

Public perception of the influence of social media platforms on indigenous languages in Bayelsa, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: The 21st century has witnessed enormous changes in communication engagements. Time and space boundaries have become narrower than even before. Social media platforms have changed the scope and nature of communication significantly. Such social media platforms include: Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, among others. These platforms have changed communication dynamics in areas like politics, merchandising, and religion, among others. Although social media platforms come with their advantages, there are concerns that they may have negative impact on indigenous languages. These concerns, however, have not received significant attention in literature.

Objective: This study intends to ascertain public perception of the influence of social media platforms on indigenous languages. The study adopts Survey research design to achieve the study objective.

Methodology: The study was conducted in Bayelsa state. The researchers surveyed a sample of 384 respondents who were selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection while results were presented in tables.

Results: The result of the study showed that the public perceive social media as negatively impacting on indigenous languages. We found that 59% of the respondents were of the view that the use of social media as a means of communication has posed a serious challenge to the use of native languages to a large extent.

Unique contribution: The study has shown specific aspects of native languages that are negatively affected as a result of social media use. This information will be beneficial for designing and implementing programmes that are aimed at promoting native languages in Nigeria.

Conclusion: The use of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, among others pose a serious threat to native languages in Nigeria.

Key recommendation: It is recommended that social media users should make use of their indigenous language in their social media engagement activities.

Keywords: Communication; Indigenous; Language; Perception; Influence; Social Media.

Introduction

In every given society, language is essential for peaceful co-existence and development. It is an essential component of people, culture, and society. Language is a system of communication used by a particular group, community, or country. It is a system of rules that enables the integration of sound structures and meaning for easy communication. It serves as an important symbol that makes a group of people unique. Thus, it is a form of identity. Through language, people's identity is defined, shaped, and maintained. It holds the power to maintain national and cultural identity (Emeka-Nwobia 2015 in Oyemike *et al.*, 2017). Basmah (2011) see language as a means of expressing and recognizing the diverse social identities that people possess.

Language performs a pivotal role in the totality of culture. Vicki (2014) posits that language essentially has two functions; these are: (i) language is a tool of communication and (ii) language is a form of identity. When language is perceived as an instrument of communication, it is conceptualized as a medium through which people create interaction and share meaning. On the other hand, when language is viewed from the perspective of a form of identity, it serves to reveal the identity of a person (see also Romaine, 2000; Rosen, 2008; Retzlaff, 2006; Retzlaff, 2008; Reynolds, 2009).

Language makes possible salient and important things in the society while also fostering unity. It serves as a vault to store valuable ancestral knowledge and help to transfer socio-cultural heritage and historical links from one generation to the other (Ogunbodede, 1998; Scent, 2015: p, 54). To this end, language is very vital to people's existence; it needs to be protected because once lost, it cannot be replaced. In the society, activities such as economic, education, social, religious, and politics can only be possible through effective language use. The worldview of a group of people is defined by their language. In affirmation to this view, Scent (2015) opines that language is the lens through which people see the world.

Language, being an essential part of people's culture is linked to sustenance of culture. No society can exist or function at its maximum without culture, and for culture to thrive, it requires language, which is the mainstay of the society. Thus, language, culture, and society are interconnected. It is through language that people communicate, interact, and live together. People can only express and share their ideas, experiences, and emotion with others in the society with language (Onyemike *et al.*, 2017). So, whether one sees it from the perspective of being an instrument of communication or from the perspective of a person's identity, language is part and parcel of the cultural values of a group of people. It is part of our everyday life. Language is an expression of a people's culture; see (Sheyholislami, 2011; Sheyholislami, 2012; Hershey *et al.*, 2008). Considering the important role of language to the cultural values of a group of people, anything that poses a threat to their language should be of concern to them.

In contemporary society, the emergence of social media has raised concern regarding the impact that it may have on indigenous languages. The emergence of new technologies and the eventual emergence of social media have raised serious concerns regarding the future of indigenous languages. This concern is heightened by the fact the social media engagements are often done using the English language. While the world experiences more sophisticated and new emergences in science and technology, there was a shift in language. Technology and computers were configured to operate with English language and it could not be rejected by any section; hence, making it a global language. English is the driver of social media platforms saturated with world popular culture; this reality is placing pressure on speaking of indigenous languages and consequently, forcing them to adopt the majority language (Scent Grace, 2015).

