Influence Of Social Media On The Spread of Information About The 2019 Xenophobic Attack On Nigerians In South Africa.

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Abstract
The study investigated the influence of social media on the spread of information about the September 2019 Xenophobic attack on Nigerians in South Africa. The aim of the study was to find out the genre of social media platform through which residents obtained information about the incident, find out if the residents were aware of the causes of the attacks and the social media platform through which they re-broadcast the information. The study was essentially a survey of 400 Minna residents, randomly drawn; questionnaire was used as research instrument. The findings show that the rate of diffusion was very swift, and that more respondents used Watsapp to first learn and follow-up the event Also most of the respondents were unaware of the causes of the attacks. Further findings revealed that Watsapp, Facebook and YouTube respectively were the major social media platforms through which residents in Minna rebroadcast the information. The study recommended that the government should do more of educating and sensitizing her citizens on the ills of attacking foreigners and to emphasize the economic and social benefits they stand to gain in terms of developments in their country. Government should implement stringent rules and punishment to citizens who spare head any form on xenophobic attack on foreigners amongst others.

Keywords: Xenophobia, New media, Diffusion of Information, Fake News and Misinformation

Introduction

Diffusion research in the third world countries often center on diffusion of innovation and not news diffusion (Rosengren, 1973, p.83 in Kur 2004) The reason, arguably, is the heavy emphasis third world countries place on development communication (McQuail, 1987, p.272). For this reason, diffusion research is often aimed at solving practical problems (applied research) rather than developing theory (basic research). This explains the avalanche of studies in third world on diffusion of information about agriculture, health and educational innovations

This study as a departure is on news diffusion of a shocking and unexpected event that is political in nature. Two concepts are associated with news diffusion. These are diffusion and learning, while diffusion is a group of process, learning is an individual process. Diffusion of a news event may be affected by event variables (times of occurrence, degree of importance e.g) and by group or system variables (media structure, social structure etc).

The individual leaning of the news may be affected by event variables, group or system variables, such as age, sex, education, interest and knowledge (Rosengren, 1973, p.83 in Kur 2004). Literature on news diffusion shows that much of the work (done in the U.S.) produced similar results. While a greater proportion of the audience heard of an event through interpersonal sources, mass media quickly assumed dominant information role.

On the contrary, things have changed as a result of innovation in technology. Social media platform are swifter in the spread of news or information with the speed of light unlike the traditional media. This statement is corroborated by Gerret, Karin & Lars. (2018) when they admitted that Social media today play a more important role as a news source than ever before... findings in their study revealed that a comparison of the social media platforms has shown that Twitter as a social media platform is more commonly used as a news source

Furthermore, Social networks originated from e-mail and are now the most widely used applications. With the evolution of social networks, there are more and more new platforms, e.g., Facebook and Flickr in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, and Sina Micro-blog in 2009. The ways in which people obtain information have changed.

In the past, individuals were passive receivers of information but now they are active publishers and communicators. When a piece of information flows from one individual or

community to another in a network ,then an information diffusion process also known as information propagation, information spread, or information dissemination has occurred. Much research effort has been put into analyzing information diffusion, with most studies investigating which factors affect information diffusion, which information diffuses most quickly, and how information is disseminated

These questions are answered using information diffusion models and other methods, which play an important role in understanding the diffusion phenomenon. This study may not know why the information flows to this direction in social networks, although we have seen the advantages of a social network in information diffusion which keeps everyone abreast of happenings around the world including our immediate environment.

It is against this backdrop that the study sought to conduct a research on the influence of social media in the spread of information on xenophobia among Minna residents. To find out which social media platform resident got the information about the xenophobic attack and the medium through which they diffused the information among others.

Statement of the Problem

One of the beautiful things that make a research credible is the ability to leverage on current trends in a particular area of study amongst others. This study is centered on diffusion of information as it relates to the 2019 xenophobic attack on Nigerian in South Africa. This study is in a way different from previous studies by scholars of mass communication as reflected in the review of empirical studies in this work.

