LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS VEHICLES OF SOCIAL MOBILISATION AND TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

Language is one of the most effective and conventional means of human interaction and social relations. A considerable body of literature in language education points to the preponderance of research around methods, approaches, strategies, media of instruction in teaching and learning; the use of technology and social media as instructional tools. In recent times, research interest is unfolding towards the combined use of technology and social media not just to provide language learning but also to reshape and transform society. In this wise, the paper examines how language and social media can be used as vehicles for social mobilisation and transformation for the immediate future. The paper focuses on language as a medium of transaction and communication, social media and communication, and language and social media platforms as a means of promoting political education, peace, equity, and fairness. The paper therefore advocates the use of language and social media as potent weapons in driving society to its desirable end. It is therefore recommended that language both Indigenous and foreign through the various social media platforms, especially (X, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook) could be used to mobilise and transform society for a better future.

Keywords: *Language, social media, social mobilisation, social transformation*

Introduction

Society has been subjected to change due to various factors such as language contacts, conquests, war, technology, science, scientific discoveries, research findings, education, and others. However, in recent times, language and the advent of new media have redefined the world. Language, verbal or non-verbal, is a key instrument that is indispensable in society. It is a major tool of communication that involves interaction and development in a society. It embodies the norms, rules, and culture of society. Hence, without the instrument called language, there will be no access to the ways of life of other groups or societies in the world. Language can be described as a mirror that reflects one's thoughts, values, beliefs, and customs. It unlocks the social bond, norms, aspirations, knowledge, and culture of the society and also acts as a powerful instrument of identification. It expresses the worldview, ideology, and cultural belief of a group of individuals or the society at large. Dikenwosi et al (2019) submit that language occupies a central place as the primary means of interpreting reality, negotiating and creating meaning; also a means of articulating our perception of experience.

Language is also a major tool for social change and development because a society cannot successfully educate its citizens without the means of a language or languages in cases of multiethnic societies. This is because it is not only a means of exchanging ideas; it is also a means of forming and consolidating ideas in the social consciousness (Sharofiddinou, 2020). For instance, during the struggle against apartheid government in South Africa, and independence from colonial rule in Nigeria and other African colonies, language indeed was the major weapon for the campaign especially the language of the colonial masters specifically, the English language and French).Moreover, language is a fundamental medium for the formation of concepts and the creation of ideas, it can also be view as the endowment upon which human existence and other social relations rest.

Over the years language has served as bacon for social change and transformation. Every form of conversation and participation is attained through the medium of language. It is therefore a potent vehicle for transmitting, cultures, values, norms and beliefs from one generation to another; hence, it remains a central factor in determining the nature of a nation (Ushupe et al, 2019). Simply put, language helps transform a nation and gives a sign of identification. It therefore follows that a society cannot function effectively without the vehicle of language. At times societies or groups are mostly divided or grouped based on linguistic grounds. A vivid example is Nigeria, where in1914; the three major regions were amalgamated based on major linguistic lines (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba) (Kazeem

et al, 2019).It therefore means that language might seem to be a major catalyst for social mobilisation and transformation. However, language diversity when poorly managed especially in plural or multiethnic societies/ countries has given birth to various political agitations, separatist movements; demand for political autonomy or independence, and in worse cases civil war (Nsude, et al 2023). But in the end, dialogue through language has remained the pathway to a lasting solution (permanent) for the problem. In addition, it is a well-known fact that effective governments have used the instrument of sound language policies to wield their diverse linguistic communities together. Hence, this paper explores language and social media as vehicles for social mobilisation and transformation.

The Advent of Technology and Social Media and their Impact on Language Use

The advent of technology and social media has increased and diversified the potential of language as an instrument of human interaction, communication, social change, and transformation. The Information Communication Technology which has in its arsenal the internet, the computer, the smart gadgets, has and will continue to redefine the world. This includes languages of the world. For instance, the advent of writing and printing machines widened the scope of language use. The advent of the print media may have led to the spread of knowledge, information, and interaction among people. However, literacy became a prerequisite for the consumption of communication in the print medium. Interestingly, the new technology broke this jinx as it has widened the potential of language for communication, transformation, and social change.