The reason why English language is globally accepted is because it is generally adopted in activities of the diverse sphere of the society (Ife Ajepe & Adeyemi, 2016). So, when users log on to their social media, they mostly use English language as a medium of interaction, and this is done at the detriment of their indigenous language. The essence of social media platforms is for interaction among its members. People interact to communicate, which is the fundamental aspect of every form of human communication. For people to have precise and effective communication, the language used must be understood by each player in the communication circles. Thus, language serves as the most prominent and unique system of communication for humans. As mentioned above, English language is the driver of social media and has over time, become the global language because it is generally adopted by players of the activities that drive the different nations of the world. This suggests that

English as a global language of communication will continue to submerge indigenous languages, relegating its use among native speakers (see Ife & Adeyemi, 2016). How the public perceives the influence of social media on indigenous languages is important because it could provide useful data that will guide policymakers on how to save Nigerian indigenous languages from going into extinction.

Perception describes the views that people hold about an issue. It fundamentally bothers on what they think. Kant (2012) avers that it is essentially based on imagination. Also, people perceive an issue based on their exposure to it or certain other drivers. The fundamental thing here is that before people begin to hold perception about something, they must have knowledge about it. Such knowledge could be derived from a person's direct experience or through contact with others who have such experience. It could also come from observations of an issue for which people have a perception. Concerning social media, the perception about the influence that something could have is based on the experience of using social media or from observations of those who use it. It may also be based on observed decline in the interest people have about an indigenous language. Therefore, it is based on this background that this study sought to ascertain the public perception of the influence of social media on indigenous languages.

Statement of the problem

Of the different facet of the human society, there have been lots of researches on the role of social media in human communication, and majority of the findings recorded negative threat on indigenous languages. This, of course has captured the interest of scholars for a way forward (Rukya, 2016; Basmah, 2011). However, there appears to be less literature focusing on public perception of the influence of social media on indigenous languages. This is despite the fact that social media engagement is often done using the English language, which is not the indigenous language of some social media users. Although, the influence of social media on indigenous languages may not be an issue among indigenous speakers of the English language, it is a big issue for those whom English is their second language. Apart from the problem of scarcity of literature, there is also uncertainty regarding public perception of the influence of social media on indigenous languages, hence, the need for this study.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to ascertain the public perception of the influence of social media on indigenous languages. The specific objectives are:

1. To ascertain public perception of social media platforms that impact on indigenous languages.
2. To determine public perception of the impact of social media platforms on indigenous languages.
3. To determine public perception of how to preserve indigenous languages in the social media era.

Literature review

The essence of social media platforms is for interaction among its members. People interact to communicate; this is the fundamental aspect of every form of human communication. In our sophisticated world of today, social media is a notable platform for information sharing and communication. Social media are computer-mediated means of communication that enhances the instantaneous exchange of ideas. They are websites that enable users to share content as receivers and senders. Nwanton *et al.*, (2013) defined social media as those internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate contents, distribute, and search for information online. This definition stresses on continuous interaction among social media users. In Nigeria, such continuous interactions basically require the use of words which could be in any language.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media are typically structured based on the dynamics of web. 2.0 which allows users to engage in an internet-mediated communication. In the views of Nwazor and Godwin-Maduikwe (2015), the activities that take place in the social media are substantially dependent on the Internet. According to them, social media sites include: Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, Facebook, BBM, Whatsapp, etc. Nwabueze and Aduba (2014) added LinkedIn, Instagram, Gmail, Yahoo mail, Flickr, and blog. Udejah and Gever (2015) aver that social media platforms basically have similar features like allowing the creation of individual accounts, depending on Internet connection, among others.

Social media can be time-consuming and addictive if a user is not disciplined. Everybody can use social media including businessmen and women, civil servants, public servants, politicians, advertisers, corporate bodies, students in all levels of education, among others. People use social media for chatting, advertising, political mobilization, posting of pictures, videos and or texts, reading of news feed, watching videos, making announcements (like wedding, burial, etc), among others (Dykeman, 2008; Taprial & Kanwar, 2012; Godwin-Maduikwe, 2015; Yeboah & Ewur, 2014).

The culture of social media as a medium of communication is that it revolves around interaction among people that are displaced by time and geographical boundaries. The concept of social media enables more of participatory culture and multitasking. The social media has brought about significant and permeating changes in terms of communication between organizations, communities, and individuals. The platforms with which social media allows for communication are diverse and numerous, which include: Facebook, google+, hi5, Friendster, LinkedIn, Meerkat, MyLife, Ning, Periscope, Plaxo, Twitter, and Xing. He further states that others which help in ideas or business promotion include: Bing, Blogging platform Discussion Boards, and Forums, Google, Flickr, MySpace, Yahoo, Youtube, among several others. Over the years, scholars have examined the impact of social media on language.

