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CONTENTS

1. **Towards a theoretical framework for understanding Nigerianness** - Victor Ayedun-Aluma - 7
2. **Facebooking ethnicity in the political storytelling of Nigerians** - Nwachukwu Egbunike & Ngozi J. Onyechi - 21
3. **The framing of political messages in Ayinla Omowura's song-texts** - Olayinka Egbokhare & Israel Ayinla Fadipe -43
4. **How Pro-Biafra agitators construct their Nigerianness on Twitter** - Oyewole Adekunle Oladapo -63
5. **Negative rhetoric in the user generated content of Nigerian news media** - Babatunde Raphael Ojebuyi - 85
6. **Group identity and nation building in the rhetoric of Nigerian politicians** - Ngozi Okpara - 107

Facebooking Ethnicity in the Political Storytelling of Nigerians

Nwachukwu Egbunike¹ & Ngozi J. Onyechi²

Abstract

After the so-called “Arab Spring”, the capacity of social networking sites to change communicative spaces and political landscapes has been studied with increased attention. The #OccupyNigeria Protests and #BringBackOurGirls campaigns manifested the influence of social media on civic engagement of Nigerians. On the other hand, Nigeria as an ethnic fault line state has experienced political tensions of brutish magnitude that have hindered nation building as well. However there is paucity of scholarly investigations that peer into the influence of social media mediated political storytelling in enhancing ethnic stereotypes or galvanizing ethnic cohesion within the context of nation building. This paper investigated the influence of ethnicity on political storytelling of Nigerians on Facebook. This study employed survey by administering online open-ended questionnaires to respondents. Data suggests that respondents' political storytelling was not affected by the ethnicity of their Facebook friends. Findings also showed that the political storytelling of their friends on Facebook was laden with ethnocentrism and that Facebook mediated political storytelling promotes ethnic stereotypes. The findings were discussed based on the meso-storytelling proposition of the Communication Infrastructure Theory, notions of nation building in the African context and reviewed literature on social media.

Key words: Facebook, ethnicity, political storytelling, nation building, Nigeria

Introduction

Social media assumed centre stage in global communication scholarship largely due to the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The Arab Spring was perceived by technological determinants as the solution that can be applied to stimulate democracy in authoritarian countries. However, studies

¹Department of Communication & Language Arts, University of Ibadan.
nwachukwuegbunike@gmail.com

²Department of Communication & Language Arts, University of Ibadan.
ngoonyechi@yahoo.co.uk

later revealed that as much as social media aided the uprisings in North Africa, other factors were instrumental in bringing about collective action witnessed in the Arab Spring protests. The uprisings were not a simplistic social media mediated political engagement but rather a combination of various factors (Aouragh and Alexander, 2011; Chebib and Sohail, 2011; Harlow and Johnson, 2011; Hamdy and Gomaa, 2012; Lim, 2012; Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2012; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; and Douai and Moussa, 2013). This explains why “the Arab Spring stopped in the desert” (Olorunnisola and Ojebode, 2013) and the #OccupyNigeria protests was neither a Nigerian version of the global Occupy Movement nor the Arab Spring (Egbunike and Olorunnisola, 2015).

In Nigeria, the social media has advanced political participation and collective action. For instance, in January 2012, Nigerians on the social media responded with the hashtag #OccupyNigeria, which became a protest against government's decision to remove oil subsidy. Similarly, the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag originating from a Nigerian Twitter user became a global sensation in demanding the rescue of the kidnapped school girls from Chibok, Borno State. Also the 2011 presidential elections manifested the rising use of social media in Nigerian political communication. Former President Goodluck Jonathan wrote a book (a compilation of his conversations with his Facebook friends) and declared his intention to contest for the presidency on the same social media platform. The social media has been credited as one of the propellers for the victory of President Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015 presidential elections (Said-Moorhouse, 2015).

