ETHNO-NATIONALISM IN A HYPER PLURAL STATE: IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA AS NIGERIA SCRAMBLES FOR A NATIONAL IDENTTIY

ISHAQ ISA EL-QASSIM

Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University Wukari

ABSTRACT

The new media, particularly the personal mobile channels, are some of the most spontaneous and most freewheeling of all forms of media. A great number of users, particularly in Nigeria, have unrestricted access to smart phones and relevant applications with which they produce impromptu contents (Harner and Thomas 2005), many of which may have the chance of going viral and incidentally lead, even to fatalities in the country. This study analyses two audio clips from 2015 and the 2019 presidential campaign periods relating to, arguably some of the most plural and crises-prone enclaves of northern Nigeria: Kaduna, Plateau and Taraba states. This paper attempted to assess the impacts of media contents relating civic nationalism or "Nigerianness" under the pretext of which the electoral politics itself takes place. The study did a critical discourse analysis of the texts on one hand, and on the other hand it conducted a covert conversational interview to gauge the extent of the social tension between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism in relations to the WhatsApp voice notes under study. Social identity theory was used to explain prevailing circumstances which pertain to crowd psychology, stereotyping and fake news production, circulation and consumption. The study helped to provide insights into the challenges of the stretched, but seemingly futile quest for Nigerianness or an ideal civic nation rather than the ethnically fragmented Nigeria that is being grappled with - from the perspective of new media usage, particularly the WhatsApp instant messaging application.

Keywords: *Ethno-nationalism – Nigerianness - northern Nigeria – WhatsApp - plural state*

War begins in the heart of men - UN

Introduction

Nigeria has grappled with the issue of integration and national cohesion for as far back as the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorate in 1914 (Pate 2003). Incidentally just as several measures have been taken to ensure a patriotic identity that should phase out parochialism, mistrust and hatred among Nigerians, the new media technology seems, literally to be the worst nightmare for a cohesive Nigerian dream today.

This rings the idea of technological determinism perspective, particularly since it involves both media content and materiality; but then concerns about the powers and (negative) influences of media technology did not start with the advent of the Internet as observed today. Croteau and Hoynes (2019) assert that as early as the 1920s, there were worry that "new" media, specifically film and radio broadcasting might negatively influence behaviours prompting vigorous investigation of the media phenomenon. The internet, is equally blamed (justifiably or not) for making an entire generation addictive, for the wrong reasons too, such as porn addiction, video games addiction, cultural emotionalism, religious fanaticism etc.

There are two populist extremes: that the media technology is the culprit in the inducement of negative manifestations in the society - based on Postman's pessimistic view of McLuhanian Medium Theory; on the other hand, the social constructivists hold that it is the society that determines the nature of technology. There is also a moderate viewpoint (McQuail 2010; Siapera 2018; Croteau and Hoynes 2019) which suggests that there is an interplay among the three variables: technology, media and society; each influencing the other in a continuous, historical, social, political and economic evolutions.

Arguably, certain interest groups have realised that the art of symbolic manipulation can be relied upon to manufacture consent via "soft power" technique, which flows mainly through the instrumentality of mediated culture (Hesmondhalgh 2002).

Of particular interest to this study is the massive acceptance of WhatsApp mobile and instant messaging application on smartphones; and the lack of much attention from researchers regarding the nature of usage of the particular medium, particularly in Nigeria. The paper focuses on the hostile and ethnocentric politico-cultural mediation that pervades the Application,

specifically in the selected areas, namely: Kaduna, Taraba and Plateau states in Northern Nigeria.

Media and the society

Siapera (2018), Croteau and Hoynes (2019) and McQuail (2010) emphasize on the nexus of media and the society as an approach that makes investigations into human communication infinite. Media and the society present mutually inclusive communicative, cultural, economic and political subjects of investigations into our behavioral manifestations. Central to the relationship of media and society is technology, which has drastically increased the speed at which meanings are exchanged participatorily (Mosco 2009). In the age of Internet the hitherto passive "audience" has been hybridized as *prosumers* (both producers and consumers) thanks to the social networking pattern of some of the new media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp etc. In addition there are applications for synchronous video calling such as: mk. Line, WeChat, iMessage, Viber, Skype, Facebook Messenger, KaKao Talk etc.

