Effectiveness of Social Media in Unifying Fragmented Nigerian Societies

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Abstract. This study investigated the effectiveness of social media in unifying fragmented Nigerian societies, using Ebonyi state as a case study. The basic assumptions of Media Ecology Theory (MET) provided the premises for this study. The descriptive survey research method was adopted, and a structured questionnaire with close-ended questions was the data collection instrument. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents who filled the questionnaire. The Australian calculator was used to empirically reduce the study population to a researchable sample size of 384. Findings from the data analysis show an impressive growth rate of smartphone ownership, internet access, and social media use in Ebonyi state. The use of social media has helped shape the lives of residents of the state socially. Findings also show traces of social fragmentation and disunity in the state. However, most of the respondents agree that, through social media, they make friends from a clan, tribe, ethnicity, state, or even country other than theirs. Based on these and other findings, the researcher recommends that "Effectiveness of social media in unifying fragmented Nigerian societies" be taught as a subject, module or course at secondary and higher levels of learning to help create national consciousness among Nigerians. Consequently, this study concludes that social media possess the potency/ability to unify Nigerians and should be adopted as practical tools for unifying fragmented Nigerian societies.

Keywords: social media; fragmented Nigerian societies; nation-building; national integration.

INTRODUCTION

An estimated population of over 200 million people, comprising of not less than 250 ethnic groups spread across 36 states, speaking over 520 different native dialects, and inhabiting a landmass of about 356,669 square miles, are but a few of many shreds of evidence that Nigeria is not only a multi-national state born out of an amalgamation of people with diverse, ancient and indigenous kingdoms and nations but also, a country made up of fragmented societies whose fragmentation bother on visible existence of differences in ethnicity, tribe, culture and tradition, customs and values, religion, dialects and languages, economy, political orientation, landmass among other related factors [1].

Unfortunately, just six years after Nigeria got her independence in 1960, the then civilian government broke down in conflicts among the three major ethnic groups over the distribution of power and resources. First, the Hausa-dominated Northern and Igbo-dominated Eastern regions allied against the largely Yoruba-dominated Western areas. Two bloody military coups followed in 1966. Ethnic tension in the North escalated into violence against Easterner's residents. Finally, the Eastern Region embarked on secession and proclaimed the independent nation of Biafra. Nigeria was then plunged into a bloody civil war between 1967 and 1970. Successive coups and counter-coups were staged between the civil war and 1999 [2]. Moreover, even decades after the war ended, the Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation (3Rs) policy introduced by the then Gowon-led administration seem to have little or no effect on Nigerians as a people as cries and calls for division persist [3].

Boko Haram, a terrorist group formed in 2002 by Muhammed Yusuf in Northeastern Nigeria, has grown to become a highly dreaded insurgent group since 2009 and has ruthlessly carried out

large-scale acts of violence in the northern part of the country. In 2013, it became apparent that Boko Haram had taken over many rural local government areas in north-eastern states where they gained strength. Boko Haram's attacks persisted into 2014, as the group raided villages and terrorised and murdered civilians with increasing frequency. Although the Joint Task Force composed of troops from Nigeria and neighbouring countries had made significant progress against Boko Haram beginning in 2015, attacks by the militants later resumed, being very active from 2018 and reportedly got a new leader, Abu Abdullah ibn Umar al-Barnawi, in 2019 [4].

Today, the movement of herders and subsequent clashes with farmers has heightened insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the North Central region and, by extension, in other parts of the country. The driving force of the clashes in the competition for available resources, especially grazing land. This has led to clashes and conflicts between these herders and farmers in their host communities. These conflicts have increased in recent times and now constitute one of the significant threats to Nigeria's national unity and security [5].

The post-civil war reconciliation programs, especially the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, is still ongoing. Since then, additional states and local government areas have been created to strengthen federalism. The federal character policy is still active and in use yet, Nigeria's unity daily has continued to witness severe threats [6]. This has left researchers and well-meaning Nigerians on the lookout for possible solutions.

