SOCIAL MEDIA, ETHNIC HATRED AND PEACE JOURNALISM: CASE OF TWITTER AND FACEBOOK USE IN KENYA

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Abstract

This article discusses social media, ethnic hatred and peace journalism based on the following questions: (1) What incidences on Twitter and FaceBook account for ethnic hatred in Kenya? (2) Does ethnic hatred on Twitter and FaceBook 'kill' Peace Journalism? And (3) How can we achieve Peace Journalism on Twitter and FaceBook? The study was informed Bojana Blagojevic's (2009) model to understand the causes and complexity of ethnic conflict.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media refers to those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing (Michaelsen, 2011). It also refers to on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device as well as interactive user feedback, creative and participative. Another aspect of social media is the real-time generation of new unregulated content. Social media examples are twitter, FaceBook, blogs, YouTube, etc. the most egalitarian Social media in Kenya are largely Twitter and FaceBook and that is why I chose to focus on the two in this paper. Social media has revolutionarised news dissemination and as for today, it is used to disseminate news faster than the traditional mainstream media.

Twitter and FaceBook have particularly stood out as the most powerful media because of their micro-blogging nature and power (Anamika, 2009). Due to their popularity, versatility and quick dissemination and sharing of information, twitter and FaceBook have emerged as a key media for news and information on major events in Kenya and beyond. Recently, proximal discussions within the country are highly mediated by the two. Due to their popularity, they are used for political communications, marketing, promotions and advocacy. They have been used successfully to mobilize Kenyans for causes that needed mass volunteering; for example, in the

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cases of *Kenyans for Kenya* initiative (2011), we are one initiative during Westgate Mall attack (2013), and majorly during the 2013 electoral process. However, apart from being used for good causes, social media have also been exploited for ethnic hatred; a usage that has heightened ethnic tensions, and sometimes has threatened to plunge the Kenya into ethnic war.

The social media conflict is far reaching and seems to catch up with institutions such as government and media. For the case of media, their ethnic aligning is a threat to peace journalism; whose tenets are objectivity and balanced coverage of events and especially during electioneering process. In this paper, I assess the contribution of social media [twitter and FaceBook] in Kenya to ethnic hatred and the way this can compromise peace journalism. In order to conceptualize this situation, the paper seeks to answer the following three questions:

1. What incidences on Twitter and FaceBook account for ethnic hatred in Kenya?
2. Does ethnic hatred on Twitter and FaceBook 'kill' Peace Journalism?
3. How can we achieve Peace Journalism on Twitter and FaceBook?

The above questions were deduced based on the need to understand: what situation are we in; how does it affect us; how can we come out of it? In this paper, #KOT means Kenyans on twitter; KOF means Kenyans on FaceBook. The terms ethnic hatred will be used synonymous to Ethnic Tensions and Ethnic Intolerance. The term Ethnic War will be used to mean Ethnic Conflict or ethnic Violence and sometimes the terms will be used interchangeably. The terms peace journalism and war journalism are understood as binary oppositions.

Ethnic Hatred and Peace Journalism

Ethnic hatred, also known as ethnic tensions are the feelings that are accompanied by acts of prejudice and hostility towards an ethnic group and it reveals itself in various degrees. Ethnic hatred has many causes as well as the resultant ethnic conflict. In some societies, the cause is tribalism, in others a history of non-peaceful coexistence and in the case of Kenya it is political rivalry and historical injustices (Kriegler report, 2008). These are among the few cause that result to actual ethnic disputes, war or violence. In most cases, ethnic conflict is born of nationalism and a feeling of national superiority among a certain ethnic group. It may also stem from the feeling of real or perceived discrimination by another ethnic group; a condition called reverse ethnicity. In Kenya, ethnic hatred has been exploited and generated by nationalist and regional

politicians who want to serve their agenda as they seek to consolidate the nation or electorates against a real enemy. The enemy is also imaginary but understood in whatever code that the leaders use to refer to the other.

Peace journalism is defined by *Jake Lynch* (2008) as when editors and reporters make choices – about what to report, and how to report it – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict. Peace journalism aims to shed light on structural and cultural causes of violence, as they impact upon the lives of people in a conflict arena as part of the explanation for violence. It aims to frame conflicts as consisting of many parties and pursuing many goals rather than a simple dichotomy. An explicit aim of *peace journalism* is to promote peace initiatives from whatever quarter and to allow the reader to distinguish between stated positions and real goals.