The internet has contributed immensely to the prevalence of the knowledge economy that rules the world. To support this Omotayo and Folorunsho (2020) submit that the media, a modern trend in information and knowledge dissemination has taken communication beyond the limitations of the traditional way of communication and socialisation. It has produced a plethora of tools through which information is accessed by the users. One of the major tools birthed by the internet is social media. Social media is a relatively new culture that enables one to create a semi-profile and create and share content with people of the same goals and interests. It has made communication easier and faster by destroying geographical boundaries which has led to the promotion of individual and group interests due to ease, cheaper cost of joining the platforms, ease of content upload and information exchange (Ukomu, Edogor, & Ezugwu, 2020). In this view, the recent explosion of social media has had a profound impact on the creation, distribution, and dissemination of information.

One of the advantages of social media is the speed at which information is passed from one person to the other on its various platforms. These platforms not only give room for the dissemination of information but also permit instant feedback or response. Sharafat (2020) avers that social media platforms have become well-known as an information platform that accelerates news, especially during events and crises. It also allows people to exchange information with little or no fear of intimidation. It acts as a voice for those who are naturally vocal and voiceless. It has brought a persuasive effect, especially on young and uneducated people and this has helped them shape their ideas about issues of life (Zaiter, Sabbagh, &Koaboz, 2023). Thus, social media encourages freedom of expression on all its platforms. It has gradually grown as a tool for social participation and social mobilisation.

Language and Social Media as vehicles for Social Mobilisation and Transformation

Social media is a tool of social participation and because of the speed in which messages are shared; it is gradually becoming a vehicle for social mobilisation. Morah et al (2023) submit that the internet has changed not only people's relationships by creating new platforms for social engagement but it has enable people to organise, interact with the outside world and participate in social and political activity, particularly in emerging and developing nation. Social moblisation can be described as a process in which groups, communities, or bodies organize themselves to create awareness to achieve a goal. When it comes to social mobilisation, individual actions tend to be meaningless, but it becomes meaningful when a large group of individuals exhibit the same behaviour to achieve a common goal, which can lead to a change in behaviour. The goal of social mobilisation is to get a large number of people to engage in actions that have a net cost for all parties involved but yield a collective benefit. This process always starts with social movements, which are organised protests against injustice and challenges to the status quo (Ayman, 2020).

Thus, the end product of social mobilisation is to bring about a desirable change in society which can be referred to as social transformation. Social transformation implies a fundamental change in society. Hajare (2020) submits that social transformation started in the era of the Industrial Revolution and its major aim is to create progress or development. Thus, in the 21st century, social media has been a major instrument used for social mobilisation and transformation. However, for this to be achieved dialogue and negotiation must be employed. The social mobilisation has changed due to the speed at which information travels through social media. For instance, various revolutions or social changes

that have taken place in recent times happened so fast because of the power of language and social media. It has increased people's understanding of fundamental situations in society. Social media has enabled individuals to connect, mobilise, and organize in huge numbers against their management, something that used to be incredibly difficult to do (Farooq, Bashir, Zafar, Zarar, & Sadiq, 2021). These gatherings led to tremendous changes in politics, education, and justice, promotion of peace, equity, and fairness.