Sunder and Cingel (2012) surveyed 228 respondents to determine the influence that social media platforms have on students in their use of the English language and found that such platforms have significantly influenced the way students use language.

Yeboah and Ewur (2014) did a survey to determine the impact of Whatsapp messenger usage on students in Ghana. The researchers reported that the WhatsApp platform has an impact on spelling and language construction. Ogundijo (2014) examined the use of social media and how it impacts on behaviour. Ogundijo's study revealed that social media platforms do not impact on users negatively (see also Chan-Olmsted *et al.*, 2013). Overall, social media platforms are now playing essential roles in our lives; we can hardly avoid it. We only need to learn how to take advantage of these platforms' offer and try to avoid its negative consequences.

Theoretical frame work

This research anchors on Immanuel Kant's theory of perception. Immanuel Kant propounded the theory in 1902. A theory is normally called by the name of the person who suggested it. In the views of Kant, imagination forms images in perception. He further opines that imagination is an essential element of perception itself (Kant, 1902; 1992; 2012). In the views of Immanuel Kant, the empiricists are wrong in their explanation of a certain feature of perception. That is, how a different type of perceptual representation or an image is produced. While the main idea occupies the view that images are produced through our receptive sensible capacities, Kant differs as he maintains that 'something more' is needed. He avers that 'something more' is the synthetic activity of the imagination; in the opinion of Kant, there is an active faculty of the synthesis of the manifold [of sense] in us, which we call the imagination. This theory was found useful in this study because it provided a framework to explain public perception of the influence of social media on indigenous languages.

Methodology

The researcher described the methodology of this study in headlines as shown below:

Design: The researcher adopted the survey research design to achieve the objective of this study. The researcher made use of a survey research design because it is most applicable when a researcher decides to explore, explain, or describe an issue. Therefore, survey research design was used to describe and explain the public perception of the influence of social media on indigenous languages.

Population of the study: The population of this study was made up of youth from Bayelsa State. The total number of residents of Bayelsa State is 2, 302, and 940.016. It should be noted that this was projected from the 1, 703, 358 2006 figure using a 3.2 projection benchmark.

Sample Size: The sample size of this study was made up of 384 respondents in Bayelsa State. This was determined using the Cochran formula. The formula was used to draw the sample size for the study.

Sampling technique: The researcher used a combination of stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques to select the sample for the study. To implement the sampling technique, the researcher first stratified Bayelsa into rural and urban areas. This is because social media platforms are most used among people from urban areas. Areas that were regarded as rural areas were those without social amenities like light, pipe borne water, among others while those that were regarded as urban areas were those with social amenities. Therefore, the researcher randomly selected Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa State. The researcher then purposively selected only respondents who could read and write. Respondents were contacted at their residential houses where it is expected that they will be in a better mind frame to respond to the research instrument.

Instrument: The researcher made use of the questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The choice of the questionnaire was because it is capable of generating a large amount of data.

Validation: To ascertain the validity of the instrument, the researcher administered it to three communication experts from the Department of Mass Communication, University of Africa that validated the questionnaire. The observations of the experts were useful in preparing the final version of the instrument.

Reliability: The researcher ascertained the reliability of the instrument using a test retest approach. To implement this, 20 copies of the questionnaire were administered to selected respondents in Nsukka, Enugu State. After two weeks, the same respondents were again contacted. The correlation coefficient was used to calculate the reliability and the result yielded 0.87. This indicates a high reliability. It should be noted that it is a standard practice to ensure that respondents in a pilot study do not take part in the final study.

Method of data analysis

In the analysis of data for this study, the researcher made use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Among the descriptive statistics, simple percentages and mean were used. Correlation analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the respondents, 355 copies were filled and returned. This represents a 92% returned rate. The sample was made up of 58% males and 42% females. Most (67%) of the respondents were within the ages of 26-33 years and also, most of the respondents had a tertiary education. The result is presented in tables as shown below:

Table 1: The extent to which social media influence indigenous languages

S/N	Items	Frequency	%
1	Large extent	209	59
2	Moderate extent	105	30
3	Low extent	41	11
4	Total	355	100

The above table sought to ascertain public perception of the extent to which social media influence indigenous languages. The result showed that most of the respondents reported that social media influence indigenous languages to a large extent.

