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Editor's Note

I have the pleasure to present to you Volume 7, No. 1 edition of Zaria Journal of Communication. As usual, this edition, consists of chapters of empirical researches on communication and mass media issues. The edition contains articles on health communication, media reports on conflict, pattern of social media usage, social responsibility of the media as well as the challenges of investigative reporting in Nigeria. I hope readers would find the articles presented here interesting and knowledgeable. Lastly, we solicit for more submissions of empirical articles for timely publication in the next edition of the journal. Thank you all.

Maryam Ibrahim, Ph. D

Editorial Guidelines

Articles including graphs and tables should not be more than 20 pages on A4 paper (double line spacing) on M.S Word, 12-point type (New Times Roman). Papers should be with an abstract of not more than 250 words, and six key words. All submissions must conform to American Psychological Association (APA) referencing format.

Zaria Journal of communication is a peer-received journal published twice yearly (February and September) by the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The Journal accepts articles in all communication related areas from local and International Journal Scholars. Articles are received all year round and are subjected to a blind review before final acceptance for publication.

- Manuscripts submitted for publication should not have been published or currently being considered for publication elsewhere. Contributors must inform the Managing Editor if the paper has been made public in another form or language as copyright of papers accepted for publication belongs to the Department of Mass Communication, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Each manuscript received shall be sent for blind assessment review. The sum of N5,000.00 (Five Thousand Naira only) shall be paid as assessment fee. Authors shall be notified about the acceptability or otherwise of their manuscripts. Accepted manuscripts shall attract a publication fee of N25,000.00 (Twenty Five Thousand Naira only). Authors shall be entitled to 1 copy of any edition in which their article(s) appears.
- Proofs will be professionally corrected and checked by the editorial team. Authors will receive marked proofs of their paper(s) for corrections and are expected to return them to the editorial board within stipulated time. Please note that corrections should be confined to typographical or factual errors. Proof corrections should be kept to a minimum, and not used as an opportunity to revise the style or substance of the article.
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  All submissions/contributions should be addressed to:

The Editor

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Contents

Social Media and Hashtag Activism in Nigeria: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Recent events suggest that there is a relationship between the social media and Hashtag activism in Nigeria. This relationship came to the fore when #ENDSARs protesters opened the floodgates of various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram to mobilize and upload sights and sounds of young people demanding change from the government. This paper "Social Media and Hashtag Activism in Nigeria: A Narrative Review" employed the narrative review method, anchored on technological determinism theory to explore the relevance of social media and hashtag activism in Nigeria. The study found that hashtag activism has now become a revolutionary communication tool for mobilization, advocacy, and creation of awareness about developmental projects toward entrenching social change across the country. The paper concluded that with the right disposition and needed synergy, social media and hashtag activism are catalysts for creating a new culture that elicits change from the government in Nigeria and beyond. The study recommends extensive study on the power of social media in developing a new communication revolution and amplifying the voice of minority groups in the country.

Keywords: Activism, Hashtag, Social Change, Social Issues, Social Media

Introduction

From the Arab Spring to the #BlacklivesMatter, #RevolutionNow, #OccupyNigeria, #BringBackourGirls, and the #EndSars movements, social media has played a pivotal role in raising public consciousness and bringing about great transformation and socio-political change across the globe (Agency for Peace building, 2022). Phil (2022) adds that social media and hashtag activism have turned into a form of advocacy that enables the mobilization of public support for a cause of action over time. The surfacing of the new millennium came with a new age. The Internet, in a short time, has become an inseparable

part of our everyday lives. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Tiktok, have been great platforms to share, interact and engage in different discussions within the digital space.

