the untimely arrest of Wakilin Mambilla Nguroje by security operatives on 16th June, 2017 as well as the disagreement on the election of Mr. John Yep as the Chairman of Sardauna Local Government. The conflict that lasted from 17th to 20th June, 2017 spread to over 13 communities, hence, the establishment of 13 IDP camps in Kwarakwara, Mayo Ndaga, Nguroje, Dorofi, Tamnya, Hainare, Bang Three Corner, Mbar, Chabbal Peluwaje, Labbare, and Tep. Others include Barup, Mayo Dule, and Tanviya. Different casualty figures were given. For the Police, only seven people were killed, but for MACBAN 351 people were killed, 381 persons missing, over 20,000 animals (including cows, goats, sheep and chickens) killed and missing and 483 houses or settlements razed down. This shows that the casualties kept increasing after each round of crisis.

In all the conflicts on the Plateau, communication has been a critical element that helped to escalate conflicts. Many scholars like Ball (2017), UNESCO (2019), Adamu (2018), Rachael and Evelyn (2018), *Vanguard* (2018), and Bello and Pate (2021) had variously accused the social media of disseminating wrong or fake information in form of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information and hate speech. According to them, this can be risky because the social media lack refined gate keeping processes that can regulate its process, thus exposing it to be hijacked by politicians, religious bigots, tribal leaders and other elites who use the platform to spread fake news and hate speeches to achieve their selfish goals.

According to Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (2017), youth are at the center of social media participation and their participation in social media by posting violent pictures and videos can sometimes ignite violence in the society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the dominant posts of words describing bloody killings by youths on Facebook/WhatsApp about the 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis.
2. To identify the dominant posts of bloody pictures on Facebook/WhatsApp about the 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis.
3. To identify the dominant posts of bloody videos on Facebook/WhatsApp about the 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis.

4. To find out the dominant posts of bloody audios on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis.

Social Media and Social Mobilization

Smidi and Shahin (2017) study of social media and social mobilization in the Middle East found that social media enabled or facilitated the protests of the Arab uprising by providing voice to people that never had access to government-controlled media, by helping people to connect, mobilize and organise demonstrations and broadcast protests to the world at large and gaining global support. Meral and Meral (2017) study on the role of social media in Arab Spring found that the uprising opponents in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, mainly youths, communicated through social media, and organized and made their voices heard via social media. Social media made the world not only to follow activists, but at the same time enabled the participants and the activists to communicate and bring them together.

Ahy (2016) study on networked communication and the Arab Spring: linking broadcast and social media accused youths for being at the centre stage of wrong use of technology (social media) as they used technology during Arab Spring to initiate conflict, recruit people for the conflict through propaganda messages and mobilization for attacks whileIrwin-Rogers and Pinkney (2017) study on social media as a catalyst and trigger for youth violence found that young people are daily exposed to online violence that displays or incites serious violence in real life. This, according to them, can influence youths to aid in escalating existing societal conflict through sharing of violent pictures and videos. According to *The Nation* (2018), youths are the major users of the social media positively and negatively. Positively, youths use social media for interaction and education. Negatively, youths can be prone to social vices like moral decadence.

New Media Youth and Conflict

Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney (2017) explained that social media can be a good vehicle to convey violence in the society, especially if wrongly used by the youths. Ahy's (2016) study on networked communication and the Arab Spring: linking broadcast and Jytte's (2015) study on tweeting the jihad: Social media networks of western foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq also corroborated this view. This informed how ICTs affected violence in civil wars like in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine.

Bello and Pate (2021) in a study of Social Media and Conflicts on the Mambilla Plateau: A Review revealed that youths used some online media to share fake news that instigated the spread of conflict during 2017/2018 herders/farmers conflicts on the Mambilla Plateau. This, according to them, may be due to lack of gatekeeping process.

Two studies by Adi (2014) on the usage of social media in the Arab Spring and that of Gire and Sabiha (2015) on the role of social media in the Arab Spring all linked youths to triggering and fuelling the spread of the Arab Spring crisis through wrongful use of social media. Adi (2014) therefore recommended that there is need for technology companies to apply direct effects of platform influence on new media messages on conflicts by censoring conflicts escalation messages.

Theoretical Framework

This paper used Technological Determinism Theory as its theoretical framework. Technological Determinism theory, according to Sergel, M (2020), Paragas and Lin (2016), and Hauer (2017) technology, is the principal initiator of the society's transformation. They linked the emergence of this theory to the American Sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who formulated the causal link between technology and the society. According to the supporters of Technological Determinism, any social change is controlled by technology, technological development, communications technology and the media. Hauer (2017) further explained that the modern information society arises as a result of the development of innovations, new technologies and their social and political implications.

Toffler (1980) therefore understands technology to be a determinant of all changes that have a fatal impact on all areas of human life. The computer, according to him, has the ability to take control of the entire mechanical age. Castells (1996) and Lévy (1998) believe in two-way influence of technology and the society where society is formed by technical change, and technical change is shaped by the society. Sergel (2020) explained that today, the Internet and the nature of new media is fundamentally changing the structure of the society as the expansion of computers, networks and the Internet has radically changed many aspects human communication and the entire society's life.

