

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MOBILISING SUPPORT FOR ABDUCTEES IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF EPE SCHOOL KIDNAP

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ABSTRACT: *This work examines social media usage to support abductees in Nigeria, beaming its searchlight on the case of the 6 Epe school boys, who were kidnapped at The Lagos State Model College on May 24, 2017. This study seeks to know various ways the social media contribute to the freedom of abductees in Nigeria and how potent the social media could be in mobilising support for them. The survey method was adopted, and questionnaire was used to collect data. For this study, 528 questionnaires were given to respondents in the 66 streets on Eredo Local Council Development Area (LCDA), in Epe Local Government of Lagos State. 521 of the questionnaire were returned. Eredo has a population of 18,590, and 3% of the population was used. Purposive sampling method was chosen for this study. This is adopted in order to select the members of the population that are fit to give the correct answers to the research questions. The findings of this study reveal that the contributions of Nigerians and social media outcry made the government and its agencies to take speedy action on the abduction of the Epe school boys. This study finds out that the social media has the power to reach a large number of Nigerians faster than other media of communication. This study therefore recommends that the Civil Society organisations in Nigeria and Human Right Groups should explore the advantages of the social media to reach the people and the government alike. The study also recommends that Nigerians still need orientations on how to maximize the power of the social media.*

KEYWORDS: Social media, usage, mobilizing, abductees, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The mass media from time immemorial are known for information dissemination and enlightenment among the citizens of any society. From ages, the media has become the most common source of information. According to Bernard (2011:21), civic and political participation is an important element of contemporary democracy. It is generally assumed that within a democratic political system, citizens should have sufficient opportunities to communicate their preferences toward issues that concern them and fellow citizens. Of equal

importance, however, is the mobilization aspect. Social mobilisation is a process that raises awareness and motivates people to demand change for a particular development. During elections, political parties use social mobilization to convince voters to support them. In furtherance of their explanation on social mobilization, Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2012:4) submit that social mobilization is not limited to government alone. They say, “organisations apply social mobilization to bring together members of institutions, civic organizations, religious groups, community networks and others in a coordinated way to attain specific goals.” Social mobilisation brings about changes by facilitating dialogue between different groups with related interests. Likewise, social crusaders, human right activists, right groups and others that want change in the society are turning to the social media to bring about the changes they desire.

Social media, as concluded by Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2012:7), played a prominent role in 2011 elections. They cite cases of social media tools used during the period. One of them is the ReVoDa, a mobile application developed by a team of tech volunteers for the EnoughIsEnough coalition (a non-partisan campaign for accountable government), and social media-enabled tools to take action. They were labeled ‘clicktivists’, but a group that had been silent found tools that allowed the safety of near anonymity while allowing them outlets for angry expression.

Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2012:8) aver that, various actions on social media led to the 2012 #OccupyNigeria. They believe that, occupy Nigeria was not because of the political opposition of the Jonathan’s administration, or a tired labour movement that called for mass action, but because the anger of those previously silent found expression. Social media proved useful in amplifying the issues, connecting individual angry citizens to shared forms of expression, and even to report live on organised actions. Aleyomi and Ajakaiye (2012:8) states: “In 2013, Nigerian citizens began standing up for each other through various #SaveCitizen efforts. Some argue that hashtags are useless. They should ask the victims whose lives were saved because someone cared enough and started a hashtag and online action. “

These actions are part of a trend, and it’s why it was easy for citizens to join a campaign that had elements of citizen solidarity, demand for good governance and measurable action. Before now, Boko Haram had also abducted 274 girls from Chibok. When the first set of #BringBackOurGirls tweets showed up, people in Nigeria could identify with what it represented. The government had failed to act and was going to cover up the abduction of #ChibokGirls, as usual. People saw concrete action that challenged citizen helplessness in the face of Boko Haram. #BringBackOurGirls is not a single protest, but is part of an unfolding series of actions in Nigeria where citizens are organizing and expressing their anger through social media. Citizens respond to leadership that seeks results. As with many hashtags before it, and many more that we’ll see unfold, #BringBackOurGirls is not isolated ‘clicktivism’, but a sign of growing citizen mobilization. The same thing was in place in the case of the kidnapped Dapchi Girls.

