

THE EFFECTS OF LANGUAGE USE ON THE SOCIAL MEDIA ON NIGERIA'S NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Globalisation has broken barriers that hitherto exist among mankind. It has contracted distance and made communication easier across the breadth and length of the globe through the instrumentality of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It also increased the speed with which communication is passed and received across the spectrum. Through social media platforms, messages are rarely censored, hence the danger of misinformation, disinformation and fake news that can lead to destructive outcomes. This paper focused on the conversations on social media and their consequences on national integration. It demonstrated the current trends in the computer mediated discourses as seen on Facebook handle. The alarming rate of hate speeches and their possible effect as seen in these discourses which are capable of causing chaos necessitated the need for this study. It explored these trends with the view to ascertaining their challenges to national integration. About fifty utterances in response to three particular excerpts from events in Nigeria gotten from Facebook accounts constitute the data with which this current trend of conversation is demonstrated. The paper discovered that in the midst of this social media revolution, issues such as crime, violence, conflict, elections and insurgency are discussed on the social media. Their examination revealed that there are predominantly hate speeches especially in reaction to issues of national interest. Most of such discourses are laced with inappropriate use of hate languages that communicate hatred amongst users. Judging from the basic components of speech act theory, the paper foresees possible destabilising acts which might be in the form of war and possible disintegration. As parts of its recommendations, the paper brought to limelight the need to put in check in the destructive use of provocative statements on the social media.

Keywords: Globalisation, Social Media, National Integration, Nigeria.

Introduction

The 21st century world is experiencing unprecedented transformation that cuts across all areas of human endeavour as a result of the relentless advance of technology and its attendant 'globalisation'. We now live in a global village that is brought about by advances in technology especially the ICT revolution. The world has become a small global village where everyone is

interconnected in one way or the other. Well known physical barriers to communication, commerce, and other human endeavours such as distance, rugged terrain, have been overcome by advances in ICT. Globalisation has come to mean that 'shrinking space, shrinking time and disappearing borders are linking people's lives more deeply, more intensely and more immediately than ever before'. Distance seems no longer relevant.

The effects of globalization are many and varied, mostly positive and sometimes negative. Media is the link between the people of a country to propagate the information from one end of the country to the other either by electronic means or by the means of print, i.e. is either by Radio, Television, and Internet or by Newspapers. It can be categorized mainly in two forms, viz. Traditional Media and New Media. New media is a terminology which emerged in the late 20th century to indicate the amalgamation of traditional media such as film, images, music, spoken and written word, with the interactive power of computer and communications technology, most importantly the Internet. What distinguishes new media from traditional media is not the digitizing of media content into bits, but the dynamic life of the "new media" content and its interactive relationship with the media consumer in real time. Another important promise of New Media is the "democratization" of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content.

Social media refers to those various computer-based interactive handles/platforms that facilitate quick access to, and sharing of pieces of information of various contents through virtual networks. Furthermore, it is defined by the Investopedia as computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual communities. The various social media platforms include – Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, twitter etc. With the advent of this media, it is worthy to note that there has been significant increase in the speed and impact of information. Communication has become easier and faster but largely unregulated (Agwuocha, 2019).

National Integration can be seen to mean to combine and to bring together all the people of a country. It is a sentiment that binds together all the people in one common bond, no matter what their race, caste, sub-caste, region or religion is. It is a strong cementing force by virtue of which all types of people live together peacefully and can identify themselves as part of a single whole. It is a binding of a people in sentiment of oneness i.e., in the bond of nationalism or what we call National Integration. It is necessary to all to eliminate and evaporate the feeling of regionalism, communalism, Linguicism etc. among themselves. Now days Media plays a very important role in a society. Without Media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of world but from the Government, Law and Orders, neighbouring Towns and Cities (Agwuocha, 2019).

The effect of the ever thriving and pervasive social media on national integration cannot be overemphasised. Hence this paper found the need to evaluate its likely consequences in Nigeria with a view to determining the extent of the effect as we battle to survive as one country.