Nigeria has a population of about 170 million people, out of which 86,219,965 are Internet users, with an internet penetration of 46.1% which contributes 2.5% to the over 3.4 billion global Internet users (InternetLiveStats, 2016). The top ten most visited sites by Nigerian netizens (citizens of the Internet) are: Google.com, Google.com.ng, Facebook.com, Yahoo.com, Youtube.com, Twitter.com, Jumia.com.ng, LinkedIn.com, Nairaland.com and Instagram.com (Alexis, 2016). This shows that Facebook is the most frequented social media platform in Nigeria. The statistics of Facebook usage in Africa (released by Nunu Ntshingila, Head of Africa at Facebook) shows that 7.1 million Nigerians use Facebook daily and 15 million each month (Mbalo, 2015). The report also indicated that “95 percent of Facebook users in Kenya are active on Facebook mobile while that of Nigeria and South Africa is at a 100 percent”

(Fadoju, 2015).

But despite these positives, social media was employed in spreading ethnic hatred after the Kenyan elections in 2007 (Makinen and Kuira, 2008; Njoroge, Kimani and Kikech, 2011) and the 2015 Nigeria's presidential elections (Egbunike, Ihebuzor and Onyechi, 2015). Thus political storytelling, even that enabled by the social media, tend not to be devoid of ethnic sentiments characteristic of divided societies. The advent of democracy in 1999 after over thirty years of military dictatorship opened up the freedom of speech but also resulted in the expression of bottled up grievances.

Military rule only served to deepen these cleavages by disrupting all attempts at acquiring political identities that cut across ethnic boundaries necessary for the growth of a political culture. With all avenues of social, political and economic relations closed, citizens were forced to return to these ethnic cocoons especially in the face of military politics of exclusion. Thus, after nearly thirty years of military rule, these pan ethnic associations have remained the seedbeds for the struggle for access to the resources and largesse of the state (Kukah, 2012:346).

Social media being the new public square was not spared this virulent ethnocentric rhetoric. Thus this study determined the extent that ethnicity plays in political storytelling on Facebook from two perspectives: that of the individual and in relation to his/her Facebook friends. This study also investigated if Facebook mediated political storytelling advances ethnic cohesion or propagates ethnic stereotypes.

Ethnicity and nationhood in Africa

Ethnicity as a concept has piqued the interest of scholars in political science, sociology, African studies and political communication. The reason is seen in the ever-reoccurring ethnic clashes, which result in violence, misery and death. "Violent and intractable internal conflicts in recent years in Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan point to a failure of states in sub-Saharan Africa to cope with ethnicity" (Welch, 1996:477). As much as this stands true, Africa is not alone in the scourge of ethnicity.

Nigeria is an ethnic fault-line state, more like a salad-bowl model with

different ethnic nationalities holding on to their prejudices. Similarly, some Western nations like the USA were built on the ideal model of multiculturalism and ethnic integration. Their model still remains an ideal because despite centuries of nationhood, USA still grapples with ethnicity. Since 2015, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has trended on social media following different clashes of African Americans with the police.

Contrary to expectations implicit in the image of the 'melting pot' that ethnic distinctions could be eliminated in U.S. society, the resurgence of ethnic nationalism in the United States and around the world has prompted social scientists to rethink models of ethnicity rooted in assumptions about the inevitability of assimilation (Nagel, 1994:154)

The "melting pot" approach of assimilation proposes that in a multi-ethnic society, all the interacting groups contribute from their respective ethnicity to produce one common melting pot. The emergent ethnicity, although a sum of the varying ethnic groups, is substantially different from the contributing groups. This is because the emergent ethnicity has been enriched and cemented into one. Nonetheless, Nagel warns that "the failure of American 'melting pot' is a qualified one" (1994, 154) since some ethnic groups have melted more into one cooking pot than the others. The whites, for instance, have been assimilated more into the American ethnicity than their black counterparts.

Nonetheless, ethnicity in Africa dates back to the balkanization of the continent by the imperial colonial masters. Not that ethnicity started with the advent of European incursion into Africa, but that the differences in origin were not obvious since each group rarely had contact with the others.