It is observed that most of the information sources by previous studies were basically on traditional media. This may be due to the fact that social media was relatively not in vogue as it is today. Hence this study is relevant in terms of adopting current technological innovation in diffusion of information among residents of Minna Niger State about the attack.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the influence of social media on the spread of information about Xenophobia among Minna residents. The specific objective is:

1. To ascertain the social media platforms through which they know about the attacks

2. To ascertain the residents awareness of the cause(s) of the xenophobic attacks
3. To ascertain the social media platforms through which the residents spread the information

Review of Empirical Studies

Gerret, Karin & Lars (2018).carried out a study on sourcing the source: An analysis of the use of Twitter and Facebook as a journalistic source over 10 years in The New York Times posit that social media today play a more important role as a news source than ever before. Yet, there have been no longitudinal studies on journalists' sourcing practices in recent years that allow one to consider the mechanisms of innovation diffusion. Comparative studies of different social platforms in different media systems are just as rare.

They therefore examined the use of Facebook and Twitter as journalistic sources in newspapers of three countries. A main finding is that, after a period of stagnation at the beginning of this decade, the use of social media sources has resurged massively in recent years.

The patterns of this second rise of social media in journalism according to their study are almost identical in the analyzed newspapers. Their findings also show that a comparison of the social media platforms has shown that Twitter is more commonly used as a news source than Facebook. Compared to Facebook, Twitter is primarily used as an elite channel. An unsupervised topic clustering approach (LDA) also revealed that the issues on which social media are sourced and the quantities of social media references are similar in The New York Times and The Guardian. In S€uddeutsche Zeitung, however journalists source social media considerably less, and in different thematic contexts.

Kur in (2004) carried out a study on diffusion of news about the attempted assassination of Governor George Akume of Benue State. The study was a essentially a survey on Makurdi residents. It investigated the patterns of news diffusion about the attempted assassination of Benue State Governor, George Akume on March 3,2004. A total of 300 Makurdi residents, were randomly drawn, while questionnaire was used to generate data and chi-square to test hypotheses. The findings show that the rate of diffusion was not swift, and that more respondents used radio to first learn and follow-up the event Also more of the respondents who were at home first heard the event through radio while those who were outside home first heard through a face-to-face source Supporters and non-supporters of the governor alike turned to the radio more than other sources for follow-up information about the event

Furthermore, due to the relatedness of the study to that of Kur 2004, the study therefore adopted his review of studies to serve as a bedrock and foundation for this present study. According to him, one of the earliest studies on news diffusion outside the U.S. was that of the diffusion of news about the marriage of Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudcan.

Trudcan, the 51-year-old bachelor Prime Minister was secretly married to Margaret Sinclair, 22, in Vancouver, British Columbia, on Thursday evening, March 4, 1971. News of the marriage as reported by Fathi (1973, p.271-277), spread with great speed. Half of the respondents knew of the event within 15 minutes after the news release. The rapid diffusion was due mostly to Twitter which reached two-thirds of its eventual first-exposure audience within 15 minutes. Interpersonal channels took 45 minutes and radio two hours to reach half of their respective audiences Radio was the most often used source for confirmation for the news. Interpersonal sources were used more than other sources in spreading the news.

In another study by Fine (1975, p.751-755) about diffusion of a major news event (the decision of Spire Agnew to resign as Vice President of the United State), interpersonal communication was found to be important. Seventy percent of the respondents claimed they first heard the news through interpersonal sources Haroldsen & Harvey's (1979, pp.771-775 in Kur 2004) study of diffusion of shocking good news produced similar results. The subject of the study was the 1978 announcement, in the US, by the Momon Church that blacks could finally hold the priesthood. The announcement followed 150 years of discrimination against blacks in holding priestly office.

The study produced three striking results: firstly, News does not have to be bad or calamitous to ignite the interpersonal communications system, although there are at least a couple of elements which are probably required: a considerable importance and probable effect for a large portion of the population, and some significant shock value. Secondly, when news does travel through the 1nterpersonal channels, it does not have as much credibility as when it is received through the mass media, and thirdly, most of those who receive information on a shocking news event from interpersonal channels turn immediately to the mass media for verification

Studies on news discussion about the assassination of President JF Kennedy suggest that certain factors determine the number of people that learnt of a calamitous event through

interpersonal channels. These factors include: when the event occurs; when the media cover it, and where the people are when the media begin their coverage (Greenberg, 1964, pp.225-232 in Kur 2004).