There was also a case of Ese Rita Oruru, a 13 year old girl, who was abducted by Yunusa Dahiru in August 12, 2015. This case was subsequently followed by social media outcry by Nigerian citizens. The hashtag FREE ESE (#FREE ESE) was created on tweeter and other prominent social media platforms to raise awareness for the abduction of the teenager. Various

civil organisations and notable Nigerians were involved in condemning the action on these platforms.

On May 24, 2017, a set of six boys from Lagos State Model College, Igbonla, in Epe, Lagos State were kidnapped in their school hostels. This came after year 2016 occurrence, when gunmen kidnapped students and teachers of the same Government Model College, Igbonla Epe, on Thursday, October 6, 2016. During the May 24, 2017 attack, the kidnappers broken down the school fence and headed for the boys' hostel, where they whisked away 10 Senior Secondary School pupils. Four of them later escaped.

From May 24, 2017; Nigerians have been agitating for the release of the abducted boys. Nigerians began a countdown to the boys' release from May 25, 2017, which was the second day of this kidnap. Nigerian have started the count with various campaign tags like: #FREE EPE 6, #EPE 6, and so on. These campaigns were also accompanied by the number of days the boys had spent in captivity. #FREE EPE 6, DAY 2 IN CAPTIVITY, #EPE 6: DAY 5 IN CAPTIVITY. Nigerians used various platforms to talk to the government, and its security outfits. These included media outcry by the families of the kidnapped boys. Family members of the victims took to the media to garner support for the boys. These campaigns continued till July 28, 2017, which was the 64th day the boys had been kidnapped. Till the day of their release, Nigerians were still counting the days they had spent with their abductors.

Today, the social media is connecting more people than the traditional media (Radio, Television, Newspaper and Magazine). According to Michael Haenlein and Kaplan, Andreas (2010:2) social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". It includes web-based and mobile based technologies that are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organizations, and communities. Since coming on board of social media, in Nigeria, issues of public concern have received public attention and scrutiny by media users. With the power of immediate feedback system and simultaneous message delivery, social media has endeared itself to the heart of Nigerians, as a good tool for discussion of issues.

Okoro and Adibe (2013:49) aver that the social media is a formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering. "The technology is participatory, interactive and cost effective. This has made the social media the medium of the moment". They conclude their findings that, the social media is a veritable tool for political mobilization. Looking at Nigeria today, abduction and kidnapping is one of the social menaces the country is facing currently. If the social media is the current power house of information dissemination, can it be used to mobilise support for the victims of abduction and kidnapping? How well have Nigerians made use of the social media in campaigning for the release of abductees? What are the positive roles, which the social media could play in supporting abductees, and contributing to their release or freedom? Therefore, the abduction of 6 Epe Model college boys has been chosen to test the power of the social media in this regard. Various campaign names have been created for the release of the six abductees. Some of them were, hashtag Free6Lagosboys (#FREE6LAGOSBOYS), hashtag Epe 6 (#EPE 6), and 'Project_Change_Nigeria'. (A project launched to campaign for the release of the boys), among others. All these were on, until July 28, 2017; when the boys were rescued. This work investigates if the social media could be used

as a tool to mobilise citizens' support for abductees, by pressing on the authorities through contributions and suggestions.