THE TRIUMPHS AND TRAVAILS OF TWITTER AND FACEBOOK IN KENYA

Kenyans for Kenya initiative

Kenyans for Kenya initiative was a fundraiser started in 27th July 2011 by corporate leaders in Kenya and Red Cross to respond to media reports of famine and death from starvation in parts of Turkana districts. The initiative was spearheaded by Safaricom Foundation, Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), Media Owners Association (MOA) and Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS). The group aimed to mobilize corporate organisations and public to raise Ksh 500 million in one month so as to relief 3 million Kenyans faced by starvation in the northern part of Kenya. During this initiative, the organizers opened a FaceBook page named Kenyans for Kenya and a twitter handle titled @Kenyans4kenya. Through these two social media, a lot of campaign and advocacy for the initiative was done. The majorly disseminated information through the social media was the critical information regarding how Kenyans and well-wishers could contribute such as the MPESA PAY BILL 111111, Account No. 111111 or KCB Account No. 1133333338 and so on. Kenyans recorded their pleas and as such the initiative was more than a success with the organizers hitting their target before their deadline and setting anew one that they nearly beat. This is a case study of how social media can be used to mobilize people.

We are one initiative

Another initiative in which social media was used successfully to mobilize Kenyans was the we are one initiative of September 2013 in which Ksh. 102,331,349 was raised towards emergency rescue operation to assist victims of Westgate mall terrorist attack. The appeal was made by Red Cross on 22nd September 2013. During the initiative, FaceBook and twitter were the main mobilizes and disseminators of appeals from within Kenya and in the Diaspora. Safaricom foundation was also involved and provided number 0702 848484 through which Kenyans from Diaspora sent their contribution and M-pesa Pay Bill number 848484 through which it was reported that it received 34000 per minute. At the peak of the campaign, we are one was a trending topic on FaceBook and twitter. Kenyans for a while forgot their differences and united for a cause; the advocacy messages on social media appealed for unity at that time.

War journalism is the dominant conventions in journalism, and it means framing of public debates over conflict issues that are generally on the side of violent responses (Howard, 2009). This concept was popularized by Johan Galtung (1965) in his formulation of principles of peace journalism. Other terms for this broad definition of peace journalism include conflict solution journalism, conflict sensitive journalism (Lynch, 2008; Howard, 2009) constructive conflict coverage, and reporting the world (Tapio, 2010).

In response to war journalism's value bias in favour of violence, peace journalism promises two key benefits: for those concerned with objectivity in journalism, it aims to avoid and counteract the persistent bias of valuing violence and violent parties. Secondly, as all journalism must in some way appeal to the values of their audiences, for those who value the promotion of peace and social justice over violence, it provides a practical methodology.

Methodology

In Kenya, there are a few examples of the social media conflicts; which involves attacks from one side, retaliatory attacks and hauling of bitter words towards a targeted perceived enemy or offender. Before getting to specific examples, it is significant to interrogate the causes of conflict as conceptualized by Bojana Blagojevic's (2009) model.

Figure 1 – Causes of Ethnic Conflict: Conceptual Framework
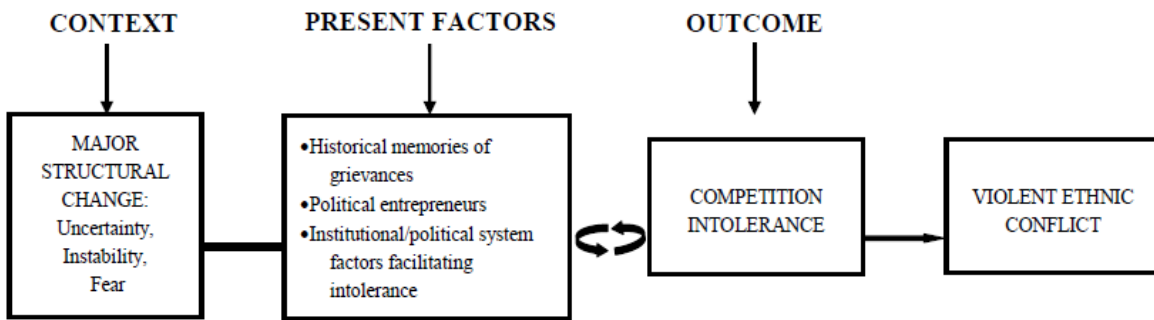
In this model, every conflict has a context. A context to a conflict is a complex phenomenon which varies from conflict to conflict. It is from this context where a group or groups which do not belong or share an interest partake in divisive factors. In the case of Kenya, there are factors such as historical injustices, ethnic exclusion, social and economic inequality among other factors. These factors usually are suppressed for a long time and harbored in people as they live with competition and intolerance. Once a chance presents itself for a conflict to occur, ethnic conflict erupts spontaneously as was the case of Kenya in 2007; Rwanda in 1994, and Germany before and during the Second World War. Likewise, social media conflict undergoes the same process and is not different only that instead of a physical violence and bloody attacks; social media violence involves use of violent words divisive updates.