These are called Over the Top applications (OTT) because they are free of the network being used and of the smartphone on which they are installed (Lash and Lurry 2007). Along with the new channels are novel devices such as mobile phones, laptops, tablets, etc and it is through these that people engage with each other in new ways.

Conflict-Sensitive Mediation

Politics is a melting pot universally, if each locale has its own peculiarities. In Nigeria, what is most apparent is the aggressive ethnicism that pervades virtually all forms of discursive political participation whether interpersonal or mediated to the extent that (ordinarily) a harmless mediated joke or an unserious mischief might be transformed into extended polemic that carries with it hateful ethnic imprints. Dunu, Ugbo and Bebenimibo (2018) argue that the media is widely acclaimed, and rightly so to wield enormous powers in dousing or escalating tension in conflict situations. Thus Pate and Dauda (2017) rightly observe that increasingly, the centrality of the mass media in defining the direction of conflicts in Nigeria is acknowledged to the extent that a debate is raging on the culpability of the traditional and the new media in some of the violent crises in the country. Also Kaol (2012) observes that this

is undoubtedly an era of heightened ethno-religious and socio-cultural intolerance occasioned by incompatible econo-political goals. The question, according to him is, whether the media can play fundamental roles in facilitating constructive civic dialogue that promotes intercultural value awareness for a peaceful co-existence. This question is difficult to answer out rightly considering the complex web of relations between the media and other institutions of the society wherein each is expected to deliver an ideal role towards building a peaceful society that taps from patriotism rather than parochialism.

According to Pate and Dauda (2003)

The intense debates and circumstances that preceded the outbreak of various episodes of armed hostilities on the Plateau, the Niger Delta and the North East; and other parts of the country have featured significantly in the content of local and international media. Indeed, the focus on conflicts by the media is understandable, because as Owens-Ibie (2002) put it, conflict is the bread and butter of journalism. It sells and media organizations find ready raw materials in them. Arguably, the importance of the media in this context goes beyond simply disseminating information because, most times, individuals use such information to form opinions on very serious issues in material life. Studies (such as Kiousis, McDevitt and Wu, 2005; Kumar, 2010; Zhou & Moy, 2007) have established clear linkages between issues considered important by the media and issues considered important by the public. In these instances, the media did not only tell people what to think, they were found to often direct peoples' minds to what to think about.

Kurawa (2000) in Dunu et al (2018) and Pate (2003) observe that Nigerian media relish promoting diversity instead of multiculturalism and integration. For example the Guardian of March 2000 threatens: "...for the first time since 1966, the Jihadists will be confronted by a determined Southern army... to teach the Northern troublemakers a lesson once and for all," (Reuben Abati, The Guardian, March 31, 2000), Pate observes how the Guardian uses a frame of "Us" versus the "other" by the labels of a "determined Southern Army" and "Northern Troublemakers"

Oso (2017) argues that to conquer and control others, mass communication will be crucial, It has since then been a battle over meaning, a struggle over who defines the social, political and economic landscape we share. Mass Communication and of course other mediated public communications have

been strategic instruments in the struggle for hegemony, both within nations and globally. This is exemplified in some of the discourses culled from some sections of the Nigerian media. For example in Dunu et al (2018) Punch (September 10, 2001) read: "Wild, Wild North: Bin Laden's men unleash terror in Kano"; The News (vol. 17, October 29, 2001) carries the discourse "De-Mallamnisation of the Ports Authority,". Also (Dr Sunday Mbang, in This Day, Monday, July 31, 2000, p4.) boasted that "...Whether they like it or not, we will not allow any Muslim to be president of Nigeria again. I am declaring this as President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)". These are Nigerian news articles ostensibly whipping up religious sentiments as a campaign weapon to gain political advantage while issue-based narratives are downplayed – and consequently making a case for a dichotomy that may not heal soon.

Roger (2016) in providing a guide to journalists reporting increasingly diverse Britain society asserts that the challenge of reporting the plural societies, their richness and variety reflects the growing awareness, among the media as in much of the rest of society, of the need to present communities to one another and to seek greater understanding of them all. The media has a vital role to play in driving forward the process of making our communities inclusive, successful and tolerant. Reporting Diversity is a practical guide for content mediators, journalists or prosumers, to help them report fairly issues arising from the many and varied communities that make up plural communities without giving needless offence.