Conceptual Clarifications

Social media and kidnapping are key concepts that need attention in the study

Social Media

The term 'Social Media' has been defined in different ways by its users. For instance, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:2) define social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". It includes web-based and mobile based technologies that are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among individuals, organizations, and communities. Typical examples of social media platforms include websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and the interactive options on these websites, such as the "retweeting" option on Twitter. These instruments are referred to as media because they are tools which can also be used for the storage and dissemination of information. However, unlike the traditional media like Television and Radio, most of the social media tools allow their users to interact as "re-tweeting" on Twitter and "comment" options on Facebook illustrate. Looking at social media from a more practical point of view, Sweetser and Lariscy (2008:13) define social media as a "read-write Web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing of Web content to actually contributing to the content".

Until the 1980s according to Sweetser and Lariscy (2008:14), media relied primarily upon print and analog-broadcast models, such as those of television and radio. The last twenty-five years have seen the rapid transformation into social media which are predicated upon the use of digital technologies, such as the Internet and video games. The use of digital computers has transformed the remaining 'old' media, as suggested by the advent of digital television and online publications. Even traditional media forms such as the printing press have been transformed through the application of technologies such as image manipulation software like Adobe Photoshop and desktop publishing tools.

Lev Manovich (2011:1) argues that the "emergence of new digital technologies signals a potentially radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and resources." According to him, "We are witnessing the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication' He predicted that the new media will:

- Alter the meaning of geographic distance.
- Allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication.
- Provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication.
- Provide opportunities for interactive communication.
- Allow forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect.
- **Kidnapping**
- Kidnapping is the abduction and captivity of a person to obtain a ransom. According to Yahaya of BBC Africa, Lagos (2019), what started as a money-making scheme about 15 years

in Southern Niger Delta with the kidnapping of oil workers has mushroomed across the country.

- Over the decades, kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved into a lingering pervasive security threat and fast-paced and multi-faceted criminal enterprise. It is now perpetrated by diverse armed groups and criminal gangs operating across the country on land, and at sea, pursuing different agendas and driven by different motivations: political, ideological, financial, social and cultural. (Assanvo and Okereke, 2019)

- Statistics from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) show that 277 kidnappings were reported in Nigeria in 2007; 309 in 2008; 703 in 2009; 738 in 2010; 600 in 2012 and 574 in 2013. No data was provided for 2011. In 2015, the Nigerian Police Force reported 886 kidnappings. About 630 people were reportedly abducted between May 2016 and May 2017. A recent Bulwark Intelligence threat analysis indicates that kidnapping figures remained relatively stable in 2017 and 2018. (Assanvo and Okereke, 2019).

- Uzochukwu (2019) identifies some of the causes of kidnapping:

- **Unemployment**

- The high unemployment rate in many countries has pushed citizens to make money through abduction. The unemployed youth turn to crime to make money. They believe that when they kidnap the rich, they will share in the richness of the rich by getting their own share.

- Poverty. Any person who lives below \$1.25 a day is said to be poor. Poverty is a propelling force that pushes people toward crime. They find themselves into kidnapping because they are no longer happy with their own condition. Sometimes, they believe that one successful kidnapping will fetch them the money they will need to start a clean business. But in most cases, they find it difficult to stop after the first attempt.

- **Religion**

- Religion is another cause. Some people love their religion so much that even when that religion is teaching them the wrong thing, they believe it is right. Many kidnappings in the world today have their root cause in religion.

- **Greed**

- Some want to own everything in the world. When men are not content with what they have, they may turn to crime to make more money. A wicked businessman can kidnap his business rival to take some money from him and become richer.

- **Politics.**

- Some thugs who are sponsored by politicians arrange for the kidnapping of their opponents. Sometimes, they do this so that their opponents will make concessions or change their votes on the issues.

- **Corruption**

- A society where corruption is customary is likely to experience a high level of kidnapping. The truth is that when any government indulges in corruption by embezzling public funds, citizens will react by kidnapping these politicians in an attempt to regain the money that was stolen from them.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF STUDY

The remediation media theory provides the theoretical frame on which this work is standing. According to the book, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* by Bolter and Grusin (2000),

cited by Sara (2012:10), remediation is a defining characteristic of new digital media because digital media is constantly remediating its predecessors (television, radio, print journalism and other forms of old media).

