PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR INSTITUTE OF ADMINISTRATION (ICIA 2025)

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY ZARIA - NIGERIA

Website: *https://icia.org.ng* **ISBN:** *978-978-695-265-9* ***Volume I, 2025***

RECLAIMING CIVILITY ONLINE THROUGH MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the topic "Reclaiming Civility Online Through Management of Social Media Platforms for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria", by hghlighting the increasing misuse of digital spaces for hate speech, incivility, and social division. In a highly diverse country like Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and political tensions are historically entrenched, the unregulated use of social media has amplified hostility and widened societal fractures. The study adopts a conceptual approach, drawing from the Civility Theory and Social Responsibility Theory to advocate for respectful digital engagement. It emphasizes the urgent need for promoting civil discourse, tolerance, and user responsibility as critical tools for national integration and stability. Key concepts such as social media platforms, online civility, and peaceful coexistence are examined in relation to how Nigerians interact online, particularly during sensitive events such as elections. Empirical studies reviewed reveal that while there is growing concern about online incivility, few efforts have been made to guide users on constructive online behavior. The paper concludes that reclaiming civility online requires a multifaceted approach that includes ethical communication, digital literacy, and self-regulation among users, alongside responsible platform management. Recommendations are directed toward social media users to be mindful of their language, avoid abusive expressions, and adopt respectful methods in addressing disagreements. By promoting empathy, dialogue, and accountability in digital interactions, social media can be transformed into a powerful tool for unity and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Digital Communication, Nigeria, Online Civility, Peaceful Coexistence, Social Media Platforms, User Responsibility.*

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for communication, information dissemination, civic engagement, and global connectivity. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok have revolutionized how people interact, share opinions, and mobilize around social and political causes. While social media provides opportunities for promoting dialogue, inclusion, and democratic participation, it also serves as a breeding ground for incivility, misinformation, hate speech, and they have simultaneously facilitated divisions within societies. (Ott, 2017).

Globally, scholars and policy actors are increasingly concerned about the role of digital platforms in fueling societal discord. In the United States and Europe, for instance, there has been a surge in online harassment, political extremism, and the algorithmic amplification of divisive content (Sunstein, 2018; Gorwa, 2019). Events such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the Capitol riots of January 6, 2021, highlighted how unregulated digital interactions can threaten social harmony and democratic institutions (Zuboff, 2019). These concerns are not limited to the Global North; in developing nations, especially multi-ethnic societies, the implications are often more severe, due to fragile institutions and heightened identity-based tensions.

In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, the proliferation of smartphones and internet access has rapidly expanded the influence of social media, making it a dominant space for public discourse (Ibietan & Gambo, 2020). With over 33 million active social media users in Nigeria (Statista, 2023), Nigeria's digital ecosystem is vibrant, yet deeply polarized. Social media platforms have been instrumental in mobilizing protests and civic movements, such as the #EndSARS campaign in 2020, which showcased the positive potential of online activism (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). However, these same platforms have also become tools for disinformation, ethnic profiling, religious bigotry, and hate speech. For instance, during the 2019 and 2023 general elections, several fake news stories and provocative posts targeted ethnic groups and political opponents, were observed to have intensified division and mistrust (Udeze, 2020; Nwanne, 2022).

More dangerously, social media has played a role in fueling violence in communal clashes and herder–farmer conflicts, particularly in states like Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau. In many cases, inflammatory content often based on unverified rumors circulates rapidly on WhatsApp and Facebook, prompting retaliatory attacks and reprisals (Adewumi & Ajayi, 2021). The 2018 Mambilla Plateau violence and the 2021 Shasha market clash in Ibadan were reportedly aggravated by provocative messages and hate narratives disseminated through social media channels (Premium Times, 2021).

While the Nigerian government has occasionally attempted to regulate digital platforms such as the controversial suspension of Twitter in June 2021, after the platform deleted a tweet by the President, these actions are often viewed as politically motivated and lacking in transparency, raising concerns about freedom of expression (Nwanne, 2022).

It is important to acknowledge that the online space in Nigeria is not entirely unregulated. There are existing legal frameworks aimed at curbing digital misconduct and promoting civility. Notably, the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act of 2015, as amended in 2024, provides legal grounds for prosecuting individuals engaged in cyberbullying, cyberstalking, identity theft, and other online offenses (Cybercrimes Act, 2024). In addition to statutory provisions, civil remedies such as the tort of defamation allow victims of harmful online statements to seek redress and damages through the courts (Okoro & Nwafor, 2020). These legal instruments serve as mechanisms for reinforcing ethical digital conduct and protecting individuals from reputational harm.