Interestingly, the increase in internet penetration and the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Nigeria have brought tremendous innovations in all spheres of human endeavours. Today, media convergence has made it easier for people to access all sorts of audio-visual content by simply initiating action on various mediated platforms. This epic convergence of media, otherwise known as metamorphosis, has given birth to what we now know as social media, which has made communication very instantaneous and simultaneous, practical, engaging, accessible, cheaper, faster, and perhaps more feedback-oriented [7].

The researcher perceived that member of various fragmented Nigerian societies could meet through social media, become friends, interact, dialogue, and come to understand and appreciate the unity in their diversity. Hence, he sought to examine how various interactive social media platforms could be leveraged as practical tools in unifying fragmented Nigerian societies, focusing on the Ebonyi state.

Statement of the research problem

Over the years, Nigeria, owing to its fragmented nature, has suffered and continued to witness a trajectory of minor and major conflicts, crises, and wars birthed out of tribal, ethnic, cultural, religious, and socio-political differences, which are all pointers to the apparent fact that Nigeria as a multi-national country is in dire need of peaceful co-existence. This need is a significant reason behind the "One Nigeria", "Wazobia", among other unity-driven initiatives that have been long introduced, promoted through various mass media, and sustained by past and present Nigerian governments at local, state, and federal levels.

Available literature shows that several studies have been conducted in areas of national integration, peace-building, and nation-building, yet, threats of disunity keep ravaging Nigeria as a national daily. Calls for secession keep growing over time, especially from the South-eastern and South-western regions of the country. Tensions and unrest promoted by ethnic crises are higher than ever before. The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in the North-eastern region in 2002, has claimed several lives and properties. Cattle herders and farmers clashes which used to be more prominent in the central area of Nigeria, are now prevalent in almost all parts of the country. Attacks and bombardments of oil facilities that are the nation's primary source of survival are high in the Niger Delta region. Religious intolerance and confrontations have claimed several lives, especially in the northern part. Politics of identity, power struggle, and allocation of resources to the federating units are also additional issues that keep threatening Nigeria`s co-existence as a sovereign state.

Building on the foregoing, it is apparent that, if proactive efforts are not made, and measures are taken, as to how available technological tools such as social media can be put to use in repositioning the country towards achieving sustainable national integration, peace, and unity, then the obvious will not be farfetched. Against

this backdrop, this study was necessitated as an academic contribution to knowledge and an empirical journey into how social media platforms can be leveraged as practical tools to unify fragmented Nigerian societies for optimal national integration, peace, and unity in Nigeria.

The general objective of this study was to appraise the effectiveness of social media in unifying fragmented Nigerian societies. However, the specific goals include:

1. To ascertain whether respondents are exposed to social media platforms.

2. To determine how often respondents make use of their preferred social media platforms.

3. To find out specific gratification's respondents derive from using social media platforms.

4. To find out whether respondents identify with indigenous groups on social media.

5. To determine what kind of influence social media has on the social life of respondents.

Theoretical framework

According to [8], Media ecology theory (MET) examines media, technology, and communication and how they affect human environments. MET holds that media are extensions of the human senses in each era, and communication technology is the primary determinant of social change. Therefore, the theory describes how different media environments shape today's society and everyday lives.

The term "media ecology" was popularised by Neil Postman in 1968 and inspired by Marshall McLuhan's theory put forward in his book titled "Understanding Media," published in 1964. Ecology in this context refers to the environment in which the medium is used – what they are and how they affect society [8].

Author [9] asserts that if a 'medium' is something in which a bacterial culture grows in biology, in media ecology, the medium is a technology within which a [human] culture increases. In other words, media ecology investigates how media of communication influence human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interactions with media expedite or impede our chances of survival.

Furthermore, the author suggests that a medium is a technological environment consisting of communication systems within which we live and shape our culture. As such, that environment unavoidably affects our perceptions, feelings, values, and beliefs. Consequently, media ecology studies the reciprocal relationship between media as an environment and society's language, technology, and culture.