Society, on the other hand, is not immune to these developments as the way people think of and participate in campaigns, mobilization, and advocacy has changed (Gold Kind & McNutt, 2014). Today, citizens can comfortably send or sign a petition like the change. Org. by email, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms, tweet to show or be against issues like #EndSars, #BringBackOurGirls, #EndAsuuStrike, #OccupyNigeria, #FreeLeah, #Notosocialmediabill, post pictures on Instagram, create short videos on Tiktok, comment, like and share messages on Facebook or even watch videos on YouTube. One can engage and attract huge traffic or followership via social media without necessarily meeting face-to-face or having any previous knowledge of them. McNutt (2018) observes that organizations and individuals use the different social media platforms available to raise awareness, mobilize supporters and facilitate collective action as well as influence policymakers.

Social media is gaining attention and is seen as a foundation layer for follow-up on activism related messages as well as advocacy work. For instance, an organization may direct a majority of its messages on social media to increase awareness about a cause for action among its existing or potential supporters. Messages can be converted from trending social media interactions to more active forms of actions such as tweeting, retweeting, hashtags, Facebooks posts, or WhatsApp messages. It is for this reason that a lot of attention is given to social media messages as they constitute an important mobilizable resource for advocacy.

Hashtag activism on the other hand has become irreplaceable. It is both a means to an end, a tool to consolidate information, and a way to share a call to action. It is used to demonstrate examples of injustice and oppression that users have observed, faced, or experienced. While there are several ways to deliver information, none is as compact, mobile, and easily digestible as a hashtag (Jackson, Bailey & Welles, 2020). Hashtag activism is not the whole of any resistance movement that seeks to gain national support and impact. The world today has experienced the upsurge of an emerging age/group of cyber-savvy and click-ready social activists who demand and advocate for social change through

information communication technologies cubed by the Internet using different social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, amongst other. Today, hashtags have even become referential and an ironically used convention in everyday speech. Narratives that emerge from hashtags evolve more quickly than traditional media and, for this reason, social media platforms have become major tools for disseminating information to the public with the desire of spurring particular actions breeding outcomes and result.

In an attempt to keep up with this communication revolution, many mainstream organizations and politicians have been motivated to create their Twitter accounts and employ a 'social media manager tasked with the responsibility of responding to the new communication logic enabled by the platforms, which may sometimes be unsuccessful. By and large, the rise and effectiveness in the use of social media platforms for mobilization, campaign and drive towards change in Nigeria, over the years, has necessitated the need to review the role and effectiveness of hashtag activism in drawing the government's attention to socio-political issues and change of policies. Therefore, Twitter is the new unifying code of hashtags that allow for direct communication of raw and imagined emotions, images, and ideologies as well as their widespread dissemination in a an unprecedented way..

Over the years, social media platforms have served as instruments for protest and calls for action against government inadequacies in Nigeria. By and large, the rise in the use of different social media platforms has necessitated the need to review the effectiveness of different hashtag activism towards change in the country. As Hari (2014) reveals in his study and suggests research on the use of hashtags and their significance in Nigeria, the position of this paper is, therefore, to explore the relevance of social media use in hashtag activism in Nigeria as a medium for mobilizing and attracting attention to issues of national interest. It also aspires to explore how social media use in activism breeds a new culture toward the communication revolution.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the technological determinism theory (TDM), which was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. The theory assumes that the media technologies shape how the individual in any society thinks, feels, acts and how the society operates as we transition from one technological age to another.

Asemah, Nwamno and Nkwanu-Woma (2017) observes that technology can steer human interaction and create social change. More so, the effects of the new media technology/social media platforms could influence the results or outcome that affects discussions. Thus, hashtag activism on social media attracts attention and, in the end, creates social change by pressuring the government and policymakers. In doing so, social media platforms can raise the consciousness of society and influence them towards adding their voices to social change. Similarly, social media shares, hashtags, and tweets can go a long way to deepen the relevance given to the issues that will make the government accountable based on what transpired during the #EndSars protest and many other movements, campaigns, mobilization and protests.

Before the proliferation of the new media technologies, the audience was somewhat passive as they could not relate to the government or policymakers via the traditional media because it did not provide an interface for interaction. The emergence of social media has engendered active audience participation, thus, making the once passive audience more active and engaging. Hirschberg (2014) adds that the traditional media audience, who were once passive, have assumed a more influential role than ever before. They are now active producers and consumers of media content without reservation.