In sum, Dunu, Ugbo and Bebenimibo (2018, P.9) argues that "the concept of intercultural dialogue which has been adopted internationally as a new paradigm in international relations – in part through the launching of the Dialogue Among Civilizations in 2001 appears not to have been entrenched or well utilized in Nigeria". CRJSSH

WhatsApp Application

WhatsApp is a mobile messaging application which is alternative to SMS texting, and it uses a data plan or Wi-Fi connection in smartphones. Once a user downloads the softwa re, all of the mobile numbers from ones contacts, whether the contacts use WhatsApp or not, are shared with the WhatsApp company. WhatsApp uses Internet services to communicate different type of text and multimedia messages between users or groups. Its users worldwide

have crossed the figure of one billion in February 2016 (Shahid, 2018). The mobile application enables users send unlimited number of text messages, images, and videos across the world. Often users form specific groups for messaging interaction based on certain commonalities such subgroups within organisations or alumni of a certain institution. Users do not need to add a "friend" before becoming accessible or even accessing one another. Once participants share contacts, then accessibility becomes free. Users may, however, select and limit the kind of users to interact with by deciding to "block" unsolicited friends or those who are no longer wanted.

This signifies that using and consuming WhatsApp is voluntary and guided by conformity to the values of a given community or group of users (SiaPera 2018). Such assemblies are not simply a reflection of the novel aspects of smartphones and the channels they supports; they also relate to how familiar forms of communication are coming to be deployed in delicately new ways (SiaPera 2018). One speaks face to face because of a prior text; one writes an email because of a picture sent via an IM client; one "Face times" because of the SMS one received moments before; one's smartphone allows one to do all this even as one sits down to watch TV.

Silverstone (2006) asserts that the effect of WhatsApp on our lives, culture, and society keeps on increasing. It is also becoming popular tool for marketing in businesses and publicity in politics. This growth has also drawn the attention of researchers who seek to understand the implications of WhatsApp on its user's social and personal life. Silverstone (2006) for example investigated the usage and effect of WhatsApp in the regions of Northern India by an internet based survey using open-source Lime survey software. Some 460 responses had been received. The survey found that there was a significant impact of WhatsApp on its users, for example 66% of users believed that WhatsApp had improved their relationship with friends. More than 63% of users thought that WhatsApp was not harmful for them. Another study by Silverstone (2006) found that young people actively use WhatsApp for past time, diversion, affection, fashion, sharing problems and sociability.

Shahid (2018) also observes that WhatsApp application has become a substitute of SMS, particularly in developing countries with added utilities such as of sharing live location, files, video, audio and text messages to any part of the world. Shahid observed an increasing trend of WhatsApp messenger as a versatile communication application in the metropolitan

Karachi. His study aimed at exploring the frequency and composition of WhatsApp users and the patterns of their conversations. A total of 50 private and group conversations of 15 days were collected from 25 students and 25 professionals. The quantitative data was analyzed through python programming language. It was discovered that a total number of 66,327 messages, 869,404 words and 6163 media files were sent by 2,023 WhatsApp users in 30 days. It was also discovered that both students and professionals use WhatsApp to build their interpersonal relationships.

New Media and Fake News

The so called *old media* tended to be a one way affair, with audiences on the receiving end of content circulation. The current digital media however are multivariate allowing interchange of roles between producers and users to interact across several content genres. For example users may "like" a Facebook post or comment on a news piece; they may create their own blogs and videos and actively float their own content and draw traffic of other users thus assuming the nomenclature of 'prosumers'. According to McQuail, the older media differ from the newer media in terms of the old media having large, dispersed, non-interactive, heterogeneous, not self-acting and manipulable recipients.

According to UNESCO (2018: P.7)

The purveyors of disinformation prey on the vulnerability or partisan potential of recipients whom they hope to enlist as amplifiers and multipliers. In this way, they seek to animate us into becoming conduits of their messages by exploiting our propensities to share information for a variety of reasons… people who cannot afford to pay for quality journalism, or who lack access to independent public service news media, are especially vulnerable to misinformation. The spread of disinformation and misinformation is made possible largely through social networks and social messaging… What disinformation seeks, particularly during a poll, is not necessarily to convince the public to believe that its content is true, but to impact on agenda setting (on what people think is important) and to muddy the informational waters in order to weaken rationality factors in people's voting choices.