African ethnicities are new not old, part of complex responses to colonial modernity. In the pre-colonial world the most striking features of African identities and communities was their fluidity, heterogeneity and hybridity; a social world of multiple, overlapping and alternate identities with significant movement of peoples, intermingling of communities and cultural and linguistic borrowing. The boundaries of communities were frequently ambiguous and identities contextually

variable. The African states encountered by European colonizers in the 19th century were largely of relatively recent historical origin and by contemporary conceptions multi-ethnic in composition, ruling with rather loose tributary relationships over linguistically and culturally diverse groups. Both ethnic political movements and territorial nationalism in Africa are of the same recent historical origins; neither is 'natural' and both are responses to the colonial introduction of the institutions of modernity in the state and market (Berman, 2010: 2).

One of the fathers of Kenya's independence, Tom Mboya, equally argues that ethnicity has not always had a negative connotation. Mboya enumerated the "positive contributions of tribalism" as the "interdependence within the community" (Mboya, 1963:68). Individual members of each clan do not work exclusively for personal gain. Thus, service to all and communality became a hallmark of African ethnic groups. However, Mboya blames colonialism for building "tribal antagonism":

The European colonial powers and even missionaries... made it easier to influence the people, if they could find an amenable tribe to use against another tribe which was hostile. This was the straightforward tactic of 'divide and rule', and it cannot be excused as part of the British public school attitude of administrators backing 'my team' against the 'other chaps' (Mboya, 1963:70-71).

This bitter cleavage ignited by colonialism continues to plague the continent till date. Obviously the reason was to make the protectorates easier to govern for the European government. Thus ethnicity was employed as a tool to create a unified but artificial nation: "the imperial colonial power sought to create a non-unified protectorate, and so enforced ethnic, linguistic, and regional differences by initiating a competition for scarce resources and favours from the British" (Kenny, 2006:10). The struggle for limited resources intensified the ethnic rivalry. In addition, the ruling colonial masters took advantage of the ethnic antagonisms between the different groups. Sadly, while the various groups fought, their masters used the ethnic distrust between them to consolidate their political power.

The "us" against "them" that were planted in Africa by the colonialists has

led to many ethnic conflicts despite the semblance of nation states. The effects still resonate till date: ethnic tensions in Zambia (Bates, 1970), ethnic relations in post-apartheid South Africa (Welch, 1996), the horrors of the Rwandan ethnic genocide (Ilibagiza and Erwin, 2006), and the ethnic wars of Burundi and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Vollhardt et al, 2007). The ethno-religious political history of Nigeria has also been characterised by bloodshed of a bestial magnitude since independence (Michel, 1997; Anugwom, 2000; Irobi, 2005; Boer, 2004; Yusuf, 2007; Boer, 2008; Boer, 2009; Galadima, 2010; Je'adayibe and Kudu, 2010). Thus one can infer that nationhood in the African continent is still in the process of becoming: an evolution that started with colonial intrusion but continues still with political ethnicity.

Political storytelling

Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT) distinguishes local communities in terms of communication infrastructure that can be activated to construct a common community, and by so doing ferment civic engagement for a common purpose (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006). CIT has three classifications for storytelling and their audiences: macro, meso and micro storytelling agents. The macro-storytellers are the mainstream media (newspapers, radio and television). However, greater focus has now been made on meso- and micro-storytellers due to research in the United States which showed that macro-storytellers have fared well in igniting storytelling in neighbourhoods (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Meso-level community storytellers are community organizations, "all the way from informal grassroots formations to formal non-profit organisations" (Kim and Ball-Rokeach, 2006). Matei and Ball-Rokeach (2003) describe the internet as a meso-storyteller. Micro-level storytellers include residents, as in family, friendship or neighbourhood networks.

