

Language Use, Ethnic Identity and Inclusiveness on the Social Media: The Nigerian Example

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of the social media in extending the discourses on ethnic identity and use of language to mediate cultural communication and inclusiveness at a period of rising ethnic consciousness in Nigeria's post-colonial history. The study gives needed attention to the contents of social network sites in terms of language use and ethnicity in Nigeria. The study examines the implications of the new status conferred on users by the social media as language planners and shapers of ethnic imagery. It draws from social network theory to deconstruct ethnic identity in the form of ties/creeds (weak/strong ties, similarity), systems of ethnic labelling, contexts of identity (multi-identity/biculturalism, local/secondary language), and factors affecting identification/inclusiveness (main group/subgroup relations; majority/minority group resistance and accommodation). The study adopts textual analysis of user generated contents on six geo-political-based ethnic Facebook sites and Twitter handles in Nigeria. The study found that social ties among social media users were formed based on sameness of ethnic groups (homophily). The groups used the sites more to display ethnic pride (displayed more as ethnic rivalry), cultural heritage and politics. The study recommends that the tone of unhealthy rivalry among ethnic groups should be de-emphasised in posts. There is need to show the beauty of Nigeria's multiculturalism rather than using it as a means of separatism. This will also help to better give Nigeria clear cultural identity rather than an image of people locked in ethnic superiority war.

Key Words: Social Media, Network, Identity, Ethnic, Language

Introduction

The social media has been a subject of great research interest over the last two decades due to its high potential in linking up people in the discussion of topical issues in a global sense. Since the Arab Spring of 2011, the social media has gained more reckoning as a social force. It has played critical roles in politics, mass mobilisation, social security and sectional interests.

However, a far majority of studies (over 90%) in Nigeria accessed by the researchers focussed on users, not on the platforms/contents (Ijeh, Umukoro, & Amune, 2013; Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014; Oyero & Jegede, 2011). This study attempts to fill the gap by focussing on the character of online contents in the area of ethnic identification, inclusiveness and language use. The study investigates the question: how do ethnic groups label themselves on the social media? How do the ethnic groups attempt to accommodate other ethnic groups through the use of language?

The social media already plays critical roles in Nigeria's social and cultural communication. It is a tool of public communication, revolutions, social mobilisation, ethnic struggles, linguistic transformations, crime, hate speech and friendship. As such, leveraging the vast numbers of social media users in Nigeria on social mobilisation, cultural development, curtailing hate speech and bigotry have become germane in present day Nigeria.

Apart from understanding the impact of the social media at this point of heightened ethnic agitations in Nigeria, the study aims to add to the narrative on the role of the social media in Nigeria's social communication landscape, especially as a way to move it away from a faceless and heedless mass engagement with technology towards more meaningful discourses about new technology, culture, language and community engagement.

The study is based on a social network analysis of ethnic identification and ties with the aim of offering some insight of how Nigeria's socio-linguistic groups connect with one another, what they do on the social media, and how they harness the resources of the social media to promote indigenous languages, cultural practices, share history and promote community harmony.

Study Objectives

The objectives of the paper are to:

1. identify the kinds/strength of ethno-cultural ties that exist on ethnic-based social media sites in Nigeria
2. examine how the various ethnic groups in Nigeria define themselves through their interests and objectives
3. determine the level of inclusiveness demonstrated by the users of the ethnic- based sites
4. ascertain how language has been used in ethnic identity and inclusiveness among users of ethnic-based sites in Nigeria

Related Literature

Existing studies on the social media in Nigeria focus on negative influences, platform affiliations, uses/gratifications, exposure levels and market potentials (Bamidele, 2016; Ochonogor and Ohiagu, 2013; Ijeh and Amune, 2013; Omenughu and Uzuegbunam, 2013; Adeyanju and Haruna, 2011; Adelabu, 2011). This study explores the huge potentials of the social media for addressing many issues associated with community interests such as language, culture, religion and history. Some of the studies on the views of users on the social media in Nigeria found that the social media have negative effects on Nigeria's culture, values and language (Asemah, Ekharefo, & Olaniran, 2013; Ogwo 2016). Ndolo (2006), however, says that the social media could offer the opportunity to multilingual societies like Nigeria to discuss their culture and language in ways the mass media would impossibly allow. This study attempts to provide the picture to corroborate or debunk the claims in the researches mentioned.