Probably the versatility and openness of the digital social media provide some of their users with opportunity to spread fake news for some purposes,

particularly in the realm of political activities. Often most discourses are guided by parochial factors rather than by civic duties. Often political actors take advantage of the new and more accessible mediation gadgets to construct unverifiable contents that are circulated solely to stimulate ethnic, regional and religious mutual suspicion. Personal mobile media technologies, especially among the "mass" but now interactive audiences/users, have virtually taken over the discursive firmament filling it up with polemics hurtful to the Nigerian identity, albeit, just as the saying goes, bad news is good news. Fake news has become so invasive that they cause serious social and political instability, particularly in northern Nigeria.

One of such very typical example of the changing face of media communication and impact thereof in northern Nigeria, was the 2014 popular salted water ingestion as "antidote" of the "real time rampaging Ebola" epidemic. Meaning, while the digital media was rolling across the land, the Ebola disease was also concurrently ravaging villages and cities along its path while "good Samaritans" keep helping to "share" the news of the new found antidote – salted water ingestion and bathing "to save lives". Instantly hundreds if not thousands of Facebook pages engaged audiences in the dead of night urging the mass uncritical information consumers to ingest salted water and bath with it before down, because Ebola was "right now " at a certain city and fast approaching. The picture conjured up of Ebola on the social media that night was that of a physical devastating tsunami that overruns geographies rather than a viral infection needing a pipe to spread based on proper medical literacy.

The Vanguard of August 8, 2014 reported that at least two were feared dead and twenty others hospitalized in Jos alone due to excessive salt intake. Also the Daily post of 14th august 2014 had reported that two more Nigerians from Benue State had died of excessive salt intake. Daily trust and Leadership newspapers also reported the regrettable fatalities caused by excessive salt intake especially by people who were hypertensive. The newspapers also reported a frantic scrambling for salt in the depth of the night and salt vendors around locales made quite an instant fortune.

Kperogi (2014) a communication scholar had this to say in his column on Daily Trust, Note from Atlanta:

> *As a communication and new media scholar, I'm intrigued by*
> *how a silly, infantile Internet joke about a salt-and-warm-*

> water home remedy for Ebola not only spread with
> unprecedentedly wild rapidity across the length and breadth
> of Nigeria but almost literally gulled the entire nation.

This pattern of frantic circulation and consumption of dangerous unverifiable content has been observed to be making a root among local political actors in northern Nigeria. In fact social media planks have become tools for nonprofessional, unethical media practice to engage in news production and circulation on behalf of political elites. The ease with which aural broadcast will emanate, say from Kaduna and steadily and conveniently traverse probably all nooks and crannies – at least wherever interested audiences might be across the world has become so alarming that researchers should begin to pay attention to the pattern of production, circulation and consumption of such renegade political contents in a plural state like Nigeria.

The "civic" Nation

Castells (2009) observes that civic nationhood is a description of a political identity supposedly constructed on a shared citizenship in democratic states. A civic nation therefore, achieves unity under a common banner despite linguistic, ethnic and cultural plurality. It is a required sociopolitical disposition by citizens to uphold the dictates of umbrella political institutions, and to give consent to the liberal ideals on which such political institutions are built. Thus, a civic nation is in theory and practice a multicultural setting whose membership is open to cosmopolitan citizens who are oriented along such values. The state in grooming a civic nation does not promote or protect one national culture over others nor does it encourage or allow citizens or immigrants to do same.

Civic nationalism can be better understood when compared with a contrasting but similar ideology: liberal culturalism which assumes that the state ought to privilege and endorse particular national cultures, those that have historically been associated with a given territory. This ideology advocates, as a legitimate function that states should protect and promote the national cultures and languages of the nation(s) within its territory and that the state should fit its idea of rights and opportunities for the protection of the identities of its historic cultural sub-groupings (Auer 2004). Renan Earnest (1882) in in Hart (2018) is an early advocate of civic nationalism or liberal nationalism – he

believes in an inclusive form of nationalism that adheres with traditional liberal values of freedom, tolerance, equality, and individual rights which are tailored to national identity. According to him individual subgroups need to collapse into a broader national identity in order to lead meaningful, autonomous lives and that democracies require a plural identity in order to function properly (Auer 2004).