The following is a summary of the qualities that have necessitated the categorizations. For instance, macro storytelling agents are usually the big media outlets like mainstream media and other agencies with PR potentials. On the other hand, meso storytelling agents have local impact and are not large communication corporations. Examples include: community based organizations like residents or religious associations, local media and the Internet. Micro storytelling agents are interpersonal communication networks.

Storytelling is the act of constructing identity through narrative discourse,

and storytelling in neighbourhoods is the act of constructing identity as a member of a residential neighbourhood (Ball-Rokeach, Kim and Matei, 2001). In other words, neighbourhood storytelling is any type of communicative action that addresses residents, their local communities, and their lives in those communities (Ball-Rokeach et al, 2001).

Black (2008) is convinced that storytelling is an integral part of identity negotiation. Storytelling among neighbours creates the basis of exploring ways in which they are tied to one another and to a larger group, which furthers deliberation by giving neighbours a shared identification and sense of belonging to a community. Thus the triumph of the 'we' over the 'I' bonds is a requisite to the formation of interpersonal and collective modes of neighbourly association.

CIT classifies the internet as a meso agent. Matei et al (2003) discovered that the internet has been partially integrated in the 'communication infrastructure' of the English-speaking Los Angeles neighbourhoods. They also find that internet connectedness is associated with civic participation and is indirectly responsible for the bond existing in that residential community. However, the story was not same in predominantly Asian and Latino areas of the same district. For the internet was disengaged from communication environments that lead to belonging but rather associated with mainstream media. The reason for this disconnection was that most Latinos are immigrants and as such have little or no access to the internet. Matei et al (2003) came to the conclusion that the internet is a meso-agent, especially with its propensity to nudge people to identify with their community based organizations, thus fuelling more storytelling in the neighbourhood.

Whereas similar studies have been conducted in the global North, not much has been heard from the global South. Ojebode and Egbunike (unpublished) investigated the communication infrastructure present in two religious student associations in the University of Ibadan. Their findings showed that the differences between Christians and Muslim students were not polarized. In other words, both student associations had similar communication infrastructures and their differences were only accidental, based on their religious persuasion. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has yet sought to assess how social media as a meso agent influences political storytelling in Nigeria and/or its relationship with ethnicity.

From the reviewed literature and theoretical background, these are the three research questions for this study:

1. To what extent is ethnicity represented in the individual's political storytelling on Facebook?
2. To what extent does the ethnicity of others influence the individual's political storytelling on Facebook?
3. Does Facebook political storytelling promote ethnic stereotypes or advance ethnic cohesion?

Methodology

Survey was adopted for this study because it emphasizes the actor-environment interplay. The research instrument was an open-ended questionnaire which was launched on Qualtrics.com – https://qtrial2016q1az1.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6ygmKv94rar7X6t – [it has since been closed and thus no longer active]. The questionnaire contained 13 items: the first four sought answers to demographic information (age, gender, number of years on Facebook and ethnic group) while the others were crafted to provide answers to the research questions. Four of the ten items were qualitative while the other six sought quantitative responses. The tool was validated by reviews and comments by peers.

The study population was Nigerian Facebook users. The instrument was shared on Facebook and respondents were self selected to participate. A total of 70 respondents constituted the sample size for this study. Data collection started on June 1, 2016 and was closed on July 11, 2016. Analyses were both qualitative and quantitative. The data was analyzed using simple frequency counts and percentages.

Findings

Forty-seven males (67.14%) and twenty-three females (32.86%) responded to the survey. Most (55) respondents have been on Facebook for 6-10 years (78.6%); 14 of them for 2-5 years (20%) and one person for 1 year (1.4%). The age range frequency count is as follows: 18-25 (10), 26-30 (11), 31-35 (22) and 36 years and above were 27. Although those above 36 years were more however, a cumulative count of young people (18-35) was 33.