A different hashtag activism utilizing social media platforms has been successful in expressing displeasure and achieving results towards social and political change. Regarding the #EndSars protest, young people, women and marginalized groups used social media to participate in public and social discourse building an inclusive platform for dialogue and for their voices to be heard. Therefore, the TDM theory justifies the fact that this technology has redefined and renewed attention to the importance of social media in mobilizing, shaping and changing public discourse in Nigeria. It is on this premise that the TDM theory is relevant to this study.

Conceptual Clarification

For proper understanding of this paper, it is imperative to clarify the following concepts.

Activism: This is synonymous with advocacy, campaigning, change-making, protesting, and rallying. The word 'activism' comes from the German word 'Aktivismus', as recorded in the early 1990s, which is a combination of 'active' and the suffix 'ism', which means practice or doctrine (Shaw, 2013). Activism in

this study simply means mobilizing and arresting attention to bring change in society and make the government accountable. Themba (2018) adds that activism is an action on behalf of a cause that goes beyond what is conventional or routine. Therefore, activism is not necessarily a good or bad thing; it depends on the context, cause, or actions as well as individual judgment of what is worthwhile.

Hashtag: As represented by the symbol #, hashtags are beneficial ways of raising awareness on issues such as #EndSARS, #BBOG, #Occupynigeria, #RevolutionNow, #EndAsuuStrike, '#' that urgently need government's attention through Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and other social media platforms. Yang (2016) defines it as "a discursive protest on social media, united through a hashtag, word, phrase or sentence". Hill (2014) adds that it is an act of supporting a cause. The hashtag is advocated through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and other networking sites. It has become a popular way in which citizens, activists, organizations and celebrities mobilize and get their messages out to ignite social or political changes. It is an act of showing support for a cause through a like, share, or tweet on any social media platform.

Xiong (2016) explains that hashtag activism allows individuals to create stories on different social media platforms that are collective and recognizable by the populace. Jackson, Baileys and Welles (2020, p. xix) observe that hashtag activism has become irreplaceable. It is both a means to an end, a tool to consolidate information, and a way to share a call to action. It is used to communicate instances of injustice and oppression users may have observed, encountered or experienced. They note that while there are several mediau to disseminate information, none is comparable or as compact, mobile and easily digestible as a hashtag.

Social Media: Social media represents platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Tiktok and Snapchat, among others, which enable sharing and connection with like minds towards collective change in society. Social media provides interactive features such as feeds and profiles to provide access and promote visibility to widen the network of common interest. Ugande and Asemah (2014) define social media as the Internet-based channels used for communication.

They are interactive in nature as they include platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter among others. Similarly, Kaplan and Haenlien (2010) add

that social media is a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technical conditions of web 2.0, which allows the creation of the exchange of user-generated contents. These platforms enable an assembly of like minds with a common interest, who mobilize across boundaries for social and political changes in the society. Xiang and Gietzel (2010) also observe that it refers to the Internet-based applications that feature consumer-generated contents, which includes consumer-generated media impressions that are kept or shared online so that other impressionable consumers may easily access them.

Literature Review

Chronicle of Hashtag Activism in Nigeria

Hashtag became an avenue for Nigerians to vent their anger and frustration about situations. The "light up" scenario in 2009 opened the frontiers when a Nigerian rapper took to Twitter to express displeasure and join in the conversation over power outage (Odewale, 2014). This started many other issues of change of which prominent among them is the #ENOUGHISENOUGH, which demanded a free and fair election in 2011. #OccupyNigeria in 2011 challenged the removal of fuel subsidy. This came after the Arab Spring Movement of 2010/2011. Egbunike (2015) adds that #OccupyNigeria draws national and international attention through social media mobilization, which subsequently translated into a physical/offline occupation of the streets. Oloyede and Elega (2018) aver that the #occupyNigeria protest symbolized a clear indication of the enforcement of social advocacy and has become a potent and viable tool for activism as represented by #BringBackOurGirls, which were initiated to attract attention to the abduction of schoolgirls at Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria. The campaign gained international attention and elicited support for the rescue and, subsequently, the much longed for safe return of the girls to their respective families.