SOCIAL MEDIA CONFLICTS WITNESSED IN KENYA

According to Yieke (2008) Ethnicity is not a negative concept and should not be seen as a curse to mankind; therefore as a positive phenomenon, Yieke analyses that ethnicity should reinforce national unity and not be seen as a source of violence thus:

> [E]thnicity reinforces our very beings as persons and nations in charting our destinies in this world in regard to national unity and progress. Ethnicity should therefore not be a hindrance to national unity and progress, or the source of the continuing violence and instability in African states, unless Africans, out of misguided individual egos used ethnicity for mischief, bordering on corruption, mismanagement, and greed for power.

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Similar sentiments are expressed in the Kenya human rights commission report into the causes of the 2007/2008 post election violence in Kenya which excused ethnicity from blame as a cause of the violence in their finding number 69. They concluded that:

> While Kenya's voting patterns especially since 1992 have demonstrated that ethnicity is an important predictor of electoral outcomes, ethnicity is hardly ever a cause of conflict, but rather a way in which people in conflict label their grievances, target the perceived 'enemy', mobilise the points of difference, support or even attack.

The report suggested that ethnicity in Kenyan political conflict is used as a fig leaf for other root causes of conflict in Kenya.

> Allusion to ethnicity in Kenyan politics camouflages the root causes of the country's problems – historical injustices relating to land distribution, impunity, exclusion, economic and social inequality, weak and underperforming public institutions, corruption, political elite wars and an electoral system that sharpens rather than mitigates the destructive effects that negative ethnicity can be mobilised to achieve.

Therefore, conflict in Kenya can be said to be fueled by ethnicity and that without ethnicity Kenyans would probably consider a better way of solving their problems and differences. There are however a few reasons as to why ethnicity continues to be a dominant identity curse in Kenya. Ethnicity in Kenya is majorly attributed and exploited by politicians. Given that politics in Kenya is largely informed by ethnicity, politicians' uses identity, and divisive strategies to their selfish gains leaving Kenyans to wallow in endless intolerance. That is the reason as to why in every election in Kenya, there is a history of post election violence.

What Koigi referred to negative ethnicity is the kind of ethnicity that instills the culture of the 'other' or excludes members of an ethnic group resulting to ethnic groups seeing the resources as grounds for the fitting for the survival of the fittest. In Kenya, the land factor has highly contributed to this and members of ethnic groups have viewed others as the causes of their economic inadequacies, poverty and suffering (Kriegler and Waki Reports, 2009). The post election violence of the 2008 was a turning point of how people can be divided along ethnic lines and engages in a serious violence while trying to address their long time deep seated tensions and historical injustices (KNCHR, 2008; The Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group, 2013; Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2013). Negative ethnicity results to

blaming the other ethnic groups for the social, economic and political evils and colluding as a group to terminate or cleanse them from a region in what is called as ethnic cleansing.

This culture of negative ethnicity is not confined to the physical world interaction; it is very real and active in the virtual world. Social media has provided a forum not only for sharing of life experiences, information and news for citizen journalists; it has also provided a forum for conflict, accusations and word lashing whenever the virtual community is angry at each other.