As the results of these studies indicate, interpersonal sources become most important in disseminating events that occur and are picked up by the media on weekdays, during working hours. For events that break during evening, when broadcast media broadcast on weekends, when most people are not at work, interpersonal sources are probably utilized less (Gantz, 1983,p.64)

The diffusion of news about the attempted Reagan assassination followed an almost similar pattern. Fifty-five percent of the respondents first heard the news from the mass media. Television (33 percent) was more frequently a source than radio (22 percent). Forty-five percent first heard the news from interpersonal sources (Gantz, 1983, p.60 in Kur 2004) Because the shooting of Reagan occurred on a weekday afternoon and news of it was disseminated almost immediately, only 45 percent of respondents were at home when they first heard of the news, while 39 percent were at work (an additional eight percent were in transit, two percent in school, two percent in shopping, and five percent elsewhere, eg, visiting) Seventy-one percent of those at home heard the news from the broadcast media. For those at home who did first hear from an interpersonal source, that source was almost as likely to be over the telephone (13 percent) and face-to-face (16 percent). These findings were almost exactly reversed for those at work

Gantz, Krendl and Robertson (1986, pp.282-287 in Kur 2004), in their study of diffusion of a prominent event, focused attention on the follow-up process. The results showed that, for a prominent event, people are active seekers rather than passive consumers of news. They actively pursue additional information from relatively accessible channels about events salient to their lives.

The results also underscore the vital role the media play in the news dissemination, information-acquisition process. despite the vitality of interpersonal sources in the initial diffusion of news events, the media offer Substantive, follow-up information about events that merit their attention in terms of the forms of media people use most in the follow-up process,

Chukwumerije (1987, p.131 in Kur 2004) found that newspapers and magazines standout. This is followed by radio and television in that order Chukwumerije studied how news about the change of leadership in Nigeria (as a result of the assassination of General Murtala Muhammed on February 13, 1976) was received and disseminated by Nigerian students in Northern California. He found that the fastest sources of news from Nigeria to the overseas students were radio, telephone calls, television and newspapers in that order while interpersonal channels were found to be the main sources of dispersion of the news, newspapers and magazines were the main sources of follow-up of the event

The present study, replicating the methodology of most of the previous studies reviewed here, was set to understand the pattern of news diffusion on social media in respect to the 2019 xenophobic attack on Nigerians in South Africa.

This study is in a way different from the reviewed studies as noted by Kur, (2004, pp 142-144) it is observed that most of the information sources by previous studies were basically on traditional media. This may be due to the fact that social media was relatively not in vogue as it is today. Hence this study is relevant in terms of adopting current technological innovation in diffusion of information. Moreover, this study is hinged on three theoretical platforms unlike other studies that had no theoretical stand point. Also the subject matter in this study is a very recent one which makes the study current and relevant.

Theoretical Framework

Three media theories provided a framework for this study. These are: mediamorphesis, libertarian media theory and agenda setting theory. Mediamorphosis theory was propounded by Roger Fidler in 1997. The theory explains the transformation of communication media, usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovations. The essence of the theory, according to Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso (2008, p. 191), "is the idea that the media, as other systems, respond to external pressures with a spontaneous process of self-reorganization." This suggests that the new media propagate dominant traits of earlier forms. It is, therefore, assumed that the new media will perform the role of the media although with slight modifications.

Libertarian media theory emphasizes that the media serve as "free market place of ideas" where the people are free to clearly express themselves (Folarin, 1998). He further states that in

its most basic form, "libertarian theory prescribes that; an individual should be free to publish what he or she likes and to hold and express opinion freely."

In relation to this study, it is assumed that, the new media will offer citizens an opportunity to hold and express opinions, ideas and information about xenophobia that will enlighten and keep people abreast of the xenophobic killings of Nigerians in South Africa.