Similarly, in a study, Ofori-Parku and Moscato (2018) assert that the #BBOG campaign was framed by the Nigerian, the British and the American media. It is also believed that other scholars, who added their voices to gender representations, have contributed immensely to the campaign (Berent, 2016). Other hashtags were created to draw attention to social change. Tags such as #IstandwithNigeria, #RevolutionNow, #StopBokoHaram, #Stopthekillings, #Endsars in 2020, amplified the power of the young people in unity for social change and making the government accountable to its people. However, it is worthy of note that most of the campaigns were successful in addition to offline

mobilization and support. Even up till now, a hashtag is still ongoing as a lot of people appeared to have subscribed into its utilization in campaigns, mobilization, and support for political and social changes.

Social Media as a Tool for Mobilization in Nigeria

Over the years, social media has proven to be a relevant instrument for different forms of mobilization in Nigeria by individuals, organizations, activists and the government. While on the other hand, researchers in diverse disciplines, especially in the media and cultural studies, are beginning to study the new trend. Social media has become an irreplaceable aspect of the media that almost everybody in society is engaged in one way or the other.

The use of social media had become more popular with Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008. Obama had effectively used the social media, which recorded a great success throughout his campaign and the eventual election. Commenting on the social media success, Igbinidu (2011) states that "the Obama campaign reached five million people in 15 different social media platforms. As of November 2008, Obama had approximately 25 million Facebook supporters, 115,000 Twitter followers, and 50 million viewers of his YouTube videos". Similarly, the case of Nigeria is not different as President Goodluck Jonathan was the first to introduce the use of social media for political activities, which he did when he launched his campaign in 2010, giving him the title "the Facebook president". He utilized the opportunities provided by the social media platform to mobilize support for his political ambition. (Igbinidu, 2011).

A study by the Centre for Public Policy Research (2014) concludes that social media does not influence voter behavior directly but provides the electorates with basic and important information to analyze the potential of the candidates. On the other hand, it is aimed at mobilizing the potential electorates who will actively participate in the electoral process. On several occasions in Nigeria, social media have been used to express anger on unfavorable policies of government as well as issues of current national interest. For example, in Nigeria, traces of social media use in mobilization includes the #OccupyNigeria protest, which was a protest against the government's decisions, when on January 1, 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan announced the removal of subsidy from petroleum products which was 65 Naira a liter, to 141 Naira per liter as a result of the subsidy removal. The protest increased national awareness and accountability on the side of the government and the populace.

The use of social media serves as an eye-opener that Nigerians are ready for action and interested in good leadership (Premium Times, 2013). It has increasingly been shaped by protest movements outside Nigeria, perhaps not in outcomes but in the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter as platforms that aid mobilization. Hari (2014) suggests that the use of social media is a driver of social protest in innovation in the country. The study concludes that with the increasing use and spread of the Internet in the country, social media will increasingly be used to put pressure the government to address more public issues. Idakwo (2011) also observes that the Internet (social media) provides a greater reach to millions of Nigerians with an amazing target which includes age, gender, interest and behavioral patterns. This, in turn, engages the audience in participatory communication, creating different dimensions in mobilization, and making it easier to disseminate and organize ideas. Dunu and Uzochukwu (2013, 14) identify that social media, as a tool for mobilization and communication, must be participatory to make it effective. As Castells (2009) asserts, the Internet provides an alternative to the different forms of engagement. It is regarded as the new space in modern society.