Recent cases have further demonstrated the relevance of these laws. In 2024, a popular social media influencer known as “VeryDarkMan” (VDM) publicly accused a senior lawyer, Femi Falana (SAN), and his son, the artist Falz, of accepting a ₦10 million bribe from fellow influencer Bobrisky to facilitate a presidential pardon. The Lagos High Court subsequently ordered VDM to take down the defamatory videos and restrained him from further publications pending determination of the suit (Channels Television, 2024; The Guardian, 2024). Similarly, in the same year, Gospel singer Mercy Chinwo faced defamatory social media allegations implying that her child was fathered by another gospel artist, Nathaniel Bassey, based on a widely circulated photo. The unfounded rumour led to viral commentary and reputational harm, prompting Nathaniel Bassey to petition the Inspector General of Police against four social media users for criminal defamation and cyberstalking (Vanguard, 2024; The News Chronicle, 2024). In another case, human rights activist Dele Farotimi was arrested and charged with multiple counts of criminal defamation and cybercrime offences after publishing a book and making online statements critical of Nigeria’s justice system, particularly targeting legal luminary

Chief Afe Babalola (SAN). The petition filed by Babalola led to a 12-count charge, a court order halting the sale of the book, and subsequent legal proceedings, which were later struck out after Babalola withdrew the complaint (Vanguard, 2024; Premium Times, 2025).

While these cases indicate that legal recourse is available for addressing digital misconduct, the persistence of online incivility and misinformation suggests that legal enforcement alone is insufficient. There remains a pressing need for comprehensive and inclusive strategies that not only deter misuse of social media through punitive measures but also promote a culture of civility, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria's digital space (Nwanne, 2022; Adekunle, 2023). More so, the challenge with the laws is basically the time it takes for people to get justice. Administration of justice in Nigeria is usually very slow. This calls for collaborative efforts between government, civil society, tech platforms, and citizens to ensure a safer and more respectful online environment.

This paper, therefore, explores how social media platforms in Nigeria are currently managed and mismanaged, and how they can be strategically utilized to promote peace rather than conflict. The paper examines the roles of users, platform regulators, civil society, and policymakers in ensuring a more respectful digital environment. This will contribute to the growing discourse on digital governance, peace communication, and responsible online behavior in ethnically and politically diverse societies.

Research Methods

This study adopts a theoretical research design**,** relying on theoretical analysis, document review, and qualitative content analysis to critically examine the management and mismanagement of social media platforms in relation to peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. The study is non-empirical and does not involve primary data collection; rather, it draws exclusively on secondary sources to generate analytical and conceptual insights. Data were sourced from peer-reviewed academic journals, scholarly books, government policy documents, regulatory frameworks, digital media reports, and documented case studies relevant to social media governance, online civility, hate speech, and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. These materials were systematically obtained from reputable academic databases, online archives, credible news agencies, and official publications of regulatory and public orientation institutions, particularly the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Orientation Agency (NOA)**.**

The analysis was guided by an analytical framework grounded in Civility Theory and Social Responsibility Theory**,** which provided the conceptual lens for interpreting the roles, responsibilities, and ethical obligations of social media platforms in fostering peaceful online interactions. Literature selection was based on clearly defined criteria, including thematic relevance to social media governance and peaceful coexistence, conceptual clarity, scholarly credibility, contextual relevance to Nigeria, and publication recency**.** Theoretical analysis proceeded through a systematic literature synthesis process involving four key steps. First, relevant documents were screened and categorized based on their focus on online behaviour, platform governance, regulation, and conflict dynamics. Second, a qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify recurring concepts, arguments, and normative positions related to digital civility, platform accountability, and social responsibility. Third, identified themes were comparatively analysed across sources to establish convergences, divergences, and conceptual gaps in existing scholarship. Finally, insights derived from this synthesis were integrated and abstracted to develop a coherent conceptual framework explaining how the management or mismanagement of social media platforms influences peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Conceptual Explications

Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms refer to web-based and mobile technologies that enable users to create, share, and interact with content in real-time within digital communities. These platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, YouTube, and LinkedIn. They function as dynamic, user-driven spaces where individuals, groups, organizations, and even governments engage in multifaceted communication activities, ranging from informal social interaction to political mobilization, business promotion, and advocacy (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

At their core, social media platforms are networked communication technologies that operate on the principles of user-generated content, participatory culture, and algorithmic dissemination (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These platforms differ from traditional mass media by facilitating horizontal (peer-to-peer) communication rather than vertical (top-down) dissemination. This interactivity has revolutionized how people access information, express opinions, form identities, and organize collective actions (Dijck, 2013).