Remediation is the incorporation or representation of one medium in another medium. This is when a new medium is using the sole attributes of an old medium in its own production, but in a new dimension. Generally speaking, remediation is the act of providing a remedy. According to Sara (2012:9), digital visual media can best be understood through the ways in which they honour, rival, and revise linear-perspective painting, photography, film, television, and print. No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media.

Sara (2012:11) opines that, the representation of one medium in another, is remediation, and that remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media. This term refers to the idea that all new media (and virtually anything can be considered new media at its inception) relies on one or more preceding medium, which it refashions or repurposes. This theory is particularly relevant to this study because the new media, which is one of the major variables of this topic is remediating the old media of television, radio, newspaper and magazine. All the features of the old media are visible in the new media. The new media combine both pictures, videos and text material together to pass its message to the users. And this is what remediation is all about.

The Case of Epe School Kidnap

On May 24, 2017, gunmen abducted about six pupils from Lagos State Model College, Igbonla, Epe, Lagos. The abductors perpetrated this evil after gaining entry into the premises around 6am through the creek at the back of the college. They have broken down the school fence and headed for the boys' hostel, where they whisked away 10 Senior Secondary School pupils. Four of them escaped later. The kidnappers subsequently demanded N1 billion ransom from their parents. Two of the parents were asked to pay N400 million each, while another two were told to raise N100m per child.

The Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) in charge of Zone 2 comprising of Lagos and Ogun States Police Commands, Mr. Adamu Ibrahim, on Monday, May 29, 2017; assured the public, especially parents of the kidnapped students of Lagos State Model College, Igbonla-Epe, that all hands are on the deck to ensure the safe return of their wards. At the Lagos State Government House, after a meeting with Governor Akinwunmi Ambode, Ibrahim said security agencies were working tirelessly to ensure the return of the students and reunite them with their families.

On June 1, Sahara Reporters, an online news outfit, tweets that, three suspected members of the kidnap gang that stormed Lagos Model College, Igbonla, Epe, were arrested by operatives of the Inspector General of Police Intelligence Response Team. The suspects were arrested in Benin, Edo state capital. The trio of Egelu Endurance, whose operational name is Jubby (25), Stanley Yomi Irabomini with operational name Powei (25) and Endurance Bentel (24) reportedly left their colleagues in the creeks where the abducted students were kept about 4pm.

They embarked on the journey to Benin through the water ways from Ondo state, apparently to beat eagle eye operatives stationed at strategic locations around the creeks where the students are suspected to have been kept. But unknown to them, IRT operatives who sighted them leaving, traced them to Benin

On July 6, 2017, after weeks of communication silence, Sahara Reporters tweets that, the abductors of the six pupils contacted some parents of the victims again. After a prolonged negotiation, the kidnappers eventually settled for N100m ransom for all the children. The parents had protested at the Governor Akinwunmi Ambode's office on Wednesday, June 7, accusing the government of indifference and asking it to facilitate the release of the children. According to Sahara Reporters, (June 07, 2017), some parents, said the kidnappers had established contact with them again. They said the gang allowed them to speak with all the children and assured them of their safety. A parent, who spoke to Punch said, "They have called again and promised to release our children soon. But they did not specify when and where they will be released. They allowed one of us to speak with all the children and they assured the parent that the kids are safe.

TV continental on its twitter handle, informs on July 15, 2017, that one of the parents disclosed that, some of them were assigned to take the money to an undisclosed place, where they paid to some members of the gang in two tranches. On July 16, the Parents of the six abducted pupils contributed and paid N31m ransom to the criminals who kidnapped their children.