However, the use of social media for social mobilisation and transformation requires language as its major instrument because every transaction that takes place on social media is done through the medium of language. Contents are created on social media to get responses or feedback from the members of the social community through the power of language. For instance, a situation that shows that language and social media are interrelated is the '#EndSars#' movement in Nigeria. The revolution started with the hashtag '#EndSARs# on Twitter in 2017 (Ajisafe et al, 2023). This movement later took momentum when a video showinga SAR's official shooting a young man in a white SUV stealing his car and leaving the victim dead on the road (Ajisafe et al, 2023; Nwaleka et al, 2023; Nwafor et al, 2021). This video spurns a lot of reactions on various social media most especially X (Twitter), where a few retweets by most X (Twitter) users led to a global awareness of police brutality in Nigeria. This gradually was used to mobilise countless youths and adults in Nigeria. Hence, the hashtag '#EndSARs' was accompanied by the Yoruba phrase 'Soro Soke' which means 'speak louder'. This became a slogan and tool that brought almost all Nigerians together irrespective of their language, tribe and religion to fight for a common cause which was to put an end to police brutality, and this consequently influenced the Nigerian government decisions in its security and social policies (Ajisafe et al, 2023).

Ways in which Language and Social Media can be a Vehicle of Mobilisation and Transformation

Political Education:

 In recent times, social media platforms have been used to mobilise people through the medium of language for political activities all over the world. Thus, social mobilization enable people to employ their energies constructively and actively participate in the social and political life of their country by raising their degree of awareness or cognition of political and other concerns (Okeke, 2019). Thus, their ability to achieve the set-out goals leads to transformation. Social media platforms have helped

to create awareness on various political issues which have led to a lot of changes in society. Ayman (2020) avers that many scholars who examined the phenomenon of social media and political participation believe that social media can positively influence political engagement and increase citizens' turnout at polls. The interactive nature of social media fosters new relationships between political actors and citizens. This further leads to political participation which boosts voters' turnout (Jorg, 2022). Omotayo and Folorunso (2020) in their study of the use of social media for political participation by youths in Oyo State show that Nigerian youths highly use social media for political participation. One of the means of selling government programmes is the internet, through social media. It also provides an opportunity for the youths to air their views on government decisions regarding various sectors of the economy such as education, health, finance, etc. through the creation of content and engagements on content created.

Thus, in recent times social media has created a mass movement in governance and this had led to societal transformation. The Internet has been viewed as an instrument of social and political change since, the turn of the 21st century (Okpala et al, 2023). Likewise, Gustafssion, Ngomba, and Nielsen (2019) submit that social media helps ordinary citizens to express their political views, organise and mobilise in support of various causes, and closely monitor and shed light on electoral malpractices. For instance, social media played a major role in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria as regards the dissemination of information about voters' registration, voting, and election irregularities (Ezema et al, 2023; Okpala et al, 2023). Morah and Nwafor's (2023) study affirm that social media platforms were apt in political communication during the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. Furthermore, these platforms are not only used for political motivation but also to mobilise citizens for their civic rights such as voting and accessing events that are under-reported or censored in traditional media, especially during the election period. In the recently concluded elections in Nigeria, voters' orientation was done via social media through the medium of language. This yielded great results and a shift from the old ways of conducting elections.

Promotion of Peace, Equity and Fairness

A lot of changes or reforms that have happened in the world in recent times were made effective by the power of social media. Justice and fairness are being served by the power of social media through the medium of language. Wilson et al. (2021) observe that social media platforms have played an increasing role in armed conflict… and efforts made to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts. Just a

little click on a gadget used for recording at a crime scene can lead to the criminals being apprehended. A re-post of a protest in a particular country can lead to a call for justice by other people all over the world. Hence, social media participation enables one to assess, share, and participate in positive conservation with others from different backgrounds. It keeps one abreast of major happenings globally, and it has proved to be a vital tool in creating awareness for causes (Kareem, 2019).

However, this cannot happen without the medium of language. For instance, the Arab Spring protest in 2011, the 2010 UK protest and in recent times the 2020 #EndSARs# movement in Nigeria all brought about major reforms in their respective countries. Social movements are increasingly using technology in their protest movements to achieve their aims or goals (Nien, 2017). A few retweets on X (Twitter) and sharing of videos or audio on Instagram, and other platforms call for answers by the respective authorities. An example is the #EndSARs# movement in Nigeria which started on various social media platforms before the protesters took to the streets (Uwalaka et al, 2023). They formed family forums on social media platforms, especially X (Twitter) to mobilise and raise funds for the movement (Doma et al, 2023). Kareem (2019) shared a story of a Ukrainian who was gang raped and burnt but survived and could name her attackers. The mother only had to share the video of her amputated legs and it all went viral. This led to people advocating for justice on her behalf and the perpetrators were caught even though they were influential. The case was monitored online and they were eventually convicted of murder. Social media through the power of language act as a tool for advocacy, peace, justice, and fairness in society.