Table 2: Social media platforms that impact on indigenous languages

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Facebook	3.2	.44	Accepted
2	Twitter	3.1	.67	Accepted
3	WhatsApp	2.9	.78	Accepted
4	Instagram	2.6	.66	Accepted
5	YouTube	2.7	.89	Accepted

The table above sought to ascertain public perception of the social media platforms that impact on indigenous languages. The result of the study showed that all the items presented were accepted as social media platforms that have influence on the indigenous languages.

Table 3: Impact of social media platforms on indigenous languages

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	People have less interest in indigenous languages	3.1	.66	Accepted
2	People are not proud to identify with their indigenous languages	2.8	.67	Accepted
3	Social media platforms are mostly used in English language	2.9	.34	Accepted
4	Indigenous languages are not used to engage in social media	3.1	.54	Accepted
5	Social media platforms negatively affect the learning of indigenous languages	3.0	.69	Accepted
6	Indigenous languages are at the challenge of extinction because of social media	3.1	.55	Accepted

The essence of the table above was to ascertain how social media platforms have impacted on indigenous languages. The result showed that all the items presented in the table had a mean score of above 2.5, which is the benchmark for accepting and rejecting items.

Table 4: How to preserve indigenous languages in the social media era

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Teaching of indigenous languages in schools	3.1	.77	Accepted
2	Media sensitization campaigns encouraging the protection of indigenous languages	2.6	.55	Accepted
3	Creating group accounts for indigenous languages	3.7	.88	Accepted
4	The use of indigenous languages for communication through social media	3.1	.65	Accepted
5	Creating apps that support the use of indigenous languages.	2.6	.47	Accepted

The table above examined the public perception of how to preserve indigenous languages in the social media era. The result of the study showed that all the items presented were accepted as ways of preserving indigenous languages in the social media era.

Discussion of findings

This study examined public perception of the influence of social media on indigenous languages. The result of the study showed that the respondents reported that social media

impacts on indigenous languages to a large extent. That is to say, social media platforms negatively impact on indigenous languages. What this means is that the respondents were of the view that indigenous languages currently faces the threat of extinction if nothing is urgently done. The result of this study is consistent with the report of UNESCO in 2012, which confirmed that languages that were not standardized, that is, languages that were not documented, had already disappeared. The report further predicted that by the end of the 21st century, half of over 6,000 plus indigenous languages will go into extinction if nothing is done. The fear is that the indigenous speakers of such language will lose it, including its cultural heritage and valuable ancestral knowledge. What this means it that language carries the cultural values and heritage of a group of people, and when lost, cannot be replaced. Also, the result of this study is in consistence with that of Yeboah and Ewur (2014), Sunder and Cingel (2012), who reported that social media pose a serious challenge to language use. The result is however, contrary to that of Ogundijo (2014) who reported that social media use does not pose any threat to language use. He further opined that social media use does not have any negative impact on users. The result of this study supports Kant's perception theory (2012). Kant had argued that perception is based on imagination about the issue in question. Therefore, the result of this study supports this theoretical assumption because the perception that the public has regarding the influence of social media on indigenous languages is based on imagination. The respondents imagined that considering that social media engagement is done using the English language, such a situation could negatively impact indigenous languages.

Conclusion/recommendations

No doubt, social media has become the most preferred medium for speedy information sharing and communication in our society. Because of the growing population of social media users and audience, its usage and prominence cannot be ruled out. Basmah (2011) opines that it is a major means of global communication. Magaret & Babafemi (2015) avers that social media has come to stay as a notable platform for information sharing and communication, and people who engage in using social media platforms adopt English language most of the time. This suggest that English as a global language of communication will continue to submerge indigenous languages, relegating its use among native speaker (see Ife & Adeyemi, 2016). Based on the result of this study, the researchers conclude that the public perceive social media as having a significant negative impact on indigenous languages. It is also the conclusion of the current study that social media pose a threat to the future of indigenous languages. The basic contribution of this study is that it has provided evidence for understanding how the public perceives the impact of social media on indigenous languages. This understanding could be useful to policymakers in deciding how to protect and promote indigenous languages in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Based on the result of this study and the conclusion drawn, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Social media users should be encouraged to make use of indigenous languages in their social media engagements. Such encouragement could come through media campaigns.
2. There is a need for further studies to be conducted in other areas to give room for generalization.
3. Other researchers should examine how best to motivate social media users so that they could use indigenous languages in their social media engagements.

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