The social media has been useful in promoting community interests outside Nigeria. Jones, Cunliffe, and Honeycutt (2013) found that the social media have helped the youth in local communities in Wales to promote and share video about their language and culture as well as to connect with friends worldwide. Putra (2015) assessed the use of Lampung (an indigenous language in Bandar, a province of Lampung, Indonesia) among four multi-ethnic youth in Bandar, Lampung. The four youth studied Lampung at school, and Putra's work examined how they used Lampung in their use of *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, and *Path*. The study indicated that the youth used Indonesian and English in the majority of their posts, but had also used Lampung, and code-switched in all the languages they knew. Social networks that did not speak Lampung restricted the extent to which the youth used Lampung in their social media.

Valenzuela (2013) found out that in Chile using the social media for opinion expression and activism mediates the relationship between overall social media use and protest behaviour. The study provided evidence on the role of digital platforms as facilitators of direct political action. Hallow (2011) found out that the social media (Facebook) was used in Guatemala to mobilise an online movement that also moved offline. Users' protest-related and motivational comments, in addition to their use of links and other interactive elements of Facebook helped organise massive protests and demanding justice and an end to violence. Sawyer (2011) studied applications of the social media among foreign college students in the US. He found out that foreign students in the United States used the social networking sites to acquaint themselves with alien cultures. He noted that foreign students used the social media "to become more familiar with the culture through talking with their friends about the cultural experience," (p. 14).

Beyond the views of users, the present study focusses on the contents of social media sites. It examines how the sites extend the narratives on Nigeria's ethnic identities. It also evaluates the uses of English and indigenous languages to mediate cultural communication. This is germane at this point in Nigeria that ethnic consciousness

and agitations are alarming since the civil war of 1967-70. Lewis and Bratton (2000) note that since 1999, over 66% of Nigerians have identified themselves in the light of their ethnicity and religion more than class identity (28.4%). In 2016, two researchers, Haldun Canci and Opeyemi Odukoya reported the following about ethnic crisis in Nigeria since 1999:

A survey conducted in Nigeria by Lewis and Bratton found that almost half of Nigerians (48.2%) labelled themselves with an ethnic identity compared to 28.4% who labelled themselves with respect to class and 21% who identified with a religious group. This means that over 66% of Nigerians view themselves as members of an elemental ethnic or religious group. What is even more interesting is the fact that religious and ethnic identities are more salient than class identities. However, this is not at all that surprising, especially if one considers that ethno-religious formations are the most persistent behavioural units in Nigeria.

With over 300 ethnic groups, over 520 languages and more than 90 million personal social media accounts, Nigeria boasts some of the largest ethno-linguistic groups and highest social media penetration in Africa (Canci & Odukoya, 2016; Ojo & Aghedo, 2013). It is no wonder that Facebook in September 2016 added Hausa and Fula as part of the over 100 languages in use on the Facebook network, which has a daily visit of 16 million Nigerians. Ethnicity and linguistic differences are the most critical factors affecting social stability, national cohesion, coexistence and development in Nigeria (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013).

Studies have looked into the new roles that new media have in language development, displacement, extinction and maintenance (Uwechia, 2016; Putra, 2015; Phillipson, 1992; Wurm, 2001). New media may introduce a diversion to existing projections on the possible links between international languages on the extinction of local languages. Many Nigerian languages have been cited as facing extinction in the next 20 years, according to a UNESCO (2012, cited in Putra, 2015 and Uwechia, 2016) projection. Phillipson (1992, cited in Putra, 2015) sees the international spread of the English Language as repressive since it not only substitutes and displaces other languages, but also imposes new 'mental structures' on learners. Jones (2013) believes that being distinct from traditional media, the social media call for the development of literature outside formal and official contexts.

In a similar vein, Cormark (2010) notes that since the social media enables users not just to be passive receivers, but also content creators, the social media gives them a role as language planners. Jones, Cunliffe and Honeycutt, (2013) say that in certain local contexts social networking sites may constitute vital platforms with the capacity to impact on the use of a minority language. Chilwa (2006) found out that the English Language conforms to contextual dynamics of media communication in Nigeria to a large extent. Chilwa argues that English in Nigeria mediates socio-cultural thoughts and assumes a local colour that is peculiarly Nigerian. The author, for instance, viewed idiom as a discourse type that represents the historical and cultural heritage of a people and shows the extent to which they mediate social communication in media discourse.

