Regulating Social Media Contents for Sustainable Development and National Security: Lessons from the April-May 2021, Civil Unrest in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract: *The influx of broadcast contents from the social media platform into the society is one that has caused more harm than good to the development of the society; The current civil unrest that has affected the security architecture in the southeast is a pointer to fact that an unregulated messages on this platform is capable of causing anarchy in the society; Hence researchers believed that a regulated social media platform will help to reduce the civil unrest in the southeast which is largely influence by youths and elites that view shared contents on the social media platform, as these has caused lots of security threat and endangered national development. The survey research method was used to prosecute this investigation, the online samples size calculator was used to draw a sample size of 381 from the population of the southeast, multi-stage sampling technique was used while tables and simple percentage were deployed to present and analyses the collected data, while the gate keeping theory and the social responsibility theory was used to anchor the study. Based on the data analyzed, it was revealed that large percentage of elite believes, receive, and view broadcast contents on the social media due to its proximity. It was recommended, that broadcast content on social media should go through regulation before it can be seen by everyone on the platform.*

Keywords: *Content Regulation, Social Media, Civil Unrest, Security & Development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

No society can function and exist as an entity without rules and regulation. One could equally say that no society can make progress where law and order are absent. The presence of law and order in the society helps to prevent anarchy, and any form of indiscipline. Esimokha (2016, p. 2) states that "one can imagine the chaos, rowdiness, unruliness, entropy, anarchy, tyranny and all sorts of abuses to pervade our society in the absence of instrument to inform us all about what acts are wrong and which are not." This really means that for any society to attain the desired goal and objective the need for law, rules and regulations cannot be over emphasised.

It is important to know that the media is a cardinal tool the society cannot do without; more especially in the digital era we have found ourselves. The pace at which information flies is one that has surpassed the conventional media: newspaper, magazine, radio and television. The conventional media platforms are bound with lots of protocols and regulations, in fact most times larger population of the society depends so much on these media platforms for information, education and entertainment. This system has rolled for ages that most people in this part of our world are now accustomed to its contents, some see it as the best, while some see it as a means to listen directly from their employers especially when the need arises. Okoyomoh (2015) opines " due to the way NTA and radio Nigeria are regulated and used by the authorities, I prefer it to other broadcast stations because I get information that affect my job from that source." Some even believe that the radio time or TV cannot lie. One can categorically state that the way and manner the conventional broadcast sector has been regulated has placed a lot of credibility on this particular channel of information than any other source.

As man begins to advance, he begins to seek better ways to make communication and information dissemination easy. Today, our society has experienced another wave of information dissemination

through social media and they have drawn large chunk of our youth to itself due to the way shared messages, tweets, videos, audios, etc, go viral, and faster. This has made many people to seek for news even before the normal news time in the conventional media. Everyone wants to be informed of the latest happening from the platform despite its unregulated nature. These platforms have been used to spread all manner of fake news, tension and panic when the need ought not to arise. However, the platforms have also provided the people with lots of benefits more especially, making communication easy and accessible to every of its member. This is to say that you do not really need to be in the America market to get some stuff for yourself; with the social media market, access to buyers are made and transactions are completed in a space of few minutes.

It has also provided another platform that enable people express themselves without so much restriction either from the authorities of government in some areas especially Nigeria. The audience of these platforms is the youths, the elites, religious organisations, political parties, organisations, and various leaders of the world. Some of these platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. It is just a community of people in such a way that what one posts on his/her timeline or page can be seen by all the friends on his list, and if this friends comment, or like the page their own friends will equally see same message from one person. This make information dissemination to go viral without much work to it, because the quest for information is always growing as the day unfolds.

It was in that mood that during the civil unrest in south east Nigeria between April and May 2021, different versions of different stories were circulated that most consumers of information became confused. The sources of most of the information on the social media platforms could not be readily confirmed. However, many enthusiasts of the south east would always post and repost the messages while anti-south east would also post and repost contradicting massages. This resulted in what could be termed message chaos. That is why it has become important to seek opinions of citizens with regard to the best practices as to regulating the social media contents so as to reap its dividends and ensure that through it, national development and security would be enhanced.

2. PROBLEM OF STUDY

It's expedient to say that the media has what it takes to make or mar the growth and development of any society. Therefore, the social media platform is one crucial aspect of the media that deals with constant day to day sharing of information, business transaction from one source to large and diversify audience within the shortest possible time. The extent to which this platform has been used to promote the current civil unrest in south-east within April and May 2021 through shared messages is what the researchers wish to unravel. It's empirical to state that most of our youth and elite rely on the social media platform for information, than the conventional media. This according to them is based on the fact that most of the broadcast stations are mouth piece of the government, and therefore lacks basic news credibility.

3. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The broad goal of this study was to investigate the role of the social media platforms during the civil unrest of April –May 2021 in the south eastern part of Nigeria. The researchers specifically sought to

i. Find out which medium of information dissemination furnished more as regards the civil unrest in the south east.

ii. Find out which medium was adjudge to be credible on information dissemination as regards the civil unrest in the south east.

iii. Find out if the social media played any role in mobilizing the people for protest within the period of study.

iv. Find out the perceived need to regulate the social media platforms and their contents

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

i. Amongst the various means of information dissemination, , which medium provided more information as regards the civil unrest in the south east?

ii. Which of this medium is adjudged to be credible in information dissemination on the civil unrest in the south east?

iii. To what extent did the social media platform help to mobilize the people for protest within the period of study?

iv. What are the perceived needs to regulate social media platforms and their contents?

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study shall serve as a valuable literature for future researchers in this area of knowledge. This implies that those who would want to engage in further studies in this area will find this study useful especially as its regards to literature review.

The broadcast regulatory body in the country will also find this work helpful, more especially now the issue to regulating social media is cardinal to the federal government, finally tertiary and research institution will find this work relevant in teaching and learning of online journalism.

6. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Since the study focused on the south-east Nigeria, the residents of the five states in the geopolitical zone constituted the scope of the study. This study was sampled among those who use the social media as a news source

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of the social media platform date back to 1997, however before this time, there has being other internet social site that was used to pass messages across different sites. In the 1980 and 90s technology news site digital trends, internet growth enabled the introduction of online, and prodigy which introduced users to digital communication through mail, bulletin, board messaging, and real-time online chatting; this gave rise to the earliest social media networks beginning with the short lived six degree profile uploading service in 1997 (online.maryville.edu). This shows that the social media platform is not a platform that just emerge from nowhere with a mandate to plunge the society into a state of anarchy, rather it was designed to aid the flow of communication across various boundaries within the shortest possible time. However, the advancement of this site has created lots of panic in the hands of the users, this is because some people take advantage of its unregulated nature to say or post certain messages that might not be for the good of the people.

One must not also forget that it has also played a crucial role in providing employment for our people in diverse ways, hence if we must enjoy the dividend that comes with this platforms the need to regulate the entire system cannot be over emphasized having seen the benefits we derived from the way and manner the conventional media has being regulated in Nigeria.

Regulations has been seen by some school of thought as a means of gaging or chaining freedom of information either in the conventional media or in the social media platform, while some see it as the right step in the right direction if the society must grow and develop. Regulation is the act of setting rules and regulations that guides the activities of a particular group of people at one time or the other. Idachaba & Ngene (2019,p . 84) sees " regulation as a process of observing, analyzing, interpreting the day to day broadcast content(s) of a media outfit, with the help of relevant resources so as to ensure that the operate according to the stipulated guidelines, rules and regulation of broadcasting as contained n the constitution, the National broadcasting code (NB code) and other bye laws of the land in the interest of the public". Any shared message that is capable of promoting disharmony is not qualified to find its way into the broadcast space of any society or nation.

Peace is a costly key that when it is lost even the media finds it very difficult to operate and do that which is expected of it. No society thrives in the mist of battle, battles, anarchy can be flamed by the way a message is written, the perception of the reader at that moment can spike a lot of reactions that might be inimical to the growth and development of such nation. When this is done, the security architecture becomes weak and unable to do the needful, which is protection of life and property. NB Code (2019,p.17) opines " broadcast regulation is essential to ensure that broadcasting plays pivotal role in the cultural, scientific, technological, economic and political lives of the people of Nigeria" This is one crucial document that has been used to regulate broadcasting on Nigeria. This has saved the Nation from lots of crisis that would have emerged due to cultural, political and religious connotations. It's indeed a compendium and a document that stipulate how electronic broadcasting

should operate in Nigeria. In the case of the social media no law has been made to regulate shared and sponsored messages; as some school of thought believes that it should be a free market place of ideas where truth would prevail against falsehood. Esimokha (2016, p.33) states "that word are very powerful when used wrongly or unwisely, they can harm, words can misinform the public and they can hurt people with false accusations" Word can be cheap and easy to say, hence its effects after it has been said can be very devastating to the interest of the general public.

The December 17th 2010 Arab spring which lasted till 2012 is believed to have its root for mobilization from the various social media platforms. The Malian protest, the black lives matter protest. Back home in Nigeria the social media platform has also been a strong force in recruiting people for protest, suicide mission, separatist and religious protest this we can see in the occupy Nigeria of 2011, Save Nigeria group, the end- sars movement, ISWAP, Boko Haram Jihadist, IPOB, and Oduduwa etc John (2013) opines "the social media in journalism as a phenomenon that has assumed the momentum of a revolution in journalism because the platform has narrowed the distance between journalist and the public, encouraged lively, immediate and spirited discussion and promoted vital news gathering and delivery" The funniest aspect is that most of these people share some of this fake and inciting messages on the social media platform just to promote their personal agenda not minding the effect it can have in the larger society., medium Udeze (2012,p.59) opines " in taking decision, we need to put the society first, profession second third, and self-last" When this is done to a large extent the sponsors of certain messages on this platform won't have done that.