One of the defining characteristics of social media is interactivity, which allows users not only to consume content but to engage with it by liking, commenting, reposting, or creating counter-

narratives. This participatory element contributes to the viral spread of content whether beneficial or harmful. Another critical feature is connectivity, where platforms use algorithms to recommend content and connect users with similar interests, thereby creating digital "echo chambers" that can reinforce biases and escalate polarization (Sunstein, 2018).

While social media platforms have democratized communication by giving voice to the marginalized and enabling real-time information sharing, they also come with serious drawbacks. The absence of editorial control, combined with algorithmic prioritization of sensational content, often leads to the amplification of misinformation, hate speech, and divisive narratives (Gorwa, 2019). In contexts like Nigeria characterized by ethnic, religious, and political sensitivities, these dynamics can deepen societal tensions and undermine national unity (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021).

Moreover, the rise of anonymous or pseudonymous participation on social media platforms has emboldened users to engage in uncivil behavior without fear of accountability. This has led to a surge in online harassment, cyberbullying, and hate speech, posing challenges for digital governance and social harmony (Papacharissi, 2004). In many cases, digital platforms lack effective content moderation policies tailored to local contexts, resulting in either over-regulation or under-regulation of harmful content.

Social media platforms are not merely neutral technological tools; they are socio-technical systems shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. They are governed by corporate actors often based in the Global North whose business models prioritize user engagement and advertising revenue over content integrity or social impact (Zuboff, 2019). This has raised ethical questions about platform responsibility, data surveillance, and the manipulation of public opinion.

In Nigeria, the impact of social media has been profound. While it has supported democratic movements like #EndSARS and amplified voices of civil society, it has also been a vehicle for promoting ethnic profiling, political propaganda, and violence-inciting rhetoric. According to Adewumi and Ajayi (2021), the unregulated use of social media has contributed to several episodes of communal violence, election-related tensions, and widespread misinformation.

Yet, despite its risks, social media remains a central part of Nigeria’s public discourse, particularly among youth populations, and thus cannot be ignored in any serious discussion about peacebuilding or national integration. Therefore, social media platforms are powerful digital environments that reflect both the best and worst of human interaction.

Online Civility

Online civility refers to respectful, polite, and constructive behavior exhibited by individuals in digital environments such as social media platforms, forums, comment sections, and messaging applications. It emphasizes the ethical use of language, acknowledgment of diverse perspectives, and adherence to social norms in virtual communication settings.

Scholars have defined the concept in various ways. According to Papacharissi (2004), civility in online communication entails the expression of opinions in a manner that respects the rights of others, even in the face of ideological or political disagreement. She distinguishes it from politeness, arguing that while politeness is about social etiquette, civility is rooted in democratic engagement and mutual respect. Similarly, Coe, Kenski, and Rains (2014) define online civility as "the absence of features such as name-calling, vulgarity, and personal attacks that disrupt rational discourse and productive dialogue."

In the digital age, online civility has become a critical concern due to the increasingly toxic tone of internet conversations, especially on platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, and WhatsApp, where anonymity or distance often emboldens people to act disrespectfully. This is particularly evident in Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and political sentiments are easily provoked through uncivil language online, fueling hate speech and social division (Adewumi & Ajayi, 2021).

One of the pillars of online civility is tolerance the willingness to accept differences in opinion, belief, or identity. In pluralistic societies like Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity defines public life, tolerance in digital spaces becomes a moral imperative. Civil online behavior allows individuals to engage with unfamiliar or even uncomfortable viewpoints without resorting to hate speech or digital aggression (Ezeah, 2021).