Table 1: Ethnic group of respondents

S/No	Ethnic group	Frequency	(%)
1.	Igbo	30	42.86
2.	Yoruba	18	25.71
3.	Esan	4	5.71
4.	Hausa/Fulani	4	5.71
5.	Tiv	2	2.86
6.	Ibibio	2	2.86
7.	Urhobo	2	2.86
8.	Ukwani	1	1.43
9.	Higgi	1	1.43
10.	Efik	1	1.43
11.	Idoma	1	1.43
12.	Ogori	1	1.43
13.	Itsekiri	1	1.43
14.	Izon	1	1.43
15.	Afemai	1	1.43
	Total	70	100

The highest ethnic group is Igbo (30) followed by Yoruba (18) with Esan and Hausa/Fulani taking a third joint place with 4 frequency counts respectively.

The extent to which ethnicity affects the individual's political storytelling on Facebook

The answer to research question one was determined by qualitative and quantitative items in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked how they present ethnicity in their political conversations on their Facebook timeline. The answers, as shown in the dominant themes in table 2, were instructive:

S/No	Themes	Examples from respondents
1.	Sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am more sensitive to issues affecting my ethnicity • I present it with caution • It's a sensitive topic I generally stay away from.
2.	Balanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced with some leaning towards my ethnicity • I am not sure I have had such discourses on my timeline. However, when I engage in such, I try to maintain a balanced view in my approach. • Well, I try as much as possible to be diplomatic and subtle when presenting issues that affect negatively other ethnic groups, however, not concealing the truth.
3.	Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I try to be as objective as possible... • I try to be as objective as possible and not let ethnic sentiments come into play in my dealings/discussions. • Objectively
4.	Neutral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm very neutral. I mostly stay clear of it. • More neutral than polar • Am neutral
5.	Hardly or Never	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardly discuss ethnicity or deliberately avoid it • I have never posted anything that borders on that on my timeline. • I rarely go on about ethnicity because it is not as important as the need for equal rights in politics. • I deliberately avoid commenting or ethnically biased political conversations. • I do not. I think it is divisive. Rarely, however, I will use it to talk about bad politics and policies going on in my own region, and say for instance that I am an indigene, it hurts me to say this but I have to.
6.	Mutual respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without insulting other ethnic groups • I present ethnicity in a positive light as God's gift, signified in the beauty of healthy diversity, working for the common good. • With mutual respect

There are six themes in table 2 which was classified into positive and negative attributes. The positive attributes include themes like: sensitive, balanced, objective, and neutral or showed mutual respect in their political storytelling around ethnicity on their Facebook timeline. The only negative theme in table 2 is 'hardly or never.' It is therefore safe to infer that respondents exhibited more positive ethnic attributes on their Facebook posts. However, this cannot be generalized although it gives an insight to the quantitative data on table 3.

Table 3: Respondents who have been called out by their Facebook friend(s) for posting or sharing divisive ethnic stories on their timeline

Answer	%	Count
Yes	14.29%	10
No	71.43%	50
I cannot recall	14.29%	10
Decline to comment	0.00%	0
Total	100%	70

Majority of the respondents (50%) said they have never been called out by their Facebook friends for posting or sharing divisive ethnic stories on their timeline and only 10% answered in the affirmative or could not recall respectively. In other words, both qualitative (table 2) and quantitative (table 3) answers the first research question on how ethnicity is represented in the political storytelling of the respondents Facebook posts. The next section will address the second research question.

The extent to which the ethnicity of others influences the individual's political storytelling on Facebook

In this section, we shall present findings that show how the ethnicity of one's friends on Facebook influences the storytelling of an individual. Table 4 is a representation of the dominant themes of respondents' perception of how their Facebook friends present ethnicity in their political conversations.