Over the past several decades, the phrase media ecology has become a famous reference point in media studies. This relates to the theoretical framework that deals with the multifaceted relationship between media and society [10]. Therefore, Media ecology is very relevant to this study because it is impossible to understand cultural and social change without analysing the mechanisms of media as environments, we live in.

Literature review

Social Media. The World Wide Web brings the internet into the realm of mass communication and enables the development of social media tools for audience engagement. Different authors have defined social media as a concept in various ways; some of these definitions are highlighted below.

For [11], social media refer to those internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute and search for information online. He notes that social media as web-based media platforms offer citizens the opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, knowledge, contact, expertise, and other things like job and career tips. In his opinion, they belong to a new genre of media that focuses on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share information with greater freedom, and publish their views on various issues on the World Wide Web. In agreement with [11, 12], social media is an online place where people with a common interest can gather to share thoughts, comments, and opinions.

Nevertheless, [13] refers to social media as elements of the new media with the highest activity on the internet, which use web-based technologies that transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogues, supporting the democratisation of knowledge and information while transforming people from content consumers to content producers.

Connecting elements evident in the definitions of [10, 11, 12, 14] sums up the concept of social media as online communities where people can interact with friends, family, coworkers, acquaintances, and others with similar interests. According to his submission, most social networking sites provide multiple ways for their users to interact, such as chat, email, video, voice chat, file-sharing, blogging, and discussion groups. He concludes that providing multiple platforms to engage the audience makes social networking sites excellent for social mobilisation.

Nation-Building. Authors [15] opine that nation-building is a crucial project that requires the services of many actors to achieve. According to the authors, it embodies national integration, poverty reduction through employment generation, robust economic development through industrialisation, and infrastructural revolution through good governance. They emphasised that these actors have different and significant roles to play. However, they regret that the part of nation-building agents has been surreptitiously scuffled through a deliberate constitutional design to permeate an unsavoury political exclusionism in addition to the crude stereotypic mentality built around them by Nigerians.

Discussing further, they [15] maintain that nation-building is a normative concept that means different things to different people. They also note that it is essential that dysfunctional, unstable, or "failed states/economies" be given assistance in developing governmental infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms, and economic aid to increase stability.

However, for [16], nation-building possesses both a general and a restricted sense. They generally see the term as the policies and projects by which newly independent governments would purposively transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity'. On the other hand, they see nation-building as the self-conscious production and dissemination of national consciousness and sentiment of a felt sense of national identity in its more restricted sense.

Pointing out challenges confronting nation-building in Nigeria today, [17] notes that some initially integrated people were taken apart by European colonialism. In contrast, separate others were incorporated into new states not formed on common identities. He also asserts that Nigeria is a colonial creation imposed on the people without their consent - which he referred to as a "faulty foundation" laid by the Europeans. According to him, it was purely done to actualise their interests and not for any genuine development of the country. He maintains that colonialism is an excellent example of how a country's nation-building can become a security threat to another.

Fragmented Nigerian Societies. However, the political and social climate that prevails in Nigeria today emphasises differences, disunity, and destruction rather than the qualities of unity and constructive energy required to sustain any human society. These forces include Arewa Consultative Forum, Ohaneze Ndigbo, Odu`a People's Congress, Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, and Indigenous People Biafra, Boko Haram, Herdsmen, Niger Delta Avengers, etc. have come together to threaten Nigeria's unity [18].

Authors [16], while addressing some of the issues that have led to further sociopolitical fragmentation of Nigeria, regretted that the existence of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission and Ministry for Niger Delta, rather than help empower the long-abandoned Niger Delta region, have only succeeded in creating more fortunes for elites and politicians. At the same time, improved environmental and living standards are sacrificed on the altar of negligence in the same region, producing a commodity that fetches the country's highest percent of its foreign earnings.