This study views ethnicity/ethnic identity simply as depictions denoting a sense of belonging or attachment to one's ethnic group. It also views ethnic inclusiveness as a tendency to accommodate other ethnic groups, without talking only about themselves as well as defining themselves in the light of general values shared by others, rather than a tendency to isolate themselves as ethnic superiors.

Social Network Theory

The social network theory investigates social structures through the use of networks. It looks at the networked structures of society as nodes. The nodes include individual actors, people, or things within the network. Social network theory also looks at the ties, edges, or links (relationships or interactions) that connect the nodes. Kinship, friendship and acquaintance network, and the social media are among the social structures often studied using the social network analysis.

The theory emanated from the works of Anheier, Gerhards and Romo and Burket Senekal (Loomies, 1957; De Noony, 2013). The extent to which actors form ties with similar versus dissimilar others is referred to as

homophily or assortivity. Similarity can be defined by gender, race, age, occupation, educational achievement, status, values, or any other salient characteristic (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook 2001). The extent to which tie-forming is diverse is called multiplexity, that is, how much of tie-forming has been done by people from a certain gender, age, occupation, etc. (Podolny & Baron, 1997). Two people or friends working together are said to have multiplexity, which is related to relationship strength (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). The extent to which two actors reciprocate each other's friendship or other interaction is mutuality or reciprocity. When there is a measure of the completeness of relational trends, it is described as network closure, and when an individual assumes network closure (i.e. that their friends are also friends), there is transitivity. The tendency for actors to have more ties with geographically close others is called propinquity (Kadushin, 2012).

In this study, there shall be a focus on the kinds of network structures in which given nodes form language ties. The language ties shall be viewed in the light of whether there is homophily, multiplexity, mutuality or propinquity. The factors affecting these network forms and situations shall be noted, especially with the special Nigerian conditions that may be noted.

Methods

The research method to be adopted for the study is content/textual analysis. As an anchor, social network theory shall be used to examine the various ways that ties/interrelationships/actors have been studied, e.g., weak/strong ties, homophily, similarity, multiplexity, transitivity, mutuality, and propinquity of actors/nodes (Anheier, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Kadushin, 2012); Willimas & Durrance, 2008).

Textual analysis of the content of the sites was based on Lincoln & Guba's (1985) Constant Comparative Technique (CCT). The technique, as described by Wimmer & Dominick (2003), involves categorisation of contents according to relationships and themes and simplifying and integrating data into a coherent and theoretical structure. The study followed Kaplan & Haenlein's (2009), and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD, 2007, cited in Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009), classification to concentrate on what is known as user generated contents (UGC) on social media. Therefore, the study was limited to (ethnic-based) Facebook and Twitter platforms, which are the sites mostly in use among ethnic groups in Nigeria as noted by Ukonu, Edogor & Ezugwu (2017).

Ethnic-based social media sites refer to sites floated to project the interest of a defined ethno-linguistic group, but with opportunity of followership by anyone who seeks admission. This study shall adopt ten such sites to represent the six dominant ethno-linguistic groups in the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, namely, (Facebook) [Igboist Profiles](#) (south east), [Proudly Yorùbá](#) (south west), [Ijaw Patriots](#) (south south), [Fulani & Fulfide](#) (north east), [Hausapedia.com](#) (north west) and [Tiv Brotherhood](#) (north central). For twitter, we have [Hausa Literature \(@HausaLiterature\)](#) | [Igbo Facts \(@_IgboFacts\)](#) | [Yoruba Proverbs \(@yoruba_proverbs\)](#), [Ndi.Igbo \(@igboist\)](#) [The six groups used are the largest ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria. The makeup of each ethno-linguistic group also cuts across geopolitical zones (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013).