The south eastern parts of Nigeria was bedeviled with a lot of civil unrest which caused a lot of insecurity and loss of life, delayed development and paralyzed business activities in the region. This ranges from burning down of police station, kidnapping, killing of innocent people and destruction of valuable properties worth billions of naira within the shortest possible time. This was informed by comment, and messages shared on the social media platform by different separatist group who believed that in one way their mandate and right has been stolen, while others believed that they have been grossly marginalized and therefore demand for justice. The pictures of the brutal killing of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) by the Operative of government also lead to the civil unrest witness within that period. Some of the social media platforms that has been used over time to mobilize the people for protest, and also used to share certain unworthy contents are as follows according to Tuffs University(2017): Blogs, Linkedin, Facebook, Watsapp, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and Vimeo and Flickr

8. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the importance of this work the gatekeeping theory and the social responsibility theory were used to anchor this study.

9. GATE-KEEPING THEORY

The gatekeeping theory was propounded by Kurt Lewin in 1947. According to Aneto. Onabajo, and Osifeso (2006,p. 91) states "this theory believes that Media organization as well as key media professionals acts as gates to the flood of information coming in from the larger society; the gate can either be opened, to let some kind of information through for processing and publication or be shut to deny other kind of information the opportunity for processing and publication. This really means that not every sponsored information should be allowed to see the light of the day. Folarin (2002. p,95) stipulate " some individuals have to decide which information to transmit, which to defer, which to modify, which to delete entirely" This assertion by Folarin stipulate the need to regulate messages as not all the messages should be allowed to find its way in the media due to the effect it might have on the general public. Esimokha (2016, p.33) states "that word are very powerful when used wrongly or unwisely, they can harm, words can misinform the public and they can hurt people with false accusations" No word or message should be treated lightly as long as it falls short of the rules and regulations guiding broadcasting

10. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY

This is a theory according to Aneto et.al (2006, p. 56) was propounded in 1963 by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm. Okenwa (2007,p.16) opines "that the theory focuses on the consequence of the media

and the attendant activities on the society, and places demand of responsibility on the operators without undermining the importance of freedom; and it also believed in the existence of freedom, but within responsible limit. This really means that in as much as freedom of speech is good one should be able to perform this act within a responsible limit that won't be inimical to the growth and development of the society.

Udeze (2012,p.59) opines " in taking decision, we need to put the society first, profession second third, and self-last" When we know that we can only make progress if the society is at peace, then it behooves on everyone to be careful on the kind of messages that might affect the security, growth and development of the society.

11. METHODOLOGY

The researchers used the survey research method to carry out this study, while questionnaire was deployed as an instrument of data collection. A projected population of 21,602,533 residents of south east constituted the study. A sample of 400 was drawn from the population   using the taro yamane's formula. The multi stage sampling was used to select the states, LGAs communities and individual whose view were ascertained in the cause of this research work.

12. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data collected were collated, presented and analyzed using tables and simple percentages, after the administration of questionnaire, 381 copies where properly filled returned, 9 copies were not returned. The researchers therefore analyzed

Table1. *Amongst the various means of information dissemination, which medium provided more information as regards the civil unrest in the south east?*

Amongst the various means of information dissemination, , which medium provided you with more information as regards the civil unrest in the south east?	Frequency	Percentage
Newspaper	82	21.5%
Radio	102	28.9
Social Media	110	26.8
Television	87	22.8
Total	381	100

Table one above shows that majority of the respondents (110) representing (28.9%) got their messages from the social media platforms

Table2. *Which of this medium was adjudged to be credible in information dissemination on the civil unrest in the south east?*

Which of this medium can you adjudge to be credible in information dissemination on the civil unrest in the south east?	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	105	31.8%
Social Media	121	27.6
Television	86	22.6
Newspaper	69	18
Total	381	100

Table two shows that majority of the respondents (121) representing (27.6%) sees the social media platform as a credible medium of information dissemination**.**

Table3. *Do you think that shared messages on the social media platform helped to mobilize the people for protest within the period of study?*

Do you think that shared messages on the social media platform helped to mobilize the people for protest within the period of study	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	190	49.9%
No	116	30.4
To some extent	75	19.7
Total	381	100

Table three shows that majority of the respondents (190) representing (49.9) believes that the social media platform was used to mobilize the people for protest within the period of study.