For [4], the carefree attitude and negligence of the various past and ongoing crises in Nigeria and steps being taken by the Federal Government to resolve them have once again sparked off debates over the Nigerian unity question: "Are the agitations, killings, destruction of oil pipelines in the Niger Delta region, and the persistent herders/farmers clashes resultant from the quest for separation from Nigeria or grievances about the polity?"

In a bid to provide answers to the above-raised question, [4] argue that the first and primary aim of the militants is not about secession but a protest against non-attention to well-known grievances of the militants - and that the grievances are ascribable to perceived unfairness and injustice. The authors further lamented that non-oil-producing communities in Nigeria boast of excellent living conditions and basic amenities achieved with oil fortunes, while in contrast, oil-producing societies wallow in abject poverty

with the shortage of basic amenities and contaminated environment is a bitter pill to swallow.

Therefore, [17] suggests the need to work collectively towards safeguarding the rights and interests of both parties and groups, be it political or economic. The author furthers opines that sociopolitically aggrieved people in Nigeria deserve to be listened to instead of being threatened or provoked into demanding a possible breakaway from Nigeria. On this note, [18] suggests that investing in education, implementing food security policies, rural development, and an effective youth empowerment program may serve as an alternative to national integration in Nigeria.

Peace and Unity. According to [19], Peace and Unity refer to a state of mind, with particular reference to the environmental forces to this specific state. He adds that it is also a state of harmony of people and their relationship with the ecosystem. For [20], peace is seen as a state devoid of civil disturbance, violence, and turmoil. Meanwhile, [17] agrees with the above perspectives by defining peace as a state of perpetual liberty and freedom from oppressive and unpleasant thoughts and emotions. He further states that peace is a state of absence of war, arrogance, extreme greed, deception, mutual desperado, and hatred. Author [19] sums up that peace as a concept is also obtainable in societies under democratic rule with respect for human rights, where the rule of law thrives, and there is collective security and harmony, and this, according to him, is true because democracies live in peace and avoid war and conflicts among themselves.

Summarily, [19] thinks that, for a better understanding of the concept of peace and unity in Nigeria, it is essential to look at the case of former Yugoslavia. He recalls that Yugoslavia metamorphosed into a war zone several years ago because the different ethnic and religious groups failed to live in unity. Hence, he advises that Nigerians should learn a lesson from the case of former Yugoslavia or risk experiencing what happened to the defunct Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

Empirical review

Over the years, researchers in humanities and social sciences, particularly in communications and media studies, have peer-reviewed, studied, and tracked the place, role, influence, effects, and impacts of social media on man and his environment. However, few studies have sought to examine the effectiveness of social media platforms in unifying fragmented societies, especially in the Nigerian setting.

It is worthy to note that [6] conducted a study on "Social Media as Social Bonders: Perspectives for Nation Building and Integration in Nigeria". This study, which was anchored on the Symmetry and Symbolic Interactionism theory, found that social media platforms are social bonders for nation-building and integration in Nigeria. Based on his findings, he recommended that government and its agencies engage the populace more on social media platforms to discuss national issues, particularly those that threaten collective existence as a nation. Author [6] studied social media as social bonders but failed to measure their degree of effectiveness, hence, the need for this study.

Also worthy of mention is author [21] study on "The Roles of Media in Realising 'Unity in Diversity' for Malaysians". Their findings showed that multi-national societies made up of heterogeneous people are susceptible to race or ethnicity issues. Their studies focused on media broadly and Malaysia as an area of study, while this research focused on social media precisely and adopted Ebonyi state, Nigeria, as a physiological context.

Authors [22] conducted a study on "Social Media: An Effective Tool for Social Mobilization in Nigeria". From their findings, they observed that the rapid growth of social media activities over the last two to three years is indicative of its entry into mainstream culture and its integration into the daily lives of many people, even within developing societies such as Nigeria. This study sought to confirm this assertion.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey method of scientific inquiry to gather data from recipients. This is because this research method enables the measurement of opinions and views of people within a large population and the analytical presentation and discussion of implications of such data. To effectively extract data from respondents, the questionnaire instrument was adopted. The researcher chose Ebonyi state (with a sample size of 384) as a working template for studying fragmented Nigerian societies due to its suitability and relevance to the study in question, as it consists of heterogeneous people

of various local government areas, tribes, and native dialects such as [23].