However, since society can be influenced by technological developments like the new media, these effects could be both positive and negative. This also underscores the fact that no matter the positive developments of the new media, users of the technology can negatively use the new media technology. This

explains the choice of this theory for the usage of the new media negatively for the escalation of the 2017/2018 herders/farmers crisis on the Mambilla Plateau through posting of bloody killings of victims through Facebook or WhatsApp.

Methodology

This study used Content Analysis as a research method. It employed Quantitative Content Analysis. Kerlinger (2000), Wimmer and Dominic (2006), and Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that Content Analysis is applicable to describing the contents of recorded information such as text, letters, diaries, ethnographic materials, newspapers articles, editorials, minutes of meeting; videos, audio clips, pictures, among others, testing hypothesis of message characteristics, comparing media content to the real world, assessing the image of a particular group and establishing a starting point for media effects studies.

Unit of Analysis

The Units of Analysis of this paper include news stories, feature articles, pictures, videos, audios, cartoons and editorials posted on Facebook and WhatsApp in respect of 2017/2018 herders/farmers conflict on the Mambilla Plateau.

Content Category

The Content Category used in this paper include dominant posts of words describing bloody killings by youths that triggered violence and insecurity; dominant posts of bloody pictures that triggered violence and insecurity, dominant posts of bloody videos that triggered violence and insecurity and dominant posts of bloody audios that triggered violence and insecurity about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis.

For this paper, Content Analysis of dominant bloody postings on Facebook/WhatsApp in respect of 2017/2018 herders/farmers conflicts on the Mambilla Plateau, Nine (09) offline papers/ Facebook mobile google and google engine search account for vivid word description of bloody killings. 20 online papers/ Facebook mobile google and google engine search account for carrying bloody pictures of killings. 14 Facebook mobile google, You Tube and google engine search accounts carrying bloody videos of Facebook/WhatsApp and two (02) Facebook mobile google, You Tube and google engine search accounts carrying audios of Facebook/WhatsApp posts were purposively and randomly selected because of their posts containing wordings describing bloody killings, bloody pictures, videos and audios in respect of 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau conflicts.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Age group behind major Irritating posting

Age group	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
0-14	0	0	0
15-35	06	100	0.1
36-50	0	0	0
51-79	0	0	0
80-above	0	0	0
Total	06	100	0.1

Source: Field study (2021)

Table 1 indicates that the age group of 15-35 posted all the 06 Facebook/WhatsApp posts with vivid wordings describing bloody killings during 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis, representing 100% at 0.1 mean leaving other age groups with no item posted. This implies that allowing youths to have access to unrestricted social media platform, especially during conflicts, can be dangerous to the security of the nation. This is because using words to describe bloody killings of people and animals can easily raise the emotions of those related to the victims which can generate counter killings, hence, further escalation of the conflict instead of diffusing the conflict. This is because youths are not mature enough to control their emotions in postings on the social media platforms.

Table 2: Age group behind major posting pictures of bloody killings

Age group	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
0-14	06	3.66	0.3
15-35	144	87.80	0.87
36-50	08	4.88	0.4
51-79	06	3.66	0.3
80-above	0	0	0
Total	164	100	1.64
Total	164	100	1.64

Source: Field study (2021)

Table 2 on bloody pictures indicates that out of 164 bloody pictures posted on the Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis, age group of 15-35 posted 144 of them, representing 87.80% at 0.87 mean. This was followed by age group 36-50 with 08 items, representing 4.88% at 0.4 mean. Age groups 0-14 and 51-79 each posted 06 items, representing 3.66% each at 0.3

mean each, leaving age group 80 and above with no post. The implication is that posting unrestricted pictures of killings, especially during conflict, can be very emotional that can likely ignite counter killings by relatives of the victims, hence, can create insecurity in the society. This is because youths may find it difficult to control their postings on social media platforms.

Table 3*:* Age group behind major posting of videos of bloody killings

Age group	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
0-14	00	0	0
15-35	04	80	0.80
36-50	01	20	0.20
51-79	00	0	0
80-above	00	0	0
Total	04	100	0.01

Source: Field study (2021)

Table 3 on video posts, indicates that the age group of 15-35 posted four (04) out of the five (05) Facebook/WhatsApp posts of video description of bloody killings during 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis, representing 80% at 0.80 mean while age group 36-50 posted one (01), representing 20% at 0.20 mean respectively. The implication is that youths unrestricted social media postings of videos of killings containing both visual and sound messages, especially during conflict, can be very emotional that can generate counter killings from love ones of the victims, especially their fellow youths. This can further fuel the conflict.