The sites used are not owned by socio-cultural groups recognised by the ethnic groups such as Ohaneze Ndiigbo, Afenifere, Arewa, Pandev. The sites used had individuals as administrators, but attracted comments from groups and individuals whose aim was the ethnic interest on a particular ethnic group expressed under various subjects. The sites was merely visited and posts were downloaded between 2016 and 2018 when ethnic consciousness hightened in Nigeria, culminating in IPOB secessionist agitations from 2016-2017, which resulted in the 2017 ultimatum given to Igbos in the North to leave the region before october 1, 2017. The study adopted the following units of analysis

1. Means adopted in ethnic promotions (Promoting local language and culture, Promoting ethnic pride, Promoting ethnicity in liaison with a given religion, Calling attention to ancestry)
2. Kinds of social ties on the ethnic-based sites (Homophily, Propinquity, etc.)
3. Languages used on the sites

4. How language was used in constructions (Using English to explain local language, Using local languages exclusively, Using English exclusively, Code-switching in given expressions)
5. Uses of the ethnic based sites (Expressing interests, Protests, Mobilisation, etc.)
6. The language of idioms and proverbs (Using equivalent English proverbs to explain local proverbs, Adapting English to suit the meaning of local idioms and proverbs)
7. Level of inclusiveness (High level accommodation, Low level accommodation, etc.)
8. Tone of expressions on other ethnic groups (Attack, Praise, Neutral)
9. Ways groups viewed themselves (Superior to others, As hated by others, etc.)
10. Types of cultures promoted (Festivals, Values and norms, Attires and paraphernalia)
11. Indices of inclusiveness shown (Constant negotiation, Renegotiation, etc.)

12. Descriptions given to the following areas (school, family, politics, religion)
13. The differences in ethnic identities of the various groups studied
14. How the ethnic groups describe themselves in relation to others including the country Nigeria (We, before Nigeria, Nigeria before us, We need to build one Nigeria)
15. Depictions of people in relation to their culture (Biculturalism, Monoculturalism)

Data Presentation

Based on the objectives, units of analysis and the constant comparative technique, the following themes were first analysed, and followed by the comparisons that put the themes into a theoretical whole.

1. Kinds/strength of ethno-cultural ties that exist on ethnic-based social

Kinds of Social Ties on the Ethnic-Based Sites: The following were the kinds of actors (nodes) on the sites: there were mainly individual actors and groups (Figure 1).

Table1: Social Ties on Ethnic-based Sites

	Homophily		Propinquity		Multiplexity		Mutuality		Transitivity	
	Intr Eth	Inte Eth	Intr Eth	Inte Eth	Intr Eth	Inte Eth	Intr Eth	Inte Eth	Intr Eth	Inte Eth
Fulani	High/low		Low/low		High/low		High/low		Low/low	
Hausa	High/low		Low/low		High/low		High/low		Low/low	
Igbo	High/low		Low/low		High/low		High/low		Low/low	
Ijaw	High/low		Low/low		High/low		High/low		Low/low	
Tiv	High/low		Low/low		High/low		High/low		Low/low	
Yoruba	High/low		Low/low		High/low		High/low		Low/low	

(intr Eth = intra-ethnic; Inte Eth= inter-ethnic)

The sites had high homophily because they all had subgroups or actors (nodes) that shared interests. Such interest were mainly based on occupations such as fashion. Similarity of interest was rarely in the areas of gender, race, age, educational achievement, status, and values. Because there was high homophily, this translated to high multiplexity because many actors on similar areas had strong relationships. For this reason also, mutuality was high. Note however, that homophily, multiplexity and mutuality were high only in the context of intra-ethnic group relations. In the area of inter-ethnic group relations, all the indices of ethnic ties were low.

Whether on inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic basis, there was no indication of propinquity and transitivity. The actors on the sites did not show that their individual friends were also friends (transitivity). Neither did the actors or groups seek out friends based on geographical closeness (propinquity). As said before, ties were mainly formed based on occupations. None of the actors or groups in each of the sites posted comments that spoke well about the ethnic members of other groups. Even when comparisons were made, it was to point out selfish or ethno-centric qualities of a group. For instance, there was a post on the *Igboist Profile* on November 10, 2017, which decried the marginalisation of Igbo in Nigeria. Replies to the post berated the Igbo for sojourning too much in other lands,

and asked them to stay back in their place to develop it instead of moving to other places. A post called for an "Igbo leader like Bola Tinubu of Lagos State, who will be selfless." Selflessness was interpreted to mean selfish obsession with the sectional interests of a group (Yoruba in this case) to the exclusion of others.