According to David (1995) the idea of a purely civic nationalism has attracted Western scholars, most of whom rightly disdain the myths that sustain ethno-nationalist theories of political community. Civic nationalism is particularly attractive to many Americans, whose peculiar national heritage encourages mutual association based solely on consciously chosen principles. But David (2008) argues that this idea misrepresents political reality as surely as the ethno-nationalist myths it is designed to combat. And propagating a new political myth is an especially inappropriate way of defending the legacy of Enlightenment liberalism from the dangers posed by the growth of nationalist political passions.

Aluko and Ajani (2016) examine the argument about the two distinct types of nationalism and corresponding national identities – civic and ethnic, and assert that both have been the subject of considerable criticism on both conceptual-theoretical and empirical grounds. Thus they propose an alternative framework for analysis of nations and national identities arguing that "civic" and "ethnic" are not mutually exclusive types of nationalism and national identity, but rather complementary identities of any given nation as well as of its individual members. They also argue that civic and ethnic identities of a nation are not compartmentalized but entwined and interplay with each other.

Hesmondhalgh (2012) argues that Nigerian nationalism is a territorial nationalism, emphasizing a cultural connection of the people to the land — in particular the Niger and Benue rivers. Aluko and Ajani (2009) identify the factors responsible for ethnic nationalism in Nigeria as: legacy of colonialism and the social plurality of Nigeria, other factors include lack of an acceptable formula for revenue allocation among geopolitical regions; ethnocentrism and the issue of majority/minority ethnic groups dichotomy. According to Aluko and Ajani (2009) these problems lead to political and social instability, thwarted national integration efforts and increased economic related violence:

from the war cry of resource control sweeping the southern states, to the creeping islamisation of the states in the north of the nation; from ethnic militias with a separatist agenda; to sharia enforcers angling for religious self-determination in a secular state; from insecurity occasioned by the state's loss of the monopoly of the instruments of violence, to the insubordinate restiveness of a military faction unhappy with its loss of despotic fiat... For while there is every possibility that as usual Nigeria will fumble and wobble through the ship of democracy and will ride the storm and return safely to harbour, there is an even greater possibility that the ship of democracy may capsize. (Aluko and Ajani 2009. P 12.)

Aluko and Ajani's pessimism seems to thrive till date, because some of the vehicles of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria which are ideological and rooted in separatist movements are well with us today. Opafola (2009) examines the implications of ethnic nationalism question in the context of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Opafola argued that the main cause of ethnic nationalism is social, political and economic injustice. Thus incidentally ethnic nationalism is a move for seeking redress. And for a truly multicultural civic nation, good governance and justice should be promoted.

Along this perspective, ethnic nationalism, when viewed as a form of resistance to oppression and injustice, its merits can be seen from the ways it can generate publicity both locally and internationally to the plight of a people perceived to be relegated. Sana (2016) asserts that the Niger Delta region, for example, agitates for protection from environmental havoc, political under-representation and economic exploitation among others. Other merits of ethnic nationalism in the Niger Delta can be seen in the various governmental intervention its people receive from the Federal Government of Nigeria. There was for example the Niger Delta Development Commission (N.D.D.C.) and the establishment of the Amnesty Program, creation of Niger Delta Ministry by late Yar Adua's administration. There is also award of contract to clean up oil spill in the region which Buhari's administration started in June 2016.

Aluko and Ajani (2009) also outline some of the demerits of ethnic nationalism within the context of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. First the ethnic nationalism in the Niger Delta region ignores the socio-political significance of the suffering of ordinary people. Second, it promotes special fraternal relationship between people of the same ethnic group; in other words, the ethnic agitation disregards the potential exploitative relationship

between the co-ethnics as a form of intra-group exploitation within the region. Third, ethnic nationalism promotes the indifference of a member or members of one ethnic group to the issues of exploitation and oppression in another ethnic group. Fourth, it encourages the separation of a group's humanity from the humanity of others. Fifth, it covers prevailing exploitative processes in all ethnic groups. Sixth, it promotes the use of the oppressed.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory was developed in 1979 by Tajfel and Turner to help understand the mentality of intergroup discrimination. The theory assumes that the self is an object capable of self categorising vis-à-vis other social groups. And it is through this important process of self-classification that social identity is formed (Will 2004). These identifications, according to Tajfel and Turner are to a considerable degree comparative, because they define an individual as related to or distinct from other groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) further observe that: at first, individuals struggle to improve their self-esteem by attempting to develop a favourable self-concept. Secondly, social groupings are linked with positive and negative value implications. Thirdly, the evaluation of own group is determined by social comparisons to specific other groups in terms of some characteristics. In essence, the theory suggests that favourable comparisons between in-group and out-group tend to produce high status, while a negative social comparison between in-group and out-group result in low social standing (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