Statement of the Problem

A responsible and educated citizen should know how he/she will say or make utterances which will ensure peace and harmony amongst the listeners and readers. It is pertinent to note that some of the discourses on social media are devoid of sense of nationhood and patriotism. What is being explicated here is that some posts on these social media platforms are capable of igniting acts of war in the country. This is trending on social media especially at this present dispensation that the country is going through various challenges. It has become wars of words when it comes to reactions to ethnic, religious or political issues posted on the social media.

There is constant graphic misrepresentation of information, falsehood in information shared, intentional or un-intentional releasing of hate speeches and so on. The paper finds these very alarming. The fact that these speeches may have the tendency of creating rivalry, chaos and national disintegration constitute the problem of this research. All these necessitate the big question on the appropriate use of language in social media communication. This paper re-directs research light to this area. It is of the postulation that if users of the social media continue to use language to elicit actions capable of igniting hatred, war and ethnic divide, there is really a serious source of concern.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted the Speech Theory Act as the theoretical framework for the purpose of this research. The speech theory act is explained below:

Speech Act Theory

In his work, 'How to do Things with Words', in 1962, Austin, J L, propounded the Speech Act Theory. The theory seeks to explain how utterances can be used to achieve effects or intentions. In the theory, there are three basic concepts: the locutionary, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary acts. The act of locution deals with the production of meaningful utterances, utterances that are intelligible to the audience. Here, he argues that every speaker produces words or sentences that must be deductible by the listener. In addition, he postulates that every communication has an intention, purpose or an effect the speaker sets to achieve. It may be to create awareness, information dissemination, making a promise or igniting a war.

In an illocutionary act we find this. It is therefore achieved when the audience is being influenced to think, believe or react according to the feeling evoked by this intention of the speaker. Simply put, an illocutionary act carries the effect of their intentions of the speaker. The feelings or reactions evoked by these utterances result to actions. These actions are what are known as perlocution. In other words, the perlocutionary act is the outcome of the effect of the meaningful utterances by a speaker.

This theory is often used in the field of philosophy of languages. Austin is the one who came up with the findings that people not only use that language to assert things but also to do things. And people who followed him went to greater depths based on this point. All sort of linguist communication comprised of linguistic actions. Previously it was conceived that the very basic unit of communication is words, Symbols, sentences or some kind of token of all of these,

but it was speech act theory which suggested that production or utterances of words, symbols are the basic units of communication. This utterance happens during the process of performance of speech act. The meaning of these basic units was considered as the building blocks of mutual understanding between the people intend to communicate.

Methodology

This is a descriptive research. About fifty comments constitute the data to be analysed which are selected from the social media with particular reference to the Facebook accounts of users of Nigerian origin. For the issue of currency, the data are selections from reactions or statements on the issue of the Kagara school boy's abduction that was posted on the Facebook page of Daily Nigeria newspaper, (3rd of February, 2021).

The pictures of the persons involved in the Facebook postings are removed for obvious reasons of anonymity. The theoretical lens of the Speech Act theory was used to analyse these data. The current state of affairs in the nation is made worse by these hate speeches freely rolled out on the social media Facebook platform. With the political, religious and ethnic differences in the country, it is very easy for an intentional or unintentional misuse of language to constitute divides among the citizens. Most of the excerpts of the social media dialogue brought to light these perceived challenges which might be explosive at the appointed time. They give a tip of the iceberg of the current trends of language misuse on the social media discourse. These excerpts are without ill-intention culled from posts on current happenings in the country taken from Facebook. They are used only to buttress the academic postulations of this research and nothing more.

EXCERPT A: KAGARA SCHOOL BOY'S ABDUCTION: I WON'T PAY ANY RANSOM TO KIDNAPPERS – GOV. BELLO

Background Information: the above is the title of a post on Facebook by Daily Nigerian newspaper on February 17, 2021 at 14:04pm. Lots of reactions followed this comment on the Facebook page among which are many malicious statements as will be highlighted below.

The Southeast are ready for Fulani Terrorists This is a follow up post which addressed excerpt A post and it generated comments. It reacted to the earlier post. It reads, "A man who loves his people and a man who sees the future occurrences of Fulani overrunning the south and get prepared Nnamdi Kanu will never be forgotten by his people. The southeast is".

EXCERPT B: "HYPOCRITES ARE EVERYWHERE ..."