Another critical dimension of online civility is the ability to disagree respectfully. In democratic societies, disagreement is inevitable and even healthy, but the manner of expressing it matters. Civil disagreement involves challenging ideas without attacking the person, using logical argumentation rather than insults or threats. According to Anderson et al. (2021), online civility "enables disagreement while maintaining respect for persons and democratic values." In Nigeria, where political and social divisions run deep, promoting civil disagreement is crucial for reducing digital hostility, particularly during elections, crises, or sensitive national debates. The tendency to demonize

or dehumanize those with opposing views on social media not only stifles dialogue but also increases the risk of offline violence.

Peaceful Coexistence

Peaceful coexistence is a socio-political and ethical concept that refers to the ability of individuals or groups with differing identities, beliefs, values, and interests to live together in mutual respect, tolerance, and non-violence. It emphasizes the deliberate avoidance of conflict and the active promotion of harmony among people of diverse backgrounds. The term has both philosophical and practical dimensions, especially in multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and politically diverse societies.

UNESCO (2016) describes peaceful coexistence as the foundation of social cohesion, noting that it "involves fostering a culture of dialogue, mutual respect, and cooperation to prevent conflict and promote societal harmony."

According to the Global Peace Foundation Nigeria (2023), peaceful coexistence is "the ability of different ethnic, religious, or political groups to live together without violence, by respecting each other's rights, identities, and freedoms, and by working collaboratively toward shared goals." This definition underscores the mutual responsibility of individuals and institutions to foster dialogue and justice in a diverse society.

Similarly, the Beyond Intractability Project at the University of Colorado (2024) defines peaceful coexistence as "a state in which two or more groups live together while respecting their differences, resolving conflicts nonviolently, and upholding values of fairness and mutual tolerance." This view reflects the shift from merely avoiding violence to actively promoting social cohesion and empathy, particularly in conflict-prone societies.

In the digital age, the idea of peaceful coexistence has extended into virtual spaces where people interact across boundaries of geography, identity, and ideology. Social media platforms, while intended to connect people, often become arenas of conflict, hate speech, misinformation, and social division. This is especially the case in societies like Nigeria, where ethnic and religious diversity intersects with political polarization and economic inequality (Adebayo & Obayan, 2022).

Online platforms now mirror and amplify real-world tensions, making peaceful coexistence not just a physical but a digital imperative. In this context, peaceful coexistence means interacting respectfully

online, avoiding inciting or inflammatory content, and promoting narratives of unity and understanding.

For instance, during elections or crises in Nigeria, online platforms have often become spaces for toxic exchanges, rumor-mongering, and identity-based antagonism. As Olawale and Ibrahim (2023) observe, the digital domain in Nigeria is frequently "a reflection of deep-seated distrust and unresolved societal tensions, intensified by anonymity and the absence of moderation."

Peaceful coexistence is increasingly seen in contemporary discourse not just as the absence of conflict, but as the presence of tolerance, respect, justice, and nonviolent interaction among diverse individuals or groups. While the term has deep historical roots in diplomacy and intergroup relations, recent scholarly and policy-oriented definitions have emphasized its multidimensional and proactive nature.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, the area of concern is underpinned using two theories such as Civility Theory and Social Responsibility Theory.

The Civility Theory

The Civility Theory is rooted in the philosophical and communication scholarship of Edward Shils (1997) and later expanded by scholars such as Carter and Elshtain (2004), posits that a healthy public discourse depends on mutual respect, politeness, tolerance for opposing views, and adherence to societal norms of decorum. Central elements of the theory include respectful dialogue, tolerance in disagreement, avoidance of verbal aggression, and responsibility in communication (Papacharissi, 2004). It emphasizes that civility is not merely politeness but a deliberate mode of communication that enables democratic engagement, even amidst ideological diversity (Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Critics of the theory argue that it may be used to suppress dissent or uncomfortable truths under the guise of maintaining order, thus potentially favoring dominant or privileged voices (Herbst, 2010). However, its strength lies in its relevance to pluralistic and digital societies, where discourse can easily become polarized or toxic. Applied to this study, the theory offers a valuable framework for evaluating how social media platforms in Nigeria can be managed to discourage incivility, promote respectful engagement, and enable peaceful coexistence across ethnic, religious, and political lines. Ultimately,

Civility Theory supports the advocacy for digital spaces that not only protect free speech but also foster constructive and empathetic communication, especially in culturally diverse societies like Nigeria.