Users of the sites saw themselves first as members of their ethnic groups, and they believed that the interests of their ethnic groups come before Nigeria's interests. The members of ethnic groups boasted that they could always stay on their own. Nationalism or national interests were not a point of interest to the groups. Therefore, it was a case of 'we, before others'; and 'we before Nigeria'. For instance, a post on *Igboist on June 6, 2017 called attention to the quit notice given to the Igbo in the north. A reply post noted: Nigeria is over-due for disintegration. The North is tired of this union. The West is weary of this forced marriage. Same goes with middle belt and South South and most recently, Fulani. Let's go our separate ways in peace. Let Biafra go now.*

2. How the various ethnic groups define themselves through their interests and objectives.

Means of Ethnic Promotions: The three major ethnic groups had wider ethnic-based sites that projected cultural interests, while the minority groups had none, and only had state-based groups that were more political than cultural. The dominant means of ethnic promotions was promoting/boosting ethnic pride. The actors on the sites shared the notion that their ethnic group needed to maintain a lead position in Nigeria, and to resist any attempt at domination. It was easy for one to understand such posts in the context of ethnic struggles in Nigeria. Otherwise, and to a foreigner, such statements could mean healthy ethnic rivalry. However, the thought of healthy ethnic competition would be dampened by irredentist comments on most of the sites, especially *Igboist*, and feelings of ill will about secondary treatment by other groups, especially *Ijaw Patriots and Tiv Brotherhood*.

For instance, this post on *Ijaw Patriots* in November 2017 read:

A wake up call to the Ijaw nation, those who read it forward it. The northerners have ganged up against the Ijaw nation, the pride of the people of the Niger Delta which is NLNG is now a prime target to be sold out as a national asset, just to dis-arm the Ijaw nation and Niger Delta at large, Izon man plz Embress the BIAFRA struggle which is your birth right and be free from the contraption called Nigeria or be killed.

The linkage to Biafra, a secessionist struggle by mainly the Igbo, was used as an instrument of mobilisation for insurrection. When Hausa was spoken on *Ijaw Patriots* Facebook page, it was to berate then incumbent president for attempting to rule by force. Hausa was used to say it thus: "Abin da zai yi, za a" what would be would be! It is God that elevates, not man!"

Proudly Yoruba built its mission more around culture: the Facebook site was deeply cultural, raising issues about cultural heritage with links to religion. This often raised comments about the Yoruba culture and religion, especially Christianity. Religion on the site was not for inter-religions arguments, but for discussions between Christianity, for instance, and traditional religion. There were posts that provided insight of cultural heritage on ancient buildings (origins of Ajao Estate in Lagos), sicknesses such as *emere* and *abiku* (mysterious sickness that killed children later suspected to be Rhesus factor and sickle cell) and human traits such as *atenuje* (greed).

Next to ethnic pride was the promotion of indigenous languages. Hausa and Fulani sites were almost exclusively written in Hausa. The Fulani & Fulfide site was also closer to culture generally, and cultural heritage such as the old tradition of *Shoro* festival, flogging Fulani young men to test their strength before marriage. The site attempts to proffer an understanding of the Fulani people. Posts were used to respond to views around Nigeria about the Fulani as the pest of Nigeria, with the mentality of 'born to rule.'

Religions and reference to ancestry played very minor role as means of promoting ethnic groups on all the sites. Protests, mobilisation, and political campaigns received significant attention on the sites belonging to the minorities, especially *Ijaw Patriots and Tiv Brotherhood*. *Tiv Brotherhood* especially was linked a lot to politics, but it did not identify with a political party the way *Ijaw Patriots* campaigned for the Peoples Democratic Party

(PDP). Politics was used to drive the interests of Benue people in agriculture, governance and education. Culture did not come up prominently in posts on *Ijaw Patriots*.

3. The level of inclusiveness demonstrated by the users of the ethnic- based sites

Based on the kinds of ties analysed above, the level of ethnic inclusiveness was very low. It was a case of 'we before others.' The philosophy of African communalism was played at the level of intra-ethnic group, rather than inter-ethnic group. For example, the following were reactions to a comment by an Igbo *Vanguard* newspaper editor (posted on June 9, 2018), which called Yoruba people sophisticated morons: "I pray that Nigeria should divide quick so that we can deported all Igbo's in Yorubaland. They can't be allow to use odudua passport and we can't give them any permit they most just go to their land." Another anonymous post read: "Either Igbo's Born in Yoruba land or not we can't allow them to use odudua passport."