Agenda setting theory posits that media agenda determines or influences public agenda. According to Mboho & Iwokwagh (2006, p. 52), there is "a close relationship between media content and audience's perception of important events in society." The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in the fact that the new media's emphasis on xenophobic killings in South Africa will re-orient and enlighten the masses on the barbaric treatment by South African meted to foreigners especially Nigerians and the need to imbibe peaceful co-existence with others.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design to generate adequate data for the study with the questionnaire as instrument. The choice of survey research method was informed by its outstanding qualities and experts' submission that it enhances efforts at finding meaning and obtaining understanding of the present conditions, attitudes, opinions and beliefs, its relative cheapness considering the amount of information gathered and the large number of people derive from the entire population and share basic characteristics of the elements that make up that population (Wimmer & Dominick, 2005).

The population of the study consists of residents in Minna metropolis, specifically respondents were purposively chosen from two geographical settlements in Minna, namely Bosso and Chanchaga. The choice of the two towns was based on the fact that they are located in the State capital. The population of the two zones was derived from the 2006 National population census. The population of adult male and female in Bosso L.G.A. is 148,136 while that of Chanchaga is 202,151 respectively. Therefore, the population of the study is 350,287.

The purposive sampling technique was used to select adult male and female in Minna metropolis who are not less than 18 years of age. The purposive sampling was used because it is a sampling method in which the researcher uses his or her judgment to choose respondents and select those that best meet the purpose of the study.

In addition, the accidental sampling technique was also adopted in the administration of questionnaire, which according to Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo & Okpanachi (2012, p. 184) ''enables the researcher to find a place that is convenient for him and he stays there to distribute his questionnaire." This technique was used in the distribution of questionnaire to respondents.

The study adopted the Taro Yamanes' formula for determining sample size to arrive at a sample for the study since it is practically impossible to sample the total population of the study. Thus, the Taro Yamani's formula for determining sample size for known population was adopted. The formula is

$$S = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where   S = Sample size

N = Population

E = Marginal error which is 0.05

In other words,

n = ?

N = 350,287

e = 0.05

n = $\dfrac{350,287}{1 + 350,287(0.05)^2}$

n = $\dfrac{350,287}{350,288(0.0025)}$

n = $\dfrac{350,287}{875.72}$

n =   399.999   approximately 400

Therefore, **a s**ample size of 400 was arrived at.while simple random technique was used to select the four hundred and twenty three (400) respondents for the study.

The sample selected is proportional to the population of each group. This method was chosen to allow all members of the population in each strata to be examined separately. For this study, the population was stratified according to the Local Government Area (L.G.A). As such Bosso L.G.A and Chanchaga L.G.A is a stratum

Data Presentation and Analysis

. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, only 382 were found useful for the study. Eight of the questionnaire had one challenge or the other. Some were not properly filled and others were not returned to the researcher. Furthermore, the Responses from the questionnaire were collated and analyzed, using descriptive statistics such as simple percentages and tables of summary in order to ease comprehension.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents for gender

Sex	Frequency	%
Male	264	69.11
Female	118	30.89
Total	**382**	**100**

The table above shows that majority of the respondents for the study was males.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents for Age

Options	Frequency	%
18-23	30	7.85
24-28	51	13.36
29-33	102	26.70
34 and above	199	52.09
Total	**382**	**100**

The above table indicated that those who fall within ages 34 and above (%) formed the majority of the respondents closely followed by ages 29-33 (26.70%).

Table 3: Distribution of respondents for Education

Options	Respondents	%
None	16	4.18
Primary	22	5.76
Secondary	226	59.16
Tertiary	118	30.9
Total	**382**	**100**

Information from the table above revealed that majority of the respondents had a secondary education. Among this educational level were people who stooped their education at the secondary level and could not further their education due to one reason or the other, while the others category who made up the secondary school level were young adults who had an android phone which they also use for social networking

Table 4: Distribution of respondents for Marital Status

Options	Respondents	%
Single	210	54.95
Married	142	37.2
Divorced	12	3.14
Widowed	18	4.71
Total	**382**	**100**

Table five shows that majority of the respondents who participated in the study were single followed by married men and women

Table 5: Distribution of respondents for Occupation

Options	Respondents	%
Students	64	16.76
Business/Traders/Artisans	107	28.01
Civil Servants	96	25.13
Farmer	33	8.63

Unemployed	82	21.47
Total	**382**	**100**

Data on table six indicates that majority of the respondents fell within the category business men and women, traders and artisans. It is also evident from the data that the margin between civil servants and the unemployed are not far-fetched.