There are, for example, array of vocations such as butchery and meat selling that is a taboo to conservative Fulani groups, based solely on viewing butchers as being of a low class status. Incidentally, the butchers as a cultural group on the other hand, see the conservative Fulanis as people who inherently have low intellect. These discrimination patterns went to the extent of abhorring intermarriages between Fulani herders and cattle merchants and butchers. This phenomenon has however been eroded by commonalities in religious faith and added cosmopolitanism. The original acrimony has largely given way to tribal jokes bordering on claims of superiority of one against the other. Social identity theory therefore, is a transition from first, defining self as an individual to defining self in terms of a particular group identity and it is in such a way that group behaviour emerges. Le Bon's (1895) mass theory claims that crowds and mobs could be destructive, because the collection of

the individuals at a particular time and context feels, virtually no sense of individual responsibility. This suggests that when a crowd mentality is active, self-perception is depersonalized and the people's views of their joint similarities are enhanced (Hogg 2000; Turner 2005).

Critics of social identity theory, such as Huddy (2013), argues that social identity theory erodes the essence of an individual with a group identity, thereby overlooking the importance of self-esteem, just as the theory makes claims about in-group bias that are not supported by data. According to him, identity formation is not simply the product of group designation; but rather, depends on a combination of several complex subjective factors.

Methodology

This paper did Critical Discourse Analysis of two audio clips, specifically leaked telephone conversations that were floated extensively on WhatsApp, each subjectively discussing political issues from the perspective of "Us" and "the other" especially in relation to power, ideology and religious or ethnic discrimination (Van Dijk 1993). One of the clips dates to the 2015 campaigns and was extensively discussing kaduna and Jos, major cities in the northwest and north central Nigeria, respectively. The second audio clip originates from Taraba State in the periods covering the 2019 general elections. It should be noted that because of the religious and ethnic appeal, the clips may enjoy very wide circulation beyond their areas of origin. Usually such audios are sent with an appeal for "prayers" for the affected "victims" of political domination on account of religion or ethnicity. It may also come with a caveat about a struggle of those who are already in power, but threatened by a rival religion or ethnic group – urging their own cohort for "prayers" against the machinations of the rival. Both audio clips are in Hausa Language, which is a language predominantly understood by non-natives in northern Nigeria. Kaduna, Jos and Taraba are some of the most plural enclaves of northern Nigeria and are states that have seen more than a fair share of politically related ethnic and religious violence. Below are relevant translations of the audio clips:

Audio 1 – Kaduna, Jos

Voice 1: I tell you what? These people are terrible!

Voice 2: of course they are – and the only person that can deal with them is candidate Mustapha (not real name)

Voice 1: I agree. They have amassed weapons and their intent is to wipe us all up. And you know they are getting a lot of assistance from other Christian countries, particularly France.

Voice 2: Yes. I heard France has pumped in money to ensure status quo is maintained. But you know America is supporting us. Obama will not relent.

Voice 1: Of course France is a terrible place. We simply need to mobilise our people to vote en masse

Voice 2: Yes, yes, yes

Audio 2 – Taraba

Voice 1: as I told you, please tell the pastor to keep telling our people to pray and pray; God is by our side that is even the reason some of them informed the governor that their people are bringing in militants to attack us so that their man can declare emergency in Taraba.

Voice 2: Jesus! So this is what is happening?

Voice 1: of course yes – what we intend to do... after the election and the Governor gets his second term, we will tell the governor what to do with them.

Findings

From the critical discourse analysis of the audio clips this paper made the following inferences:

- The choice of words in both telephone conversations which border on the "Us" and "Other" identity is prevalent in both audio clips.
- The first audio clip discusses the danger posed, ostensibly by Christian militants who amass weapons to exterminate Muslims around Kaduna-Jos axis.
- The second audio clip is about Taraba state – wherein a Christian fellow is notifying a woman to propagate the message that there was an impending attack by an invading Muslim militants to destablise the state before the elections so that, ostensibly a "Muslim president" can install a Muslim as governor through the backdoor.
- Diction of both conversations show similar pattern of invoking "God" for help to secure the domination of fellow Nigerians on account of differentials in religion and ethnicity, but using political power as a tool of repressing one another.
- Dictions in both conversations express assurances of victory through God in a clear move to evoke culturalism and religious emotionalism.