Table4. *Do you think there is need to regulate social media messages?*

Do you think there is need to regulate social media messages?	Frequency	Percentage
It should	195	51.2%
Should not	113	29. 7
Can't say	73	19.1
Total	381	100

Table four shows that majority of the respondents (195) representing (51.2%) believes that the social media messages should be regulated

13. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The researchers discussed the finding of the study with reference to relevant empirical literature.

Research Question One: Amongst the various means of information dissemination, which medium provided more information as regards the civil unrest in the south east?

This research question seeks to find out the various social media platform that the people of south east used to access messages within the period of the civil unrest. Table one above shows that majority of the respondents (110) representing (28.9%) got their messages from the social media platform, 102 respondents representing (28.8%) got most of the information on civil unrest from the radio, 87 respondents representing (22.8%) believes that they got the messages from their television, while (82) respondent representing (21.5%) got most of their messages the newspapers as it regards the civil unrest. This really means that the social media platform has become a valuable channel through which most people get messages on the civil unrest. In the 1980 and 90s technology news site digital trends, internet growth enabled the introduction of online, and prodigy which introduced users to digital communication through mail, bulletin, board messaging, and real-time online chatting; this gave rise to the earliest social media networks beginning with the short lived six degree profile uploading service in 1997 (online.maryville.edu). The social media platform has indeed become a catalyst for information dissemination

Research Question Two. Which of this medium is adjudged to be credible in information dissemination on the civil unrest in the south east?

Table two shows that majority of the respondents (121) representing (31.8%) sees the social media platform as a credible medium of information dissemination, 105 respondents representing (27.6%.) view the radio channel as a credible source of information, 86 respondent representing (22.6%) viewed the television as a credible source of information, while 69 respondent representing (18%) viewed newspaper as a credible source of information. John (2013) opines "the social media in journalism as a phenomenon that has assumed the momentum of a revolution in journalism because the platform has narrowed the distance between journalist and the public, encouraged lively, immediate and spirited discussion and promoted vital news gathering and delivery" The proxy, urgent nature of this system of this platform on information dissemination has made it to attract lots of followership.

Research Question Three. To what extent did the social media platform help to mobilize the people for protest within the period demonstration?

Table three shows that majority of the respondents 190 representing (49.9%) believes that the social media platform was used to mobilize the people for protest within the period of study, 116 respondents representing (30.4%) believes that the social media did not mobilize the people for protest, while 75 respondents representing (19.7%) can't say if the social media was used to mobilize the people for protest. Ekoh and George (2021.p.1) opines that " the sharing of video of Anti-Robbery Squared (known as SARS) officials killing a man on social media platform such as instagram, and twitter has led to wide spread of protest across Nigeria" Just as the conventional media has the power to change the thinking and attitude of the people, the social media platforms has assumes such through her various platforms.

Research Question Four. What are the perceived needs to regulate social media platforms and their contents?

The last table indicate that 195 respondent representing (51.2%) believes that social media messages should be regulated, 113 respondents representing (29.7%) believes it should not be regulated, while 73 respondents representing (19.1%) can't say if it should be regulated. Idachaba & Ngene (2019,p . 84) sees " regulation as a process of observing, analyzing, interpreting the day to day broadcast content(s) of a media outfit, with the help of relevant resources so as to ensure that the operate according to the stipulated guidelines, rules and regulation of broadcasting as contained n the constitution, the National broadcasting code (NB code) and other bye laws of the land in the interest of the public". Regulation should not be seen as muffling the press, rather it should be seen as a process that is put in place to protect the greater interest of the society at large in her day to day activities. Udeze (2012, p.59) opines " in taking decision, we need to put the society first, profession second third, and self-last.

14. SUMMARY OF FINDING

Based on the analysis of data made, the researchers found that

1. The social media platforms through shared messages provided the people with information on the civil unrest in South East Nigeria.

2. Majority adjudged the social media as credible source of information.

3. The social media is a strong a catalyst for protest mobilization during the civil unrest.

4. Social Media messages need to be regulated for the general interest of the public.

15. CONCLUSION

Based on the summary of findings, researcher conclude that the social media has become a great force more especially in mobilizing the people for one agenda or the other through shared messages that is fast at a click, therefore messages shared on this platform needs to be regulated so as to avoid the society plunging into anarchy.

16. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, researchers recommend the following:

i. That other medium of information more especially the conventional media, should be enhanced to operate in a digital manner so as to get more audience.

ii. Other conventional media platforms must also carry out their function as the fourth estate of the realm so as to serve as the voice of the people.

iii. Operators of the social media must also know when they society is at war the media cannot operate , therefore, they must tread with caution in their shared contents

iv. Finally, an unregulated medium is an express invitation to anarchy, therefore the social media should be regulated objectively , in fairness and balance so that it can achieve it major aim of protecting the society

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