A Yoruba leader (an Oba) was once dressed like an Igbo chief, and insults were rained on him with the following expressions: "Suru yi poo"; "Dangarage"; "Òrò pèsì je"; "so he's no longer an emir, but an igwe now." "Chaii, o ga ooo;" "A clown with no Yoruba ideology and culture;" "A fake king. In the days of our ancestors his head would be in Ogun shrine for the disrespect."

However, one post was the only post that rallied Nigerians as subgroups (citizens) in a superordinate group (country):

Nigeria can only grow when we all see ourselves as one. Mind u its just a dress and the dress doesn't change its language neither does it change the people he governs. My pple lets learn to appreciate one another. Lets live as one. *E fote si le kan mu oro mi so.*

Because of the low level of inclusiveness, the dominant indices of inclusiveness was therefore resistance and non-negotiation. Issues about negotiation, accommodation and renegotiation were not seen. Renegotiation was discussed in the light of secessionist topics, especially on *Igboist* and *Ijaw Patriots*.

4. How language was used in ethnic identity and inclusiveness

The sites used the English language mainly to communicate. It was only in *Fulani & Fulfide* as well as Hausapedia.com that indigenous languages were almost exclusively used. The other sites used their indigenous languages to render proverbs and only transliterated. That is, the meanings of the proverbs were rendered in English in a way to show their direct translations, not necessarily word-for-word, but in the area of the direct meaning. Therefore, the translations did not refer to equivalent proverbs in English. Consider the following: Hausa proverbs:

A yi, a gamma, ta fi takamma, gobe a koma.

To do, to finish, is better than don't care, come back to-morrow.

Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.

(Procrastination is a lazy man's apology; a stitch in time saves nine; what is worth doing, is worth doing well)

Yourba proverbs:

A kù í kán'jú lá'b gbígbóná, tí a bá kán'jú lá'b gbígbóná, á b'ni l' nu; tí b bá wá tutù tán, nu wo la ó fi j'ata? / Never sip hot soup in haste, else you'll end up with a scalded mouth; and how'll you lick the soup when it cools? [Be calm with complex issues.]

(more haste, less speed; cutting your nose to spite your face).

Ì kì í ja kó má lè w nínú odò.

A fish cannot experience so much deprivation as to be unable to swim in the river.

[Keep up hope; tough times will not be forever; there is a limit to any challenge.]

(There is always light at the end of a tunnel; light is closest to the darkest part of the night)

The ones in bracket are the English equivalents which were not given on the sites. The attempt at transliteration led to reactions to proverbs such as this one directed to a transliteration of an Igbo proverb: *A gbaka m mb bu ego nri, garanya si na Chi*.

English transliteration: Our hustling and jostling is for daily bread, it is of the Lord that maketh rich. A reply post then noted:

You are mixing these things up. *Chi* in Igbo cosmology is not God. A lot has been written about this and I need not belabor it here. *Chi* is personal and everyone has their own. Remember: "ofu nne n'am mana ofu chi a d gh eke." (Siblings can from one mother, but each has different luck)

There was code-switching in some circumstances, mainly to crack jokes. A post on June 17, 2016, which accused Igbo leaders of selfishness received this comment: "The greedy politicians don't know the importance of unity and oneness. They just want their own comfort alone, but I trust *Okikeabiana*, the igbos keeps surviving by *Chukwu* Grace."

Discussion of Findings

The actors (nodes) on all the sites behaved alike in terms of the kinds/strength of ties. This pointed to sameness of reason for establishing such sites in the light of ethnicity and ethnic contexts in Nigeria. The name of the sites, in fact, began to make further sense to the researchers after this fact was found out. Names such as *Igboist*, *Proudly Yoruba*, and *Tiv Brotherhood* smacked of ethnicity, first of all. Principally, and in line with the findings of Haldun Canci and Opeyemi Odukoya (2016), actors of the ethnic-based sites still dominantly defined themselves in terms of their ethnicity. Similarly, the experience of one's own ethnicity is bounded by the perceptions of and interactions with other ethnic groups, including those who are in the majority as well as those who are in the minority (Rumbaut, 2005). Conversely, this study did not confirm to the aspect of the study by Haldun Canci and Opeyemi Odukoya (2016) that Nigerians also define themselves highly in the light of religion.