Table 4:Age group behind major posting of audios of bloody killings

Age group	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
0-14	00	0	0
15-35	04	100	0.01
36-50	00	0	0
51-79	00	0	0
80-above	00	0	0
Total	04	100	0.01

Source: Field study (2021)

Table 4 on audio posts, indicates that the age group of 15-35 posted all the 04 Facebook/WhatsApp posts of audio description of bloody killings during 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis, representing 100% at 0.1 mean leaving other age groups with no item posted. This implies that allowing

youths to have access to unrestricted social media platform, especially during conflict, can be dangerous to the security of the nation because audio description of killings can ignite emotions that can lead to counter killings from relations of the victims.

Findings and Discussion

Age bracket of 15-35 posted all the 06 Facebook/WhatsApp posts with vivid words describing bloody killings during 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis that were sampled and studied which answered research question one: "What is the extent which youths can be associated with the dominant posts of vivid wordings description of bloody killings on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis?" This means that youths (within the age group of 15-35 years) were directly associated with the dominant posts of vivid wordings description of bloody killings on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis.

The above findings are in line with the findings of Ahy (2016) whose study on networked communication and the Arab Spring: linking broadcast and social media linked youths for being at the centre stage of use of technology (social media) as they used technology during Arab Spring to initiate conflict, recruit people for the conflict through propaganda messages and mobilize for attacks.

This implies that allowing youths to have access to unrestricted social media platform, especially during conflicts, can be dangerous to the security of the nation. This is because using words to describe bloody killings of people and animals can easily raise the emotions of those related to the victims which can generate counter killings by other youths related to victims. This can further escalate the conflict instead of diffusing it.

Age group of 15-35 posted majority of the bloody pictures posted on the Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis which answered research question two that asks "What is the extent which youths can be associated with the dominant posts of bloody killings of bloody pictures on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis?"

The above findings are in line with Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney's (2017), and Meral and Meral's(2017) findings which established that during the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, youthscommunicated through social media,

organized and made their voices heard throughout the world via social media. That youths used social media not only to make the world follow their agitations, but at the same time for mobilization of their fellow agitators to communicate and come together. It also revealed that the use of Facebook carrying slain persons' pictures, videos and audios predominantly influenced the spread of the Arab Spring. The implication is that posting unrestricted pictures of killings, especially during conflict, can be so emotional that it can likely ignite counter killings by relatives of the victims, hence, can create insecurity in the society.

Age group of 15-35 posted majority of Facebook/WhatsApp video posts describing bloody killings during 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis which answered research question three: "What is the extent to which youths can be associated with the dominant posts of bloody killings of bloody videos on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis?"

The above findings are also in line with what Irwin-Rogers and Pinkney's (2017), and Meral and Meral's (2017) findings that young people are daily exposed to online violence and that the use of Facebook carrying slain persons pictures, videos and audios predominantly instigated, mobilised and fuelled the spread of the Arab Spring. The implication is that unrestricted social media postings of video of killings containing both visual and sound messages, especially during conflict can be so emotional that it can generate counter killings by the loved ones of the victims. This can further fuel the conflict.

Age group of 15-35 posted all the Facebook/WhatsApp audio posts describing bloody killings during 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis which answered research question four: "What is the extent to which youths can be associated with the dominant posts of bloody killings of bloody audios on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis?" The above findings conform to the findings of Meral and Meral (2017), Gire and Sabiha (2015), Ahy (2016), and Smidi and Shahin (2017) which established that the use of Facebook carrying slain persons pictures, videos and audios predominantly instigated, mobilised and fuelled the spread of the Arab Spring and even generated sympathy and supports from not only within their individual countries in the Middle East, but from the international community.

The implication of the findings of this study is that if youths are allowed to use social media unrestricted during conflict periods, they can spread irritating

pictures, videos and audios that can help escalate the conflict since most people now rely on social media to form opinions on certain issues, especially during crisis in the society.
This further implies that allowing youths to have access to unrestricted social media platform, especially during conflict, can be dangerous to the security of the nation because audio description of killings can ignite emotions that can lead to counter killings from relations of the victims.

The study is faced with methodological limitations where there are a dearth of exhaustive and comprehensive list for both offline and online Nigerian newspapers and other search engine accounts. Only one research method of quantitative content analysis approach was used for this study which cannot be as adequate as using mixed methods. Only the following units of analysis formed the sample: papers news/feature articles for vivid description of bloody killings, pictures, videos and audios. This research work could not access published items on cartoons and editorials. Other social network sites like You Tube, Instagram, Telegram, etc. were not studied.

Conclusion and Recommendations
This paper concludes that youths (within the age bracket of 15-35 years) were directly associated with the dominant posts of vivid words describing bloody killings on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis. This age bracket posted majority of the bloody pictures Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis. The same age group posted majority of the bloody videos on Facebook/WhatsApp about 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis as well as a majority of the audio messages describing bloody killings on Facebook/WhatsApp audio posts describing bloody killings during 2017/2018 Mambilla Plateau herders/farmers crisis.

This research work recommends that the unrestricted access to social media given to youths, especially during conflict situations should be controlled. Hence, government should come up with measures to control excesses of the use of the new media during crisis, especially among the youths of this country. This will go a long way in de-escalating the spread of conflict in the society.

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