Table 6: Respondents Sources of Information about the Xenophobic Attack

Options	Respondents	%
Whatsapp	213	55.76
Facebook	62	16.23
Twitter	11	2.9
YouTube	56	14.65
Traditional Media	16	4.18
Others	24	6.28
Total	**382**	**100**

The above table revealed the different sources from where the respondent in table seven8obtained their information about the South African Xenophobic attack against Nigerians.. The data show that majority of the respondents got their information from Watsapp and YouTube videos respectively, while others got the information from family, friends and neighbors. It is obvious from the table that traditional media seem not to be popular anymore among residents as only a few got the information from Radio/TV.

Table 7: Social Media contributed to the wide spread of Information about Xenophobia

Options	Respondents	%
Strongly agree	268	70.15
Agree	87	22.77
Undecided	4	1.04
Disagree	11	2.9
Strongly disagree	12	3.14

Total	382	100

The question in table 8was designed to determine if social media contributed to the spread of information about the xenophobic attacks against Nigerian in South Africa. Data from the table revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that social media contributed to the spread of information about the incident.

Table 8 Level of Respondents Awareness of the Cause(s) of the Attacks

Options	Respondents	%
Fully Aware	97	25.4
Partially Aware	103	26.97
Unaware	138	36.12
Undecided	44	11.51
Total	**382**	**100**

Table 8 revealed that out of 382 respondents, only 97 of them have adequate knowledge of the incident. It is therefore evident that majority of people had no knowledge of what Xenophobia is all about neither can they tell what triggered the attack on Nigerians in South Africa. All they could tell was that their fellow Nigerians were massacred in South Africa

Table 9 Genres of Social Media Residents Used in the Spread of Information on Xenophobia

Options	Respondents	%
Watsapp	234	61.26
Facebook	47	12.30
Twitter	29	7.6
YouTube	65	17.01
Others	7	1.83
Total	**382**	**100**

Respondents were asked to identify specific genres of new media mostly used during the 2019 South African Xenophobic Attack on Nigerians. Their responses as presented in table 11

indicate that Watsapp (61.26%) was the most used social media in thespread of information about the incident.

Discussion of Findings

Data in table 6 were used to answer research question one, which sought to ascertain the social media platforms through which residents got to know about the xenophobic attack against Nigerians in South Africa. Respondents' opinions indicate that social media were employed to provide information, and education about the incident

These findings re-confirm earlier studies, such as those of Ijwo & Ikani (2011) & Kindelan (2000), which concluded that new media provide a channel of communication for people to get information, education, and mobilization about elections in this case, xenophobia. people forwarded message from Watsapp groups platform from those they trust such as friends, family members and colleagues.

The findings also agree with and conform to the theoretical positions that the level of importance assigned to issues is a function of the media's presentation of such issues. In other words, new media's emphasis on news and updates about the attacks led to massive awareness about the attacks

Information on table 7 showed that the use of social media contributed to the success of the widespread of information about the unfortunate incident. Majority of the respondents agreed that social media influenced the spread of information at a very fast speed about the xenophobic attack against Nigerian in South Africa

Table 8 was designed to ascertain if residents are aware of the causes of the xenophobic attacks or not. The data show that out of 382 respondents, only 97 of them have adequate knowledge of the incident. It is therefore evident that majority of people had no knowledge of what Xenophobia is all about neither could they tell what triggered the attack on Nigerians in South Africa. All they can tell was that their fellow Nigerians were massacred in South Africa.