Adopting the multi-stage sampling technique, the researcher first used a simple cluster sampling method to cluster Ebonyi State into three senatorial districts: Ebony-North, Ebonyi-Central, and Ebonyi-South. Secondly, luck deep's simple random sampling method was used to empirically select one local government area from each of the above clustered senatorial districts where respondents were administered with copies of the questionnaire thus: Abakaliki LGA from Ebony-North, Ezza-South LGA from Ebonyi-Central, and Onicha LGA from Ebonyi-South. Thirdly, to avoid bias and arrive at more empirical findings, the researcher used Bowler's Proportional Allocation Formula to distribute 110, 99, and 175 copies of the research instrument among Abakaliki, Ezza-South, and Onicha LGAs, respectively, as each LGA has varying population size. Finally, simple randomisation was used to pick a particular town from each clustered LGA. Thus, Abakaliki (metropolis) in Abakaliki LGA, Onueke in Ezza-South LGA, and Onicha in Onicha LGA were randomly picked as the point of questionnaire distribution. The researcher's choice of the multi-stage sampling techniques was to reflect the three senatorial districts and, at the same time,

give elements of each population an equal chance of being selected.

The test-retest criterion was adopted. Thirty copies of the questionnaire were pre-tested in a test-retest pilot study at two different periods at Ishieke suburban area of Ebonyi State. Pearson's r correlation coefficient of both results proved that both results obtained from the pilot study were consistent, confirming the reliability of the research instrument.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With nearly an equal distribution of the questionnaire among all sexes, including all age brackets and all walks of life, and considering the respondents' marital status and educational backgrounds, the study exonerates itself from possible criticisms that could be based on the biased distribution of research instrument (Table 1). Data collected by the study's first objective proved that most Ebonyi state residents own an internet-enabled smartphone and an account with at least two social media platforms. This shows a significantly high rate of internet penetration, smartphone ownership, and social media use among Nigerians (Table 2).

Table 1 − Figuring out socio-demographic features of respondents

No	Items	Analysis				
1.	Questionnaire Distributed	Distributed 384 (100%)	Returned 380 (99%)	Not returned 4 (1%)		
2.	Respondents' Gender Distribution	Male 131 (34.5%)	Female 128 (33.7%)	LGBTQI+ 121 (31.8%)		
3.	Respondents' Age Distribution	18-25 218 (57.4%)	26-33 107 (28.1%)	34-41 38 (10%)	42 Above 17 (4.5%)	
4.	Occupation of Respondents	Students 255 (67.1%)	Farmers 36 (9.5%)	Business Owners 65 (17.1%)	Public/Civil Servants 20 (5.3%)	Others 4 (1%)
5.	Respondents' Educational Qualification	FSLC 32 (8.4%)	SSCE 123 (32.4%)	1st Degree 182 (47.9%)	2nd Degree 30 (7.9%)	PhD/Post 13 (3.4%)
6.	Marital Status of Respondents	Single 243 (64%)	Married 132 (34.7%)	Divorced 5 (1.3%)		

Table 2 − Ascertaining respondents' level of exposure to social media

No	Items	Analysis				
7.	Do you own an internet-enabled smartphone?	Yes 375 (98.7%)	No 5 (1.3%)			
8.	Do you use social media platforms?	Yes 380 (100%)	No 0 (0%)			
9.	How many social media platforms do you have an account with?	One 72 (18.9%)	Two 209 (55%)	Three 18 (4.8%)	Four 49 (12.9%)	More than four 32 (8.4%)

Since data collected in line with the second objective of the study show that Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform in Ebonyi state, Nigeria, with respondents admitting they spend an average of 1-2 hours every day on the

forum, it is then safe to say that social media hold the significant prospect of unifying or disuniting the Nigerian people (Table 3).