Table 4: Dominant themes of respondents' perception of how their friends on Facebook present ethnicity in their political conversations

S/No	Themes	Examples from respondents
1.	Bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is bias. • Most of my friends on Facebook are biased when it comes to ethnicity in their political conversations on Facebook. • Some of them are quite biased.
2.	Tribalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good number are tribalistic. • Most are considerably very tribalistic. • Most often tribal sentiments.
3.	Marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Igbos among them clamour for autonomy because they feel marginalized by the Nigerian government. • Quite a number of them try to pass their messages in a subtle and diplomatic manner but I have one outstanding friend who is pro -Biafra; he daily posts on the pro -Biafra protests all over the world, the marginalization of Igbos, the need for secession and his hatred for other ethnic groups (Hausas, especially).
4.	Bigotry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloody bigots • A few are bigots and when it gets to some level especially when they incite hatred or when the argument is faulty but the person is so blinded by ethnicity to the point of being unreasonable. I simply unfriend them.
5.	Subjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly one sided • Mostly skewed towards their ethnicity • Subjectively • Stories meant to highlight the failings of other ethnic groups politically are usually shared, the reverse is the case for stories about their own ethnic groups
6.	Mutual respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of my friends are not ethnic bigots, I rarely see my friends taking sides with ethnic interests when discussing politics. • Most of my friends are neutral while presenting such topics. Some stay away from the topic. A handful are quite vocal about how they feel.
7.	Tolerant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly tolerant but a few shocking and ignorant views. • Varies from person to person. Sometimes respectful. • Most of my friends on Facebook are not politically inclined. But the few who has interest in politics are not biased. They also present ethnicity in a mild way, except for the few extremists.
8.	A mixed bag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My "friends" on Facebook do this in a whole spectrum...they can be quite biased, passionate in a good way or all round hate speech... I will then proceed to delete and block those fond of sharing or making hate speech. I have a strict policy on this. • Some of my friends share my view of ethnicity. Others see it as irreconcilable human difference which results in polarized conversations and the inability to unite our ethnic resources for pursuing the common good. • There are always stories with different ethnic connotations/interpretations on Facebook. • It varies, from the good to the distasteful.

There are eight themes in table 4: five of which can be considered negative (bias, tribalism, marginalization, bigotry and subjective) while two have positive connotations (mutual respect and tolerance). The last one is a mixture of the good and bad of ethnic political conversation on their friends' Facebook wall.

Table 5: The extent that ethnicity of one's Facebook friends influence the type of political stories one share on his/her wall

Answer	%	Count
Very great extent	7.14%	5
Great extent	14.29%	10
Very little extent	42.86%	30
No extent	35.71%	25
Total	100%	70

Table 5 shows that most respondents' political storytelling on their Facebook wall is not influenced by the ethnicity of their Facebook friends – very little extent (42.86%). This pales in comparison by those who are influenced to a very great extent (7.14%) and great extent (14.29%) respectively.

Table 6: Respondents who have called out their Facebook friend(s) for posting or sharing divisive ethnic stories on their timeline

Answer	%	Count
Yes	50.00%	35
No	45.71%	32
I cannot recall	4.29%	3
Decline to comment	0.00%	0
Total	100%	70

The figures above shows that 50% of respondents have reacted to divisive ethnic stories posted on their timelines by calling out their Facebook friend(s). On the other hand, 45.7% did not react while 4.3% can't recall. From the findings in this second research questions, one can infer that although people are not influenced by the ethnicity of their Facebook friends, as regards the type of political storytelling on their Facebook wall (table 5) yet they react to the ethnic virulence of their Facebook friends. This is either expressed by calling out their friends for their disconcerting posts

(table 6) or the respondents' perception of the ethnic content of their Facebook friends posts (table 4). The next section will look at the findings of the third research question.

How Facebook political storytelling either promotes ethnic stereotypes or advances ethnic cohesion

In order to answer this last research question, the findings from three items in the questionnaire are examined below.

Table 7: Promoting ethnic unity in diversity through political conversations on Facebook

Answer	%	Count
Strongly agree	7.14%	5
Agree	18.57%	13
Disagree	35.71%	25
Strongly Disagree	18.57%	13
I cannot say	20.00%	14
Total	100%	70

Most respondents do not agree – disagree (35.7%) and strongly disagree (18.6%) – that political conversations on Facebook have promoted ethnic unity. This perception was repeated in table 8 below.