Social Responsibility Theory

This study also draws upon the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press, propounded by members of the Hutchins Commission in 1947, including scholars such as Robert Hutchins and Theodore Peterson. The theory argues that the media should operate in the public interest by promoting truth, fairness, balance, and social good, while also being accountable to society (McQuail, 2010). Its core elements include freedom of expression with responsibility, pluralism of viewpoints, media accountability, and ethical journalism (Fourie, 2007). A key criticism of the theory is its idealism, as it assumes that media practitioners will always act ethically, even in the face of economic, political, or ideological pressures (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). However, its strength lies in its emphasis on the media's duty to uphold democracy, promote dialogue, and avoid content that may incite conflict or undermine social cohesion. Applied to this study, the theory offers a strong normative framework for regulating and managing social media platforms in Nigeria. It suggests that social media operators, content creators, and users alike have a collective responsibility to foster civility, discourage hate speech, and promote peaceful interaction. By adhering to social responsibility principles, social media can become a tool for unity and peaceful coexistence, rather than division and hostility.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Adebiyi et al. (2025), in their work *"Media and the Propagation of Hate Speech in Nigeria: Implications for National Security and Social Cohesion,"* adopted a mixed-methods design. They performed content analysis of traditional and digital media outputs and conducted in-depth interviews with journalists and media experts. Both statistical methods (chi-square tests) and qualitative thematic analysis were employed. Findings showed that ethnic and religious hate speech proliferates particularly on social media and significantly contributes to insecurity and social division. The authors called for stronger regulatory frameworks and public education campaigns. However, while the study is rich in diagnosing the problem, it does not offer practical digital strategies or frameworks for managing platform behavior to foster civility—a gap this study seeks to bridge.

Ilevbare et al. (2024) conducted a technologically grounded study titled *"EkoHate: Abusive Language and Hate Speech Detection for Code-switched Political Discussions on Nigerian Twitter"*. Using a

mixed-method design, the researchers collected and annotated a dataset of tweets related to the 2023 Lagos governorship election, focusing on code-switched expressions (Yoruba-English). They employed manual binary and multi-label annotation, alongside supervised machine learning and cross-lingual classification techniques. The results demonstrated an impressive 95.1 F1 score for binary classification and 70.3 F1 for fine-grained categorization. While the study makes a significant contribution to automated hate speech detection in Nigeria's digital sphere, it is limited in scope as it does not address the broader implications of hate speech on civic behavior or propose civil discourse strategies. This leaves a gap that the present study intends to fill by examining how platforms can be managed to promote civility and peaceful coexistence.

Oriola and Ajayi (2023) carried out a descriptive survey involving 106 communication scholars in Nigeria to assess their perceptions of social media hate speech regulation. Data were collected via an online questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found a general consensus among scholars regarding the prevalence of hate speech and the need for regulatory intervention. However, it also revealed concerns about potential government overreach and suppression of free speech. Although the research contributes to the academic discourse on policy and regulation, it focuses solely on expert opinion and lacks an exploration of platform-level user behavior and practical communication norms. The current study builds on this by proposing platform-based strategies to cultivate civility and peaceful engagement among users.

Adebumiti and Olaseinde (2022) investigated hate speech patterns on Facebook during Nigeria's 2019 presidential election campaigns. Utilizing a quantitative survey design, the researchers gathered data from social media users through structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed widespread use of hate speech to discredit political opponents and mobilize ethnic sentiments. The authors emphasized the urgent need for regulatory measures and responsible use of social platforms during elections. While the study captures important public perceptions of hate speech, it does not explore the operational mechanisms of platform governance or user accountability. In contrast, the present research seeks to propose proactive platform management approaches that go beyond description, aiming to encourage ethical engagement and online civility.

Alakali, Faga, and Mbursa (2017) examined public perception of hate speech and foul language on Nigerian social media using a mixed-method approach. They surveyed 384 respondents and conducted focus group discussions to gather data on the frequency, impact, and users' awareness of legal implications. Their analysis combined descriptive statistics with thematic interpretation, alongside a

doctrinal review of existing legal provisions. The study revealed a high prevalence of hate speech, coupled with limited public awareness of the associated legal consequences. While the research highlights critical awareness and regulatory issues, it stops short of addressing the role of digital platform architecture or user-interface features in fostering respectful communication. This presents a conceptual gap that the current study intends to fill by emphasizing the design and governance of social media platforms as tools for promoting peaceful coexistence.