Hari (2014) observes that the abduction of over 200 secondary school girls on the 14th of April, 2014 from Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, elicited reactions from different people with different approaches to register their dissatisfaction. There were calls for the immediate, unconditional, and safe release of the innocent school girls. Social media was one of the approaches adopted to drum up global support by activists with the slogan 'Bring back our girls. The network site commonly used for the global campaign was Facebook. These campaigns on social media were global efforts at creating awareness of the abduction and further registering disapproval over the heinous act and it has provided all individuals with an opportunity to get involved in issues of importance, which define the era of social media mobilization to not only ensure its sustainability but also its remarkable success. Therefore, social media has proven to be and has presented new ways of communication and mobilization, rallies, and other activities giving a faster, wider and cost-effective reach with instantaneous response and feedback. Similarly, the #Endsars protest intensified the use and power of social media in facilitating support, mobilizing, and pressuring the government to be accountable to the people.

Relevance of Social Media in Hashtag Activism

In recent times, many researchers and studies have examined the importance of social media use in championing hashtag activism and activities. Ta'amneh and

Al-Ghazo (2021) explore the importance of using hashtags in raising awareness about social issues. The study reveals that the overall degree of the expected benefits of using hashtags on raising awareness about social issues is high. Moreover, the results reveal that there is no statistically significant difference in gender (male and female). Similarly, a study conducted by Oloyede and Elega in 2019 explores the relevance of hashtags and the timeline of prominent hashtags in Nigeria and investigates #EndSars as a means of creating awareness of Police brutality. The study concludes that hashtag activism is instrumental to social transformation, which includes social media impacts, dictates and influences and what the existing traditional media think and present as germane to the public.

Ofori-Parku and Mascato (2018) examines how the social media in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America framed the #BBOG activism campaign despite Twitter's promise activists now need to grapple with ways to maintain control over their issues and discourses in the Twitter-sphere locally and internationally.

Akpojiri (2020) argues that the #Bring Back our Girls movement, although established to mainly advocate for the release of the over 200 abducted Chibok School Girls by Boko Haram, has used the emerged platform of digital activism to challenge normative discourse about women and violence against women as well as girl child within the Nigerian state. Consequently, the movement is seen to be at the forefront of advocating for social change towards women and girls by producing a counter-discourse that promotes gender equality and safe education for the girl child. Similarly, Dapoet (2015) observes that social media use in political campaigns and mobilization in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria has improved citizen engagement among youths and, especially, women in northern Nigeria whose voices have always been silent. Therefore, the actualizing agency of social media as a tool of revolution and reformation in Nigeria is vital.

In a recent study, Olukemi, Popoola, Azeez and Adeniyi (2022) examine how Twitter was used to organize the #EndSars protest in Nigeria. It investigates the extent to which Twitter has prevailed in Nigeria by way of its support for enhancing freedom of expression and being a driver of social protest. The study reveals that Twitter is an effective tool for social protests as witnessed in the #EndSars protest. The study concludes that social media /hashtag activism can enhance or degrade social change depending on its usage by users, who are the core drivers of change in a democratic process. Fatuga (2021) adds that Nigerian

activists used Twitter as well as other social media platforms to raise awareness, mobilize protesters, and discredit government propaganda through real-time information. Also, the use of masses in protesting via social media has given Nigerians a voice that has ultimately disrupted the culture of deference.

Furthermore, Obia (2020) examines the role Twitter has played in the #EndSars protests and the implications for media regulation, providing insights into how Twitter serves as a coordinating platform for oppositional discourse and campaigns in Nigeria. #EndSars hashtag amplified, coordinated and created conversations to get the word out for citizens to retweet widely for the celebrity and influencers. Therefore, Twitter has fostered a more diverse public discussion than other kinds of social networks. In another study, Phil (2022) asserts that social media activism has provided a platform for ordinary citizens to air their views. It has enabled young people, women and minority groups to participate in public and social discourse. It concludes that social media have renewed and redefined attention in shaping opinion and discourse of national importance.

Chiamogu et al. (2021) focuses on the strength of social media in creating political awareness and mobilization in different protests in Nigeria. The study reveals that there has been the marginalization of different sections of society for the massification of groups for the distribution of information on social media, generating public sympathy that wakes people up and propels them against the State. The strength of social media is also believed to boost consciousness and facilitates mobilization and protests against bad leadership.