On such conflict was experienced towards the 2013 general elections when CNN released a video titled *armed as Kenyan vote nears* released on February 28, 2013. The report by the international correspondent Nema Elbagir featured four masked Kenyans with, in the reporters words "guns fashioned from iron piping, home-made swords and bullets bought from the black-market" (Shiundu, 2013, p.1). This video and CNN report was seen as highly fabricated to bring tension among Kenyans and the media house together with the correspondent were fiercely attacked on twitter and FaceBook. Furious Kenyans opened popular hash tag #SomeoneTellCNN in which they hauled all kinds of attacks on CNN and the correspondent whose twitter handle is @NimaCNN. This example is a case of social media attacks that have been common in Kenya and whose impact is yet to be seen; as to whether they can really translate to physical violence. This was not an ethnic violence, but violence directed to an established enemy of Kenya as a nation, and the impact went on through the election process when foreign journalists were shunned and mishandled and accused of already coming to Kenya with ready stories of violence.

Another example of online war was experienced in Kenya after the March 4th elections results were released by the independent electoral and boundaries commission in Kenya on march 9, 2013 the war was also revived when the supreme court which ruled over a petition filed by cord coalition against the winning of jubilee coalition Uhuru Kenyatta and upheld the victory of Kenyatta on march 30, 2013 different from the real machete and fire experienced in 2007/2008, the 2013 violence was a war of online words on twitter and on FaceBook. There were unprecedented and unworthy status updates between supporters of jubilee coalition and those of cord. Just like the post election violence of the 2007/2008 the 2013 social media war was full of

ethnic and tribal overtones. The concerned ministry of information and communication was highly alarmed by this new form of violence which if not controlled was seen as a time bomb in Kenya.

Kenya was on also involved on social media war with Nigerians two days before March 24th over the mishandling of Harambee Stars in Lagoa in which the 2014 World Cup qualifier march was to take place in Calabar. Through hashtags named #SomeonetellNigeria and #SomeonetellKenya; Kenyans and Nigerians went into each other and set a worldwide trending conversation in which over 100 tweets were posted per minute (Africanewspost.com, 2013). The reports were that while the Nigerian team was lodged in a five star hotel; Kenyas national team was settled in an boarding school and were to train on a primary school field.

A photo of Kenya's National Football team (Harambee stars) in Nigeria that infuriated Kenyans on twitter (#KOT) and on FaceBook

Kenyans on twitter furiously attacked Nigerians for their perceived hash welcome. The words were too hash and the picture below, gotten from africanewspost.com; can tell the magnitude of the expression and updates posted.

THIS KENYANS WILL KILL US OOOOOOH!!

#SomeoneTellNigeria #SomeoneTellKenya

Media coverage inequality supposedly turned injustice

Another cause of online violence in social media has been mainstream gagging or its failure to address issues as they should be. In Kenya, in 2007/2008 the mainstream media overindulged in violence coverage and was caught in ethnic inclinations and took sides in reporting and spreading uncensored content. Instead of acting as a neutral observer, it took sides. This caught the attention of the government which on… banned the live coverage of the post election violence. Kenyans went on social media for an alternative platform on which ethnic war continued. This was supposedly the first time Kenya experienced with social media usage at a wider scope and from then, the rest is history.

Moreover, citizen Journalism necessitated by Twitter and FaceBook has in most cases spilled over to ethnic and mainstream media virtual violence. The feeling that no unbiased coverage or attention is being given to matters at hand is the main driver of the violence. For example, the elections coverage of 2013 in Kenya was seen largely as an event in which the mainstream media was caught in the quandary of the past experiences and failed to tell the truth as it feared violence outbreak. This way, Kenyans on social media decided to use the alternative to post uncensored information some of which generated heated ethnic attacks and war of works among members of identifiable ethnic groups.

HOW ETHNIC HATRED CONTRIBUTES TO WAR JOURNALISM

Ethnic hatred is a behavioral pattern that is inculcated into the society members through communication and socialization. Ethnic hatred is usually factored into journalism if journalists are not careful enough. In 2013, there was a warning by Kenyan professionals to journalists on the way they should handle social media. The cases of inflammatory language when expressing views were on the rise and journalists were advised to be extra careful when doing their work. This was not the beginning because social hate speech has a history in Kenya violence from 2007/2008 when it was partly attributed to hate speech. The case of Joshua Arap Sang; a journalist facing the ICC trial is an example of how vulnerable journalists are in times of conflict. Because of the uniqueness of the social media tools such as FaceBook and twitter, journalists are sometimes seduced to forget that they are representatives of media houses and treat their conversation online as personal. In a report on the warning by media professionals to journalists, Judie Kaberia the Kenya Coordinator for ReportingKenya.net and Special Projects Reporter at Capital FM in Nairobi, in an article produced as part of a media development programme quoted Haron Mwangi, chief executive officer of the Media Council of Kenya, which monitors the media as having said that:

> We discovered that there is a trend of disconnect between a journalist as an employee of a media house and a journalist as an independent blogger…It is very unfortunate when you have… a very popular journalist posting hate messages (Kaberia, 2013, p.1).