Table 3 – Identifying how often respondents make use of social media platforms

No	Items	Analysis				
10.	Which particular social media platform do you use more frequently?	Facebook 289 (76%)	WhatsApp 65 (17.1%)	Instagram 16 (4.2%)	Twitter 4 (1.1%)	Others 6 (1.6%)
11.	How often do you make use of your preferred social media platform?	Once a day 196 (51.6%)	Several times a day 83 (21.8%)	Once a week 20 (5.3%)	Once in a while 47 (12.4%)	Not certain 34 (8.9%)
12.	How many hours do you spend on social media platforms in a day?	1-2 199 (52.4%)	3-4 142 (37.4%)	5-6 13 (3.4%)	7-8 26 (6.8%)	

Data collected based on the third objective of the study have shown that residents of Ebonyi state, Nigeria, use their preferred social media platforms more in making new friends and chatting with their friends. The implication is that social media wield a significant impact on the social lives of residents of the state and is a solid pointer to the chances of using social media to encourage peace-building, nation-building, national in-

tegration, and national consciousness among Nigerians (Table 4).

Considering the analysis of data collected in harmony with the fourth objective of the study as captured in the table above, it has been found that most Ebonyi state residents do not identify with indigenous groups on social media, and this shows a lack of unity and nationalism (Table 5).

Table 4 – Finding out specific gratification's respondents derive from the use of social media

No	Items	Analysis				
13.	In what area do you mainly use social media platforms?	Making new friends 200 (52.6%)	Chatting with family and friends 84 (22.1%)	Sourcing for news 32 (8.4%)	Business purposes 42 (11.1%)	Others 22 (5.8%)
14.	What mainly prompts you to come online on your preferred social media platform?	To chat with friends 51 (13.4%)	To make a new post 33 (8.7%)	To check on new notifications 15 (3.9%)	To view the latest updates from friends 267 (70.3%)	Others 14 (3.7%)

Table 5 – Ascertaining if respondents belong to indigenous groups on social media

No	Items	Analysis				
15.	Do you belong to any indigenous Group meant for Ndi Ebonyi on social media?	No 209 (55%)	Yes, but inactive 72 (18.9%)	Yes, and active 18 (4.8%)	I used to but had to leave 49 (12.4%)	Yes 32 (8.4%)
16.	Have you ever created an indigenous Group for Ndi Ebonyi on social media?	Yes 7 (1.9%)	No 373 (98.1%)			
17.	Do you follow any indigenous Page meant for Ndi Ebonyi on social media?	Yes 23 (6%)	No 357 (94%)			
18.	Have you ever created an indigenous Page for Ndi Ebonyi on social media?	Yes 3 (0.8%)	No 377 (99.2%)			

Statistical analysis of data collected in line with the fifth objective of the study has shown that Ebonyi State residents make and meet new

friends from a clan, tribe, or ethnicity other than theirs, which has socially shaped their lives. It also shows that social media could be a practical

tool for unifying fragmented Nigerian societies if appropriately used (Table 6). The analysis of the data collected based on the general objective of the study as represented in the table above have shown that there are traces of the existence of social fragmentation and divisiveness among Ndi Ebonyi (i.e., indigenes/residents of Ebonyi state) as a majority of the respondents admit they see posts on social media in which social media users engage in virtual inter-tribal/ethnic fights and abuses. However, the statistical analysis presented above also shows that although there are traces of disunity among residents of Ebonyi state, social media are practical tools for unifying fragmented Nigerian societies. The majority of the respondents agree they have seen social media posts that preach unity among Ndi Ebonyi (Table 7).