Therefore, a different hashtag activism has provided a playing ground to advance the culture of social media that weakens the old form of solidarity as well as raises a new generation of activism in rules and technologies. That is to say, Nigerians have deployed their voices and smartphones to protest against injustice meted on them and call on government and policymakers on the need for change.

Limitations of Hashtag Activism

While there are great advantages of social media enhanced activism, there are also some limitations and challenges posed by its use. They are discussed thus:
Online activism may be out of control as the process can easily be hijacked by angry mobs that may deter the process towards the actualization of social and political change. Similarly, instances of hidden identity through activism on different social media platforms perpetrate crime, privacy concerns, and the

creation of an artificial community. The older generation may not be reached online as some may not have access to or the knowledge of the use of the new media technologies in activism. Ghonim (2015) adds that a major limitation of hashtag activism is that it creates an echo chamber whereby communication is limited with people that agree with a certain point of view, while those who have a contrary view are muted and blocked or 'unfollowed'. Furthermore, social media share over engagements, post genuine conversations, shallow comments over deep conversations, and talk at each other rather than talking with each other.
Baer (2020) observes that hashtag activism creates a platform where one can congregate with people that they agree and change the minds of those few who do not. Therefore, some activism may merely start and terminate online without necessarily having any considerable impact offline.

Other limitations are that online activism may get out of control of the organizers, as campaigns may sometimes get out of control and may eventually lead to death and destruction of properties. Similarly, ideas shared with like minds may be likely met with great resistance from those who do not subscribe to it. Privacy concerns may constitute another factor as one may not have an idea or purpose that the data will be used for. Fundamentalists may hijack the process to perpetrate dangerous acts that could be harmful to citizens (Frost, 2020). This implies that sometimes hashtag activism may not result in any change as individuals may just share without taking part in any further action. Therefore, the fact that one may "like", "share" or "Tweet" something does not mean one is concerned about it.

Conclusion

Social media is a vital tool in the dissemination of information about ways action could be taken offline either in the form of having conversations with people face to face or attending to political events such as protests. Activists or conveners have utilized social media to spread awareness about topics of importance to them as well as use social media to organize protests and events in the real world. But how effective is activism?

The position of this paper was to review the relevance of social media as a platform for facilitating hashtag activism in Nigeria and the power of hashtags to draw attention and mobilize support for change. Technology is a driver for sharing of ideas, information and relationships. Social media today has revolutionized communication both at the international, national, state, and local

levels by distributing information to all facets of society, and changing how people think, connect and engage with activities of activism towards social change and the development of the Nigerian society. This implies that hashtag activism is moving towards becoming a new revolutionary communication tool for mobilization, advocacy and creation of awareness on social issues in the hands of the people in Nigeria. Therefore, the citizens are now aware of the power they have in mobilizing support and making policymakers and government accountable to the needs of the population.

Activists, organizations, social media users, and government should ensure that advocacy does not stop at drawing attention to trend. Instead, advocacy should serve as a springboard for something meaningful and greater towards attaining democratic sustainability and national development. The study conducted a narrative review of social media and hashtag activism in Nigeria on the existing literature. Further research may examine the nexus between traditional and social media activism. Moreover, a focus group discussion may be conducted with young people who have experienced firsthand police brutality or any type of maltreatment by other government agencies. In so doing, the effectiveness of the new media would be identified beyond its capacity as a tool for social mobilization and creating real time change in Nigeria and beyond.

Recommendations

In light of the review of the relevance of social media as a platform for facilitating hashtag activism in Nigeria, the study recommends that:

1. An extensive study to explore the power of social media in developing a new communication revolution in Nigeria be conducted.
2. The government should facilitate increased Internet access, especially in rural communities, to ensure maximum participation in government policies and programs.
3. Researchers should ascertain the use of social media in amplifying the voice of the 'veiled groups' in a patriarchal society.
4. Users should weaponize the social media and hashtag activism toward social and political changes in Nigeria.

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