All five studies primarily describe hate speech prevalence, detection, or perceptions, but none provide actionable frameworks for managing social media platforms to reclaim civility and promote peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Discussion

We have attempted to explore the topic "Promoting Civility Online Through Management of Social Media Platforms for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria" and we have also underscored the urgent need to address the growing trend of hostile and uncivil interactions on digital platforms, which this study critically examined through some reviews of empirical studies. The findings of this study reveal a persistent and growing misuse of social media platforms in Nigeria, where online spaces are increasingly dominated by incivility, hate speech, and hostile interactions, especially along political, ethnic, and religious lines.

Conceptually, the study develops a Social Media Civility Management Framework, which identifies four interrelated components: (i) Platform Governance Structures (rules, moderation policies, and algorithmic accountability), (ii) Regulatory and Institutional Oversight (roles of agencies such as the NCC and NOA), (iii) Civic and Digital Literacy (user awareness, ethical norms, and civic responsibility), and (iv) Context-Sensitive Moderation Mechanisms (tools that recognize Nigeria's political, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity). The analysis suggests that the absence or weakness of any of these components undermines the ability of social media platforms to function as spaces for constructive dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

From the perspective of Civility Theory, the findings highlight that respectful engagement online cannot emerge organically without intentional institutional support. Where platforms fail to enforce norms of respectful discourse, verbal aggression, hate speech, and polarization become normalized, particularly during politically sensitive or socially charged periods. This reinforces the theoretical claim that civility is a learned and regulated social practice, not merely an individual moral choice.

The Nigerian digital space illustrates how unchecked incivility can spill over into offline tensions, thereby threatening social cohesion. This was supported by Ilevbare et al. (2024),

who observed a high prevalence of abusive and hate-laden discourse on Nigerian Twitter, particularly during politically sensitive periods. Similarly, Adebumiti and Olaseinde (2022) confirmed that during the 2019 presidential elections, Facebook was used as a medium for promoting division rather than constructive political dialogue.

Similarly, the application of Social Responsibility Theory reveals a diffusion of responsibility among platform operators, regulators, and users. While platforms prioritize engagement metrics and regulators focus on reactive controls, insufficient attention is paid to proactive ethical governance and user education. The study's conceptual contribution lies in reframing social media management as a shared responsibility model, where platforms must embed ethical design and moderation, regulatory institutions must provide adaptive governance frameworks, and users must be empowered through digital civility education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Nigeria's ethnic, religious, and political diversity makes the management of social media platforms for peaceful coexistence not just important but imperative. The growing misuse of digital spaces to spread hate speech, incivility, and misinformation continues to undermine national unity and social harmony. As online interactions increasingly reflect and amplify offline tensions, there is an urgent need for a collective effort to reclaim civility in the digital space. This involves not only the enforcement of regulatory frameworks and platform-level accountability but also the promotion of digital literacy, user responsibility, and ethical communication practices. Ensuring respectful dialogue and discouraging hostility online, social media can become a tool for building bridges rather than walls, this will greatly contribute to national integration, democratic resilience, and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the literature reviewed and key findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward for social media users and government agencies toward promoting civility and peaceful coexistence online:

1. Government agencies such as National Orientation agency (NOA), National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), and National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should invest in nationwide digital literacy campaigns that educate citizens on responsible social media use, online civility, and the consequences of hate speech.
2. Social media users must be deliberate about the tone and content of their posts, avoiding abusive, inflammatory, or divisive language, especially during sensitive national events like elections. During election seasons, INEC can integrate online civility messages into voter education campaigns to mitigate digital hate and political incitement.
3. When confronted with offensive content, users should report such posts to platform administrators instead of responding with similar incivility or aggression.
4. Users are encouraged to counter misinformation or opposing views with verified facts and constructive dialogue, rather than insults or threats.
5. Individuals must take personal responsibility for their digital conduct, understanding that their words online can escalate conflicts or foster peace.
6. Government at every level should support programs that use social media for conflict prevention, interethnic dialogue, and promotion of national unity, particularly among youth and politically active groups.
7. The administration of justice for social media-related offences in Nigeria is often slow, thereby weakening the deterrent effect of the law and denying victims' timely redress. It is therefore recommended that the jurisdiction of Magistrate and Area Courts be expanded to cover specific categories of cyber-related and online defamation cases. As courts of summary jurisdiction are better positioned to handle such matters swiftly, thereby improving access to justice and promoting greater accountability in the digital space.

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