Table 6 − Identifying the influence of social media on the social life of respondents

No	Items	Analysis				
19.	To what extent do you use social media platforms in interacting with people?	To a small extent 67 (17.6%)	To a large extent 120 (31.6%)	To a huge extent 193 (50.8%)		
20.	Has your use of social media influenced your social life?	Yes 275 (72.4%)	No 105 (27.6%)			
21.	What specific kind of influence has your exposure to social media had on you?	It made me more social 196 (51.6%)	It helped me to build a positive self-esteem 83 (21.8%)	Ability to accommodate people from diverse clans, tribes, and ethnicity 20 (5.3%)	Improvement in my love life 47 (12.4%)	Not at all 34 (8.9%)

Table 7 − Appraising the effectiveness of social media in unifying fragmented Nigerian societies

No	Items	Analysis	
22.	Do you connect with people you have never met before on social media?	Yes 263 (69.2%)	No 117 (30.8%)
23.	Have you ever come across any post(s) on social media where users engage in inter-tribal/ethnic altercation?	Yes 325 (85.5%)	No 55 (14.5%)
24.	Have you ever come across any post(s) on social media that preaches unity among Ndi Ebonyi?	Yes 218 (57.4%)	No 162 (42.6%)

CONCLUSIONS

Summarily, after a critical analysis of the data collected in the course of conducting this study, the researcher made the following findings:

1. In the bid to ascertain whether respondents are exposed to social media platforms, the study found an impressive growth rate of smartphone ownership, internet access, and social media use in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. This is in agreement with the findings of [24].

2. Having sought to determine how often respondents make use of their preferred social media platforms, the study found out that an average internet user in Ebonyi State spends between 1–2 hours on Facebook, at least once every day – thereby making Facebook the most commonly used social media platform in the state. These findings agree with [9] results but provide more insights into how frequently Nigerians use social media.

3. While the study attempted to find out specific gratification's respondents derive from social media, the study found that residents of Ebonyi State use social media mainly for making new friends.

4. In an attempt to find out whether respondents identify with indigenous groups meant for Ndi Ebonyi on social media, the study realised that most Ebonyi State residents are yet to identify with indigenous groups on social media. Findings have also shown traces of social fragmentation and divisiveness among Ndi Ebonyi as a majority of the respondents admit they see posts on social

media in which social media users engage in inter-tribal/ethnic abuses.

5. Having sought to identify what kind of influence the use of social media has on the social life of respondents, findings have shown that Ebonyi State residents make and meet new friends from a clan, tribe, or ethnicity other than theirs, and this has socially shaped their lives.

Summarily, having made the above findings, this study submits that social media possess the potency and ability to unify fragmented Nigerian societies. A majority of the respondents admit seeing social media posts in which originators of such posts preach unity among Ndi Ebonyi. This justifies the suitability of the Media Ecology Theory for this study and its assertion that media environments shape today's society and our everyday lives. Building on the submission of [10], this study agrees that Media ecology is very relevant in social media-related studies because it is impossible to understand cultural and social change without analysing the mechanisms of media as environments, we live in.

Based on the research findings, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. That "use of social media in unifying fragmented Nigerian societies" as a topic should be incorporated into the curricula of schools teaching Social Studies, Civic Education, and Nigerian Peoples Culture at all levels of formal education.

2. The Nigerian government should introduce a bill prohibiting Nigerians from engaging in inter-tribal and inter-ethnic abuses on social media. This, if done, will foster a sense of tolerance and accommodation among Nigerians.

3. Since the findings of this study show there is high internet and social media use among Nigerians, the Nigerian government should, from time to time, organise and execute unity-driven social media campaigns through its various official social media pages and handles. The Nigerian government should subsidise data costs through the National Communication Commission to achieve this. The idea is if data becomes more affordable, citizens' social media accessibility will skyrocket; hence, the more citizens the Nigerian government is likely to reach through such unity-driven social media campaigns.

4. Since findings show that social media users are already using the platform to advocate for a united Nigeria, the Nigerian government should find ways to partner with such patriotic citizens to attain a more united Nigeria.

The Nigerian government should create and introduce an interactive group and page that will both serve as virtual "Opinion Boxes" for the commoner to always suggest directly to the presidency, possible ways of salvaging the already threatened unity of the country without restrictions of any form, as this will give an average Nigerian, a true sense of belonging.

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