Background Information: This is a reaction to a post in INSIDE KADUNA facebook page on 15th February, 2021 that says 'Northern Governors visit Oyo State, meet Makinde over sasa crisis. This is following the unfortunate crisis that led to destruction of lives and properties in the sasa market in Oyo state which sparked off reactions that poses as challenge to the unity of this country.

DISCUSSION OF THE UTTERANCES EMANATED FROM THESE EXERPTS

EXCERPT A: Utterances the use of these words as ‘Fulani terrorists, tribalistic, useless, tribalism champion in these utterances to refer to a certain ethnic group as whole. In writing this comment, the writer revealed the way he or she feels about the entire Fulani tribe. The act of illocution comes vividly here as the message is intelligible to the receivers which is likely to evoke several reactions. These are terms conveying hatred to an entire tribe by using affiliating the crime to the ethnic group which is capable of instigating and exacerbating hatred that may lead to violence. Irrespective of the issue at stake, such is against the communication competence maxim of language use.

In **EXCERPT B** utterance 3 Makinde is a terrorist leader....‘ Illumines act of locution by the speaker. His utterances that are intelligible to the audience and the speaker produced words or sentences that are deductible by the listener. Such is made explicit. Utterances 5 and 7 also depicted the same act of locution whereby issues such “When the genocide in kaduna state was taking place they didn't gather like this oo... “. The seventh speaker puts his response “Hypocrites everywhere.. Did they gather like this when people we're being killed in” This statement tries to depict the governors as being bias to certain section of their citizens owing to the speakers beliefs. The speech act concept of perlocution would be achieved if this message pulls through, that is, if the nation is eventually disintegrated. In this, this paper raises alarm as it sees this as a challenge to the unity of the country. The language use here made no mistake about this as seen in these utterances are seriously disturbing and calls for a proactive steps to stem its proliferation in the social media space. There is a wave of tension building up amongst the Igbo, the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani as they constantly castigate one another. There are drums being beaten by these posts. Whether, they are drums of war or peace is left for the future to tell. But a critical mind would predict correctly.

Language use indeed in its communicative competence performs an action. Just like Noshitake quoted in Ndiribe (2016) stated —a statement does not only describe a situation or state some facts, but also performs a certain kind of action by its self.

Conclusion

This paper is concluded by stating that the current trend in the language use on social media – as a consequence of globalisation - is the predominance of utterances that could be termed as hate speeches, which cause more harm than good to the integration of the country. Its scope of language use is filled with anger, resentment, disillusionment, pride and prejudice, acrimony, insults, derogatory and defamatory terms and what have you. It is gradually affecting the emotion and psyche of those who read them on the social media handle. The truth of the matter remains that these pent-up emotions are waiting to be diffused. By uttering sentences, language is used to initiate an illocutionary act, once the illocutionary act is initiated, definitely what follows will be the effect, the reaction to the speaker’s message, the perlocutionary act. The consequences could lead to crises or wars that may lead to the loss of several lives and livelihoods such as what happened recently in country about the End Sars protests.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the paper recommends measures to prevent plunging the country into unnecessary crises or war based on the unguarded utterances. To this effect, this paper after x-raying the current trend of language use on the social media and its effects on national integration has brought to limelight these facts as follows:

1. Therefore, to prevent this perlocutionary act, language use on the social media should be devoid of hate speech. Firstly, every society thrives on the dialogic use of language; therefore, speeches that are capable of creating national divides should be avoided.
2. Secondly, the peculiarity of the nation in terms of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious divides should be a matter of concern. Reasons for separation and national disintegration.
3. Therefore, this paper advocates the need for constructive comments which are capable of de-escalating conflicts amongst these already existing divides. Language use is like a mask of two sides; one motivates peace and the other escalates wars.
4. For national stability and integration, societal relations as well as continued peaceful co-existence and tolerance, language use on the social media in Nigeria by Nigerians should be devoid of these comments which are regarded as hate speeches.
5. This paper is of the view that the way issues are raised, discussed and handled on these media sites might someday transform to missiles with which avoidable wars would be fought. Imperatively, language use on social media should be devoid of malicious pieces of information; hate speeches which are capable of igniting hatred amongst users.
6. Relevant legislations need to be enacted by the National Assembly and electronically enforced by relevant security outfits to safeguard our country from disintegration.

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