The contents of the sites shows that the ethnic groups in Nigeria are in undeclared rivalry. This is the context of ethnic identification in Nigeria. Comments were written as if replying to responses to attacks by rival ethnic groups. This conforms to the views of Smith (2001; Sindic & Reicher, 2009) that groups tend to make separatist claims on the basis of a shared ancestry and/or linguistic and cultural distinctiveness.

The social media has, as expected, become a platform for ethnic identification, but more significantly, ethnic struggle. Ethnic discourses on the social media have given huge opportunity to ordinary people to join in shaping the narrative on ethnicity in Nigeria. It seems that ordinary people are driving the contemporary narratives. Unfortunately, the discussion has no meaningful coordination, and it is headed towards hate speech and more divisions. Popular discussions on social media often have ethnic leaders as the objects of discussion. The leaders do not join in the contributions. They appear only as the topics of discussion.

The ethnic discussions are in the dimension of exclusivity not inclusivity. This has implications for Nigeria's and Africa's cultural identity. Individual wars and efforts to assert ethnic superiority will not lead to any meaningful identity for Nigeria as a cultural definition. For instance, it is guaranteed that English is Nigeria's official language. As found out in a study by Ukonu, Edogor and Ezugwu (2016), ethnic-based social media sites used English predominantly in their posts and members indicated that they wished everyone to have access to their sites, and to understand them. This was why English was used. But the way code-switching (moving from English to an indigenous language) was done tended to caricature the indigenous languages. Therefore, true language promotion is not yet happening on the sites, except for *hausapedia.com* and *Fulani & Fulfide*, where Hausa was the dominant language. Remarkably, however, it was difficult to follow the groups if one did not understand Hausa.

A good way to show interest in the promotion of proverbs and language would have been to translate the proverbs and idioms into their English equivalents (where one exists), rather than transliteration, which detracted from the full force and linguistic context of the local proverbs. It would also be easier to assess the richness of English and

local languages in terms of proverbs, leading locals to appreciate their languages more as equally rich with English or richer. It will also make the English Language, though a foreign tongue, to begin to assume a colouration that is essentially Nigerian according to the views of Chiluwa (2010).

The discussions on the sites can be a beautiful way to define Nigeria as a multi-ethnic society. The tone of struggle, self-centred cultural expressions, superiority, ethnicity and ethnic attacks tended to dampen the spirit of multiculturalism. In addition, religion did not play a significant part in discussions on the sites. Perhaps the sites took it for granted that their members had an unshakable allegiance to given religions. But this calls to question the seeming lack of belief in actors on the sites that members can share cultural values, ethnic interests and national interest. Impliedly also, there is no tendency to create intra-group and inter-group relations (homophily and multiplexity) based on race, geography, economic status, age, education, traditional titles, etc. There is need for such trends because they would open the doors to inter-ethnic group friendship and linkages on ethnic based sites.

The notion of multiculturalism was identified in the various ways each ethnic group talked about themselves, showing multicultural context. However, in the areas of positive indices of inclusiveness and integration of multicultures, Nigeria's multiculturalism collapses. The indices are level of constant negotiation, renegotiation, resistance, and accommodation (Erikson, 1968)

Conclusion

This study upholds the view that the social media will allow users to discuss their culture and language in ways the mass media cannot possibly allow. However, it bears saying that the opportunity afforded by the social media in this regard is more related to the inherent character of the social media rather than the exclusive ways it was used by the actors on the ethnic-based sites studied. This study has also further supported the view that the social media has been useful in promoting community interests. Such promotions have however not happened in the areas of protest, activism, using the social media to get acquainted with alien cultures and language development and maintenance. As the social media continues to evolve as an instrument of public communication, there is more opportunity to tailor it toward greater social integration and inclusiveness.

Recommendations

1. The tone of unhealthy rivalry should be deemphasised in posts. There is need to show the beauty of our multiculturalism rather using it as a means of separatism. This will also help to better give Nigeria clear cultural identity rather people locked in ethnic superiority war.
2. The actors on the sites should see Nigeria as the superordinate group, so as to help them better appreciate and identify with the subgroups that make up the country.
3. There should be intra-group and inter-group relations (homophily and multiplexity) based on race, geography, economic status, age, education, traditional titles, etc. Such trends would open the doors to inter-ethnic group friendship and linkages on ethnic based sites.

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