Desirable Values: Mutual respect and concern for others:

Social media through the medium of language has been a tool for mobilsing society for the achievement of desirable values. Social media is a leveler; it is not restricted to a particular class of people. It is also used to command mutual respect among people. A lot of cases of domestic violence or injustices towards the less privileged have been solved on social media space regardless of the calibre of people involved. For instance, in pluralist societies, people must deal with animosity, intergroup hostility, and personal enmity; yet, people are more inclined to treat themselves with respect and concern when they are on social media, where they share similar beliefs (Rossini et al, 2020). There are also cases of comments that can be categorise as hate speech on social media platforms, however, most blogs and social media platforms bring such comments down. Gonzales (2020) avers

that parents and teachers can create communities that have understanding, show empathy, mutual respect, and shared contribution on social media platforms.

It has been argued that the internet is a carrier of hate speech (a type of abuse, or insults that can lead to violence). Wilson et al, (2021) affirm that the United Nations has tried to put a measure of control on social media companies to control hate speech. One of the rules is that "social media companies are responsible for effectively prohibiting and removing content in the shortest time possible that is discriminating, hostile or violent towards those (community members) with protected characteristics based on any identification factor and especially those belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities based on their minority identity" (Wilson et al, 2021). Thus, measures are being put in place to control the use of hate speech on social media.

Promotion of Indigenous Languages

Social media through the medium of language is harnessing and creating social awareness in respect to languages and culture. Furthermore, the intrinsic properties in social media can be used to promote personal interests like culture and in particular, indigenous languages (Onuh, 2022). Social media has been a tool of change in society; it has broken the level of bias concerning language use even though there are lot of concerns about its effect on indigenous languages since English language is mostly the language of social media (Ekwueme et al, 2019). It has paved the way for intra-ethnic content consumption through the medium of local languages. Most people do not have to be literate before they can engage in some content on social media. This is made possible because of the various modes available on social media platforms such as audio and visual content in indigenous languages. Moreover, most social media platforms have a substitute tool. Social media has allowed the Indigenous languages to be freely used on these platforms even as an instrument for mass movement. It has broken the bias that comes to the use of indigenous languages in a pluralistic or multilingual society. For instance, in 2021 the Igbo word "Ozoemena" trended all over the world in remembrance of the fallen heroes of the Biafra War. The Igbo word acted as a tool for social mobilisation and enlightenment during that period. A lot of people got to understand the story of the civil war that took place in Nigeria and the necessary precautions taken by the government to avert a repeat of such a crisis.

Conclusion

The paper has endeavoured to draw attention to the potentials and possibilities which language and social media possess as alternative or additional tools that government, institutions, and organisations could utilise/exploit to mobilise the people for effective participation in governance and leadership for the achievement of set goals that will change the society for the better. Specific areas or domains in which government and other relevant stakeholders could invoke the instrumentality of language and social media to mobilise and change society include political, education, peace, equity and fairness, mutual respect and concern for others, and promoting the use of Indigenous languages among others. It is further hoped that this paper will serve as a trigger for further research and discussion on the wider use of language and social media to ensure mass participation in governance, effective execution of policy, achievement of set goals, and bring about positive change in society.

Recommendations

Based on the reviews of related literature, this paper, therefore, advocates the use of language and social media as potent weapons in driving society to its desirable end. It is therefore recommended that language both Indigenous and foreign through the various social media platforms, especially (X, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook) could be used to mobilise and transform society for a better future.

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