Table 8: Promoting ethnic stereotypes through political conversations on Facebook

Answer	%	Count
Strongly agree	20.00%	14
Agree	51.43%	36
Disagree	4.29%	3
Strongly disagree	4.29%	3
I cannot say	20.00%	14
Total	100%	70

A great majority of respondents affirmed that political conversations on Facebook deepen ethnic stereotypes – strongly agree (20%) and agree (51%) respectively. From the similarity in both tables 7 and 8, we now go to the qualitative data in table 9 to give a voice to these numbers.

Table 9: Dominant themes on Facebook and the discourse of ethnicity in Nigeria

S/No	Themes	Examples from respondents
1.	Useful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook is a great platform on the discussion of many issues which ethnicity is one of them. Although there are still some demerits to it but the advantages outweighs the disadvantages. Up to 16 million active users in Nigeria...would be great. I just have no say in politics. I do what I believe is right and would rather let my friends learn from my example than engage in arguments. Has to be encouraged.
2.	Mixed bag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploited for good and bad measure. Facebook is used for sincere expression. People say things as they are. Facebook has been a great tool to understand other ethnics [groups] and how all ethnic [groups] feel about one another. Double edged sword. It fuels hatred in a sense. Yet again, Facebook affords us the opportunity to see different ethnic groups in new perspectives which may be good or bad.
3.	Hate speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It allows people to hide behind keyboards while spewing out venom they wouldn't have given different circumstances. It's an avenue for the cowards to showcase their shallow minds, It is important, and must be closely analyzed and studied empirically for use in local politics in Nigeria, especially in the fields of civic education and outreach to the people. Things like Biafra agitation via hate speech have been propagated via Facebook.
4.	Value neutral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook is a powerful tool for mobilization, enlightenment and positive change, provided those who use the social media understand the role of values in shaping the discourses and conversations which they engage in. Facebook is value neutral. It is what we do with it that determines what comes out of it. Garbage in, garbage out. So people need to know that peaceful coexistence is better than conflicts, and that God has blessed us with these powerful social media for connecting the whole of humanity in one fell swoop of history.
5.	Freedom of expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I believe that Facebook gives people the opportunity to air their views with regards the ethnicity in Nigeria. There is this freedom that Facebook users have while online that they give their views irrespective of the consequence particularly since they cannot be attacked physically on the spot. I give no room for understanding. Facebook only creates room for expression.
6.	Ethnic integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If harnessed well, Facebook will be a tool for ethnic integration and Frank engagement among the ethnic entities. I have met very wonderful people on Facebook. I have also learned a lot about some of the ethnic entities in our country for example I never knew people from Badagry had their own language and ethnic identity different from Yoruba. As far as I knew, everyone from Lagos state was Yoruba. It is unavoidable, however there are people who promote unity and celebrate good deeds of people outside their ethnic groups. The medium doesn't matter; we will always find a way to air our views and biases. I believe Facebook conversations are breaking down ethnic barriers surely but slowly.
7.	Divisive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divisive, enlightening and provocative. Forum to vent and seek recognition. Can be quite divisive. It has been very divisive. Discussions are fuelling the divisions and

The themes in table 9 are varied. There are three positive (useful, freedom of expression, ethnic integration), four negative (hate speech, divisive, trolling/cyber bullying and ethnic stereotypes) with two neutral (mix-bag and value neutral) themes. Thus from the findings therein, the answer to the third research question is that the political storytelling on Facebook promotes ethnic stereotypes.

Discussion

The assessment of self by respondents as regards their political storytelling and ethnicity yielded positive attributes (table 2). Majority stated that they had never been admonished by their Facebook friends for sharing divisive ethnic posts on their Facebook wall (table 3). Thus, the responses to the first research question shows that respondents acted with responsible maturity when discussing ethnicity. This was not the case with findings from the second research question where data suggests that 'other' Facebook friends' political storytelling was characterised by bigotry, bias, tribalism, subjectivism and cries of marginalization (table 4). They therefore called out their neighbours on Facebook for the virulence of ethnic storytelling (table 6). Interestingly, just like in tables 2 and 3, netizens re-affirmed that the ethnicity of their Facebook neighbours did not determine their own ethnic political storytelling (table 5).