On July 28, 2017, Sahara Reporters, after 64 days in captivity, breaks the news most Nigerians and especially parents had hoped to hear in that last two months. Sahara Reporters tweets that the Six kidnapped students of Igbonla model school, Epe were released. The students were rescued from Aboto creek, Ilaje local government area of Ondo State. The details of their release show that the Lagos and Ondo governments worked with the Nigeria Police to make the mission possible. They were handed over to the Ondo state Deputy Governor, Agboola Ajayi by their abductors. The students abducted from the school are: Pelumi Philips, Farouq Yusuf, Isiaq Rahmon, Adebayo George, Judah Agbasi and Peter Jonah. The Ondo State deputy governor took the boys to Lagos State, where he handed them over to the Lagos State Government.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study is Descriptive Design. The researcher used Survey Method which is aimed at collecting large samples from a population in order to examine the distribution incidence and interaction of the phenomenon in the study. The basis for selecting this research design is to determine the state of all variables in the study which is an investigation into use of Social Media in mobilising support for abductees: The Case of Epe School Kidnap. Questionnaire was used to reach out to the population of study. The population of this study is the people of Eredo Local Council Area of Lagos State. The population is divided into two strata, the youth, which are the unmarried and the adults, which are the married people.

Based on accessibility, resources and time constraints, a sample of 528 respondents were selected from a population of 18,590 that make up the LCDA. Eredo is one of the 4 Local Council Development Area in Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State. The Whole Epe LGA has a population of 84,179. Eredo LCDA was selected for accuracy. Lagos Model College, Igbonla, where the kidnap occurred is located in Eredo. This will allow for generalisation on the issue of roles that Social media play in mobilising support for abductees.

The study adopts primary and secondary methods of data collection. In the Primary methods, questionnaires were used to solicit answers that test if the social media in any way mobilise the Nigerian population to support abductees, and consequently lead to their (abductees) freedom. This is done through administration of questionnaires to about 528 Nigerians. The division of the respondents to two strata was informed by the fact that the victims were youth and the other stratum was the parents, who bore the pains.

The questionnaire was used to collect primary data, which is complemented by secondary sources of data collection through data retrieval techniques, most notably scholarly textbooks, journals, official publications, seminar and conference papers, newspapers/magazines and the internet. The sample technique used is the non-probability sampling. Members of the population were chosen based on their relative ease of access and the fact that such respondent must be connected to at least on social media platform. In this study, purposive sampling technique which entails the researchers selecting samples for study based on the purpose of the study. We used a sample population of five hundred and twenty eight (528) respondents selected from the entire population. Out of the 528 questionnaire distributed; five hundred and twenty one (521) were returned and form the basis of our analysis and findings. The presentation of the primary data is done with the use of statistical tables and simple percentage based on data retrieved from questionnaires.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Table 1

S/N	QUESTION	RESPONSE	%
1	Do you use the social media	521	100
2	Are there discussions of abduction on social media	435	83
3	Do you Forward news on abduction	278	53
4	Frequency of forwarding abduction news	102	36
5	Whether respondents contribute to the discussions	358	69
6	Whether government and its agencies take social media seriously	502	96
7	Do Social media has impact on kidnappings	319	61
8	Whether abductors use social media	498	95
9	Do the government and the people take abductors response on social media seriously	403	81
10	Do social media discussions affect government	399	76
11	Are You aware of the Igbonla, Epe kidnap	521	100
12	How frequent did you see the story on Epe kidnap	291	56
13	Whether social media discussions pushed government to action	358	68
14	Which media broke the news of the release of the abductees first : social media – 495 – others - 5	495	95
15	Which platform allowed for robust discussion on the abduction Social media – 495 others – 5	495	95

From the table above, all the respondents (521) were social media users. This was particularly so, because of the purposeful sampling method used for this work. Only social media users were selected as respondents in order to get the needed answers to the research questions. 435 of them, which represents 83% averred that they have been seeing discussions on abduction on social media. 278 of the, which is 53% confirmed that they forward abduction news to other social media users, in order to spread the news. But when asked on how frequent they do forward such news, only 102, which is 36% do forward frequently.