- Both stories revealed in the leaked conversations were not verifiable and are therefore fake news circulated to promote intergroup conflict by some politicians who explores Nigeria's plurality for parochial gains.

Covert Conversational Interviews

The researcher/research assistants conducted covert conversational interviews with some purposively sampled WhatsApp users among rudimentary political participants in Kaduna, Jos and Jalingo. This technique is best suited for the study, in that apart from stealthily navigating the course of the discussion, respondents do not realize they are providing information for some research and that reduces the possibility of response bias. This is a form of covert participation technique that can be justified, since it is, in the circumstance adjudged to be the best option for having the designated respondents to express self freely in a natural setting in which petty political conversations occur. Lubbers (2015) justifies the technique to investigate volatile issues; making a case for the fusion of journalistic and social scientific approaches to research.

Findings

From the conversational interviews this study found that:
- Many interviewees indicated knowledge of the particular audio clips and even some more similar WhatsApp voice notes, texts and videos; an indication that the audio clips under review had achieved *virality* or widespread circulation in the social media planks.
- Interviewees do not include in their discussion any clue on the need for verifying the outrageous claims made in the viral audio clips under review or in any other audio, text or video of similar contents. Thus majority of discussants observed seem to be taken in the ethnocentric bandwagon to castigate "others" on the bases of the inciting viral content.
- Virtually all interviewees believed, without any evidence, that they are going to be violently attacked by the "others" and the political power taken away from "them" just as the viral contents suggest.

Discussion of Findings

The most important finding is the fact what is being reproduced as audio clips and circulated on WhatsApp are basically unsubstantiated disinformation and

the peddlers of the fake news do not seem to bother on the verifiability of the content; consumers of fake news are only concerned about the purposes the fake narratives serve: creating and sustaining the hatred of the other. The finding coincides with the analytics by UNESCO (2018) in the literature review section.

Most of the consumers of the hateful disinformation appear to be manipublable along cultural fault lines coinciding with the analysis of Hesmondhalgh (2007) on the implications of soft power and audience manipulation (Turner (2005). Often the consumption of fake news have been found to be at distinct group levels leading depersonailsation, mob mentality and bandwagon gullibility. This coincides with the discussion of the theoretical framework as postulated by to (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

In terms of ethno-nationalism and a patriotic Nigerian identity, the study found out, just as Hesmondhalgh (2007) argues: Nigerian nationalism is a territorial nationalism, emphasizing a cultural connection of the people to the land.

Recommendations

- Authorities may enhance intelligence gathering to track the actual sources of such fake news so that their authors may be prosecuted to deter others
- Authorities must not be making the mistake of ignoring or underestimating the potency of such informal media as they have always proven to be so tragic to the individual and collectivity of Nigerians.
- Authorities should engage clerics from across isles to ensure integration advocacy based on common national identity to ensure equality for all
- There should be a shift in strategic communication by governments, opinion leaders and voluntary groups denouncing provocative messages by engaging, particularly the youth in the volatile social media platforms that used to propagate divisive messages
- Politicians in power should avoid making inflammatory or policy statements in their ethnic comfort zones or places of worship as that spurs fanatical motives among their supporters and scares others from them thereby creating mutual suspicion

- Governments should adhere to the principles of federal character as that is the silent vehicle for integration (Pate 2016)
- The federal character tenets must be made enforceable by the law courts to ensure political and economic justice to all

Conclusion

Uncensored, at times violently graphic texts, images, videos, voices go viral concomitantly in all social media platforms, particularly Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram, widely consumed, often by gullible manipulable users, mostly young people. Often the real sources of the media content are not known since the materials of the contents are not reported as news or opinion pieces as raw as they are in the conventional media or in credible online journalism platforms. Fake news kills as the new saying goes and it is time researchers, authorities, opinion leaders and civil society organisations rise to the occasion to nib at the bud the monster of misinformation as it has the capacity to bring down any semblance of Nigerianness in our citizens. Nigeria is a hyper plural state with hundreds of linguistic variations and probably thousands of dialects making it difficult to disintegrate into operable entities. A simple look at the mapping of ethnic violence happening between people of the same religion, but different dialect in a given local government area is a sufficient pointer that Nigeria cannot disintegrate into workable particles. The only option (bitter?) is to imbibe multiculturalism and social justice to thrive as a nation of variety and beauty under the African sun.