The contrast in the first and second research questions point out the difficulty of self-assessment. Respondents had no inhibition in pointing out the ethnic bias of their Facebook friends – 'others' – political narration but absolved themselves of any blame. Here we find once again the prejudicial distinction between 'we' and 'them' that fuels ethnocentrism (Welch, 1996 and Berman, 2010). This cleavage has been a dominant feature of pre-colonial African states. The forced amalgamation of diverse ethnic nationalities into states despite their inherent differences has not aided nation building. Thus each ethnic nationality still holds her primordial interests over and above those of the nation state. Consequently the politics of power sharing and nation building in Africa will still be determined by ethnic entrepreneurship (Kukah, 2011). These findings also validate that Nigeria, like other African states, is still a nation in evolution. The ethnic cleavages which were suppressed during the dark era of military dictatorship have resurfaced with democracy. The participatory freedom characteristic of the digital space has only amplified it.

Facebook as an agent of ethnic cohesion or division was the focus of the third

research question. The verdict by tables 7 and 8 ruled that the political storytelling on Facebook aided ethnic divisions. The whole essence of communication infrastructure theory was to determine identity creation (Black, 2008) in residential neighbourhoods (Matei et al, 2003). This study validates the Internet as a meso-agent in identity construction for this virtual neighbourhood of Facebook users in Nigeria. The neighbour of the 21st century is not a block away but a click away (a nearby social media profile). However findings also call for caution because although the Internet remains a neutral technology – which can be used for both good and evil – it is certainly not populated by innocent netizens. The lack of tact and irresponsibility that Facebook confers in brewing ethnocentrism (tables 7 and 8) was consistent with reviewed literature. For instance, in the aftermath of the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria, twitter users propagated ethnic hate speech (Egbunike et al, 2015). Similar situation led to an ethnic war in Kenya after the 2011 presidential elections (Makinen and Kuiru, 2008; Njoroge et al, 2011).

This study has shown that people who promote virulent ethnocentric speech can hijack the digital space. Freedom of speech is sacrosanct – online and offline – however, free speech is not absolute. Our freedom is a shared freedom, limited by the freedom of others. Netizens must draw the line between free speech and arbitrary spite. Nonetheless, online ethnic hate speech in Nigeria is only a manifestation of a deeper problem – the absence of a strong nation state. For a fault line state, the lasting solution lies in healing the cleavages that promotes ethnic division offline. This also means the triumph of a national identity that transcends the opportunistic ethnocentric group identity, which has been the bane of Nigeria's nationhood. This is the only way of ensuring that Nigeria transforms from a nation state in becoming (an amalgamation of hostile ethnic groups) into a nation state in essence (a diverse nation made up of fully integrated ethnicities). Then and only then, will this part of the old national anthem be fulfilled: though tribe and tongue may differ/In brotherhood we stand.

Conclusion

The conversation among scholars has shown how social media has changed the communication landscape. As such the crushing of gatekeepers, the inherent freedom and participatory nature of social media platforms is no longer novel. However the implication for a fragile state like Nigeria made up of varying and competing ethnic nationalities is self-evident. If social media becomes an avenue for spreading ethnocentrism in political

storytelling, then the end is near. However, ethnic hate speech online is only a mirror of the offline ethnic rivalry. Thus the underlying structures that promote and abate ethnic hate have to be fully addressed. This will not only end online ethnic vile speech but more importantly, will consolidate Nigeria's nationhood. This study definitely does not have the last say but hopes to trigger more evaluations on the intersection of nation building, ethnicity, political storytelling and social media in Nigeria.

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