On whether respondents contribute to the discussions on abduction stories on the social media, 358 of the respondents, which represents 69% said people contribute very well on the stories of abduction. 502 of the respondents, which is 96% said government and its agencies do take social media discussions concerning abduction very seriously. On whether social media activities impact of positively in any way concerning the abduction in the country, 319 of the respondents, which represents 61% said social media have positive impact on the abduction cases. While responding to the question on whether abductors use the social media too, 498 of the respondents, which is 95% affirmed that the abductors use the social media to communicate to both the government and the people.

To test whether government and the entire populace take the communications of abductors or kidnappers on social media seriously, 403 of the respondents, which is 81% believed that the government and the people take the words of the abductors seriously. Meanwhile, 399 of them, which represents 76% said the social media activities affect the government actions on abductions and kidnappings.

All the respondents, which represents 100% claimed to be aware of the Igbonla, Epe school kidnap. 291 of them, which is 56% claimed to have seen the stories concerning the kidnap on the social media every day, while others claimed to come across it less frequently. On whether the social media comments contributed to the positive action taken by the government on the Epe kidnap, 358 of the respondents, which is 68% believed that social media activities of Nigerians contributed to the positive reaction of the government.

To test the capacity of the social media and other media of communication in breaking of news, respondents were told to give the source that broke the news first to them. 495 of the them, which is 95% claimed to have seen the news first on the social media, while only 5% claimed to have got it first on other media of communication. While commenting on which of the media platforms gave the most beautiful opportunity for the people to comment on the issue of the abduction, 495 of the respondents chose the social media above all other media of communication.

CONCLUSION

From the interpretation and analysis of the data collected, the following conclusions were drawn:

- *Nigerians take the cases of kidnaps or abductions to the social media
- *That Nigerians are interested in discussing the plight of abductees using the social media platforms

*Although more than 50% of the respondents do inform others of abduction cases, this study finds out that Nigerians are comfortable passing news about issues that are of lesser importance among themselves than issues affects their society and governance.

*The study also shows that despite an overwhelming response by the respondents that they do comment on the issues of abduction, majority of the pass irrelevant comments by either clicking 'like,' 'thumb up,' or 'thumb down,' rather passing relevant and analytical comments.

*It is discovered that both abductors and the government are now in the habit of using the social media to talk to the public concerning the cases of abduction.

*The contributions of Nigerians and social media outcry made the government and its agencies to take action on the abduction of the Epe school boys. This is because social media users took the case to the people and thus did a count-down till the 64th day when the boys were released from the captivity of their abductors.

*The Nigerians have realized the power that lies with the social media usage.

*The social media has the power to reach a large number of Nigerians faster than other media of communication.

*The social media outcry that followed the abduction of 6 Epe school boys contributed to the release of the abductees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above research findings, the following recommendations are hereby made: As the findings of this study shows, the use of social media to propagate a course, to air the views of the citizens is gradually becoming a norm in Nigeria. The civil society organisations in Nigeria has found a fertile land in the social media, to always sow the seed of their grievances and observation. As such, the civil society and the human right activists should explore the social media to mobilise Nigerians on issues of social decadence, abductions, and human right abuses and so on.

Many Nigerians need to be educated on the use of social media, as many of them see it as a tool of socialization rather mobilization. What the social media did before and during the Arab spring cannot be over emphasized. Many Nigerians still do not know the power of the android and IOS devices they are carrying. A review of the news tweets on the Epe Kidnap revealed that many people just visit some of the pages to do some funny things. Imaging a social media user who visited a page with a very serious news as the abduction of 6 young, promising Nigerians, only to click like on the news. One begin to wonder if they love the bad news or the 'like' is for the poster. Also, Nigerians are not in the habit of forwarding serious news items on the social media, but the unserious ones.

Government agencies should be educated on the importance of the social media. It not only when the citizens' cry, or make allegations that agencies like the police should update the citizens on issues of national importance or respond to a nagging problem through the social media.

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