Reference

Aluko M., & Ajani O. (2009). Ethnic Nationalism and the Nigerian Democratic Experience in the Fourth Republic DOI: 10.4314/afrrev.v3i1.43593 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272444181_Ethnic_Nationalism_and_the_Nigerian_Democratic_Experience_in_the_Fourth_Republic

Auer S. (2004). *Liberal Nationalism in Central Europe*. Routledge. p. 5. *ISBN 1134378602. Retrieved 13 May 2017*.

Castells M. (2009). Communication Power. Oxford University Press: New York.

Croteau D., & Hoynes W. (2019). *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences.* 6th edin., London: Sage.

David M. (1995). *On Nationality.* Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-828047-5

Dunu I.V., Ugbo G.O. & Bebenimibo P. (2018). International Journal of International Relations, Media and Mass Communication Studies Vol.4, No.3, pp.8-25, August 2018.

Gustave L. (2000).The Psychology of Revolution. Longman: New York.

Hansen J. (2006). The threat to the planet. New York Rev. Books, 53, no. 12 (July 13, 2006), 12-16.

Hart T.X. (2018). Ideology: The death of civic nationalism. https://medium.com/@TXHart/the-death-of-civic-nationalism-546d1d009997

Hemer O., & Thomas, T. (edn.) (2005). Media and Glocal Change: Rethinking Communication for Development. Clacso/Nordicom: Buenos Aires/Gothenburg.

Hesmondhalgh D. (2007). The Cultural Industries. London: Sage.

Hogg M.A., & Terry D.J. (2000). Social Identity and Self-Categorization Processes in Organizational Contexts. *The Academy of Management Review.* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan., 2019), pp. 121-140 DOI: 10.2307/259266 https://www.jstor.org/stable/259266

Huddy L. (2013). From Group Identity to Political Cohesion and Commitment. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.458.5322&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Kaul V. (2012). The changing world of media and communication. *Mass Communication Journalism* 2:116. doi:10.4172/2165-7912.1000116.

Kazys V. (2008). "Beyond Locative Media" in Varnelis, Kazys (edn.) Networked Publics. The MIT Press.

Daily Trust (Farooq Kperogi Aug 16, 2014). Understanding how the salt-and-water Ebola cure hoax spread in Nigeria https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/understanding-how-the-salt-and-water-ebola-cure-hoax-spread-in-nigeria.html

Lash S. & Lurry C. (2007). Global Culture Industry. The Mediation of Things. London: Polity.

Lubbers E. (2015). Undercover Research: Corporate and Police Spying on Activists. An Introduction to activist intelligence as a New Field of Study. *Surveillance & Society* 13(3/4): 338-353.

McQuail D. (2010). McQuail's Mass communication theory. 6th edn. London: Sage.

Opafola S.O. (2012). Nature of Human Persons. Lap Lambert: London.

Oso L. (2017). Perspectives in Media and Conflict. In Pate, U. A., & Oso, L. (eds) Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting Conflict in Nigeria. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited.

Pate U. (2003). Professionalism, Diversity Reporting and the Media in Nigeria. A paper presented at a departmental seminar organized by the Department of Mass Communication, Kaduna Polytechnic: Reas Hall, C.A.B.S., Kaduna Polytechnic

Roger S.(2006). New media and society. Longman: London.

Sana S. (2018). Journalism and Mass Communications (IJMJMC). *International Journal of Media* Volume 4, Issue 1, 2018, PP 14-26 ISSN 2454-9479 http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-9479.0401002 www.arcjournals.org

Tajfel H., & Turner J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin, & S. Worchel (Eds.), The social psychology of intergroup relations (pp. 33-37). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Tamir Y. 1993. Liberal Nationalism. Princeton University Press. ISBN 0-691-07893-9

Thussu D.K. (2006). International Communication: Continuity and Change. (2nd Edn), Hodder Education, UK.

UNESCO Courier (July-September 2018). The Media: Operation Decontamination. Open Access under the Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/ igo/)

Van Dijk T.A. (1993). Elite discourse and racism. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Will K. (1995). Multicultural Citizenship. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-827949-3 *International Journal of Environmental Sciences* Vol.1 No.2. 2012. Pp. 46-49 ©Copyright by CRDEEP.