This is also evident in viral YouTube videos where some Nigerians were interviewed as to the cause of the crisis in South Africa. The responses were funny as many said, South African killed one Igbo man called Xenophobia and burnt down his shop. Others said, they don't know but only saw some videos depicting violence and killings. These findings agree with the

theoretical postulations which states that an individual should be free to air his or her opinion freely on any issue and publish what he or she likes,

Furthermore, there appears to be strong correlation between the theoretical base and the findings in this study. The findings showed that Watsapp was the most used social media for the spread of information during the Xenophobic attack against Nigerians in South African in September, 2019i .

In table 9, respondents were asked to identify specific genres of social media mostly used during the 2019 xenophobic attacks. In Their responses indicated that Watsapp was the most used social media platform during the attack.

The findings also agree with other related studies particularly Crobie's (2006) study conclusion which holds that, new media make it possible for anyone to create, modify, and share contents with others using relatively simple and inexpensive tools.

Furthermore, the table also shows other types of social media used by residents to spread information about the attacks; these include: Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. These findings are in tandem with those of Manovich's (2003) study, which found that new media tools help one to connect people with information and services, collaborate with people and create contents, services, communities, and channels of communication that help one deliver information and services. The findings also conform to theoretical positions that new media were brought about by the complex interplay of social needs and technological innovation.

Summary

The new media played crucial roles in diffusion of information particularly during the September, 2019 Xenophobic attacks on Nigerians by South Africans by providing adequate and functional information that updated the masses on the incident thus educating and sensitizing them on the causes, the dangers of the act and situation report

. The new media also created platforms for public debate and helped in public opinion formation. By bringing the incident into limelight through news updates and discussing them. The new media painted pictures of such attacks, which invariably spurred the masses to condemn such barbaric act and sought government's intervention in the matter.

 The Social media were also used to monitor the incident. It is, therefore, the position of this study that the social media enhanced the success of the spread of information about the Xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa. In summary, the findings of the study show

that: Majority of the residents in Minna got their information about xenophobia from Watsapp and YouTube videos respectively,

Data from the survey revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that social media contributed to the spread of information about the incident. It was evident that majority of people had no knowledge of what Xenophobia is all about neither could they tell what triggered the attack on Nigerians in South Africa. All they could tell was that their fellow Nigerians were massacred in South Africa. Responses from residents indicated that Watsapp was the most used social media in the spread of information about the incident.

Conclusion

The most important reasons behind the prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa are economic and the tendency to criminalize foreigners. Existing explanations in terms of economic crises, political transition, relative deprivation, or remnants of apartheid all contain an element of truth but are not in themselves sufficient. Proclamations from politicians coupled with media reporting on drug syndicates, prostitution and human trafficking, all feed and in turn feed off a popular perception that migrants are bad for South African society and its economy.

It is all too easy for the media and the government to place blame on immigrants for crime, unemployment and housing problems but it is not a long-term solution and, eventually, can only be detrimental for the economy, culture, society and international image of South Africa.

The government faces a pressing need to find a way for citizens and foreigners to live peaceably together and to tackle the problems that xenophobes justify their actions by. Xenophobia may manifest itself violently through rioting and attacks on foreigners amongst the poorer, black population, but it is an issue for all sectors of South African society and one that is becoming increasingly urgent for the government to address.

Perhaps the most important point to realize is that these misguided feelings of hatred and bitter resentment are based solely on the *perception* of economic harm and of immigrant involvement in criminal activities, therefore the primary focus for the government must be education and to correct these misperceptions.

Recommendations

In view of the empirical evidence and the conclusion reached, this study makes it's recommendations

1. Education: First and foremost, it must be made clear that the primary challenge that the government of South Africa faces is an educational one, as it is unable to focus on any one group in society. It has a duty to provide citizens with vicarious knowledge of migrants, immigrants and refugees as *people* through the media.

2. **Continentalism;** Government should encourage a greater sense of continentalism and internationalism through the media and through the public pronouncements of opinion-makers. This can be achieved by working with schools, colleges and universities to include issues such as citizenship and xenophobia in their curricula,

3. **Government** should try and stress the positive impact that immigration can have on South Africa's economy and society, by using examples from countries such as the UK and Switzerland.5 The media must also play a vital role in this educational process, and the following suggestions are in reference to this:

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