Judie Kaberia recounted a story of a journalist who confessed that he had posted a controversial message on his social media page during the eve of the March 4th elections but deleted it immediately after criticism from other journalists. The journalist confessed that:

> When I made the post, I was carried away by politics, instead of seeing the journalist in me, I saw myself as an individual and left out the professional part of me," the reporter, who asked not to be named, said. "I changed – I no longer post such messages on social media. I am cautious, but I see fellow-colleagues still make the mistake (Kaberia, 2013, p.1).

The journalist confession went on and he averred that it is difficult to be objective especially when reporting or engaging as a journalist during an event that is highly defined by affiliations especially ethnic as a journalist, given that you first belong to an ethnic group before belong to a

professional group. In the same article, Judie Kaberia goes on to quote the self confessed journalist saying:

> There is a lot of burden, because there is a thin line between yourself [as a professional] and your political or tribal affiliation. This is very challenging for us journalists. This is what we are fighting with – trying to have a balance between you as an individual or you as a professional journalist; yourself coming from a certain community and having a political preference (p.1).

There is a lot of temptation for journalists to engage in unfavorable use of social media without their knowledge if they do not understand their role as journalists or if they fail to separate what is personal and what is objective. Peace journalism arose from the realisation that there is dominance of war journalism when a journalist is involved in reporting a conflict. In war journalism, a journalist frames the messages on public debate generally on the side of the violent response. The best way to understand war journalism is to understand 17 principles for peace journalism by Galtung, McGoldrick and lynch (1995). The principles summarize that a journalist, while in a situation of conflict should:

1. Not view a conflict as an issue of two parties
2. Not put distinction between self and others
3. Try to establish the possible causes of the conflict
4. Go beyond physical causes of violence while reporting
5. Enquire deeper for localized solutions to the conflict
6. Identify the points of convergence rather than divergence
7. Establish possible remedies to the conflict
8. Not place blame on a particular party
9. Treat all parties equally in convergence
10. Enquire parties' solutions to their problems
11. Avoid emotive and derogatory language in reporting
12. Avoid demonizing adjectives while reporting
13. Avoid demonizing labels of whatever kind
14. Treat serious allegations equally
15. Not to treat opinions as facts

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16. Interrogate remnant causes of violence after peace is established

17. Explore the peace initiatives from all stakeholders

Although these principles may not be exhaustive and considerate of the multifaceted techniques of handling conflict by journalists and the complexity of a conflict situation, they can act as a guide to some objective point. Given the nature of social media tools, journalists may be caught in a quagmire when he or she sheds off the professional attire and use social media to post what they think is good for them. Whenever they do so, the mostly resort to their affiliated ideologies as individuals and the public takes these opinions as weighty because at that time, the public views a journalist as a representative of a media house. Media is highly trusted and influential institution and thus, the opinion of its representative should be as objective as possible in times of conflict. In Kenya, whenever a journalist is caught in the tentacles of war journalism, peace journalism is compromised. Given that an ethnic society is vulnerable to journalism based on "we" and "our"; them and theirs, journalists and media regulators have to be extra careful and repeatedly remind journalists of their role to remain objective and neutral in their social media engagement.

HOW CAN WE ACHIEVE PEACE JOURNALISM ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK?

Social media operates on virtual world and given that it is not easy to control their usage due to its anonymity; we can only deal with the root causes. The root causes of ethnic hatred are historical injustices, lack of media objectivity in coverage, politics based on ethnic blocks, and economic injustices that exclude members of certain ethnic groups (KHRC REPORT, 2008). Some control policies can also be employed at secondary level to achieve some control, especially those that come at times of crisis. For example, closing up of all accounts disseminating ethnic hatred through the web hosts can safe a great deal. Social media violence can intensify and translate to physical war in future if not controlled. It can also be used to fuel already erupted violence and this can result to prolonged violence if not checked.

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