

## IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON AWARENESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

*The study examined the influence of social media on awareness of human rights among undergraduates in a Nigerian University. The study adopted the Agenda setting theory as the theoretical framework in generating qualitative data around the major variables under investigation. Descriptive survey research type was adopted for the study while the final year students in Niger Delta University constituted the target population. 246 undergraduates were randomly selected as sample from six faculties in Niger Delta University for the study. A 22-items researcher's designed questionnaire tagged "Social Media and Undergraduate Students' Awareness of Human Rights Questionnaire (SMUSAHRQ)" was used as an instrument for data collection. The face and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by experts in Educational Research, Test and Measurement in the Department of Educational Foundations and the Department of Social Science Education, Niger Delta University. A test-retest method was deployed to determine the reliability of the instrument using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation in which a reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. Findings indicated that majority of undergraduates students in Niger Delta university are very much aware of their fundamental human rights but not through the social media. Thus, it was concluded that though undergraduate students in Niger Delta University makes use of the social media, it does not necessary influence their awareness of human rights. Therefore, the study recommended among others that students can leverage on the social media to increase their awareness to human rights.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Awareness, Human Rights, Undergraduates and University

### Introduction

In today's society, the role of the social media is increasingly gaining momentum even as it has in no small measure helped in promoting the right things on right time and gives real as well as strong aspects of the world about what is right or wrong. Also, it also express that how can we store and distributes the views. The world is progressively moving in every step of life. But one cannot deny the fact that people everywhere are bounded directly or indirectly with the loads of socialization of the media, which affects several persons in the society.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media can be defined as a group of internet based applications built on ideological

based technologies which allows for the creation and exchange of user generated contents. For Jan and Hermkens (2011), social media is also known to play an essential role in collaboration, community building, participation, sharing and motivation of students' secondary and tertiary education. A critical point to note is that social media utilizes mobile and web-based technologies to initiate highly interactive platforms through which individuals, institutions and other community of people share, discuss, and modify user-generated contents to enhance their relationship and level of interaction. It should be noted that social media exists in different forms such as internet forums, web-logs, social-blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcasts, rating, social

bookmarking and social networks (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007).

Obviously, the rapid adoption of social media by students in the countries round the world raises some important questions on the effects of its usage on the motivation of students that use these sites. Social media websites, such as Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter, have become an integral part of students' lives. On the other hand, there is a general belief that, more than ever before in human history and learning, social media now contribute to peoples' awareness and attitudes towards issues of social concern such as human rights giving the fact that it saves time in solving these issues (Jan & Hermkens, 2011).

Social media usage by students is so rampant recently because of easy access to devices such as smart phones, iPhone, black berry, tablets, iPad and laptops which are connected to the internet. Addiction to the usage of social media has extremely increased in recent times as student users often download assignments without proper content evaluation. The perils of its effects on the academic motivation and performance of the over-involved students are disturbing them in their academics. Enriquez (2010) in his study asserted that students who multi-task between social media sites and homework are likely to have 20% lower grades than a student who does not have a social media site in visual range. Napoleon (2010) opined that there is in existence a continuing drop of grades among student users of social media.

Similarly, the term 'human rights' stem from the recognition of rights that belong to an individual as a consequence of being human and it have been a global phenomenon which have overtime helped lots of people recognize the fact that humans and students have right in the society. The fact remains that rights are inherent in nature and have come up in our society over the years. Generally, human rights could be regarded as basic liberties and fundamental freedoms without which people irrespective of race, gender, socio-economic status, religion or political affiliations; cannot live with respect and dignity wherever they found themselves. More so, Goli (2016) argued

that people's rights are regulated by rule of law and it is the duty of the government to enforce and protect these rights and fundamental freedoms.

Human rights are generally categorized into social, economic and political rights claimed by everyone and held for everyone, especially by government through social institutions like the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. With the advent of the United Nations (UN) and the subsequent adoption of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the concept of human rights has turned out to be one of the most contemporary issues across the globe. The UN Charter, which was adopted in 1945, was the first international document to recognize the protection and promotion of human rights as an obligation to be carried out by individual, as well as collective states. The main reason behind the adoption of the charter was, according to Smith, Sinclair and Chapman (2002), to forestall the reoccurrence of the horrible events caused by two devastating world wars which were caused by massive violations of human rights and unbridled breach of territorial integrity.

In order to give a solid foundation for analysis and discussion of views and opinions in this study, the Agenda Setting Theory was adopted. The theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972. Accordingly, the Agenda Theory argued that the media are not always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think about. Corroborating the Agenda Setting theory, Asemah (2011) opined that in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important parts shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much important to attach to the issues from the amount of the information in the news story and its positions.

Wimmer and Dominick (2000) observed that the theory on agenda setting by the media proposed that the public agenda or what kind of things people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what they choose to publicize. This theory is therefore

relevant to the study because not only the main stream media but higher institutions' students can leverage on the many potentials of the social media to set the agenda of human rights in Nigeria, so that the people will think along that line.

A study by Akiri (2013) on students' and human rights awareness in secondary school environment in Delta State using descriptive design and stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select the sample size of students and teacher reported among others, that there is limited awareness of the fundamental rights amongst secondary school students and teacher. Similarly, a study by Goli (2016) on the awareness of human rights among different teaching professionals in Warangal District with a sample of 112 teaching professionals of Warangal district of Telangana state. Self-made tool was developed for the study. Results show that moderate levels of awareness on Human rights noticed among teaching professionals. In Goli's study, Locality and management aspect of teaching professional indicated no significant difference on human rights awareness.

Despite the enormous and detailed investigations conducted in the area of human rights awareness, there still exist hitherto some research gaps, lapses and unanswered questions by scholars and commentators to which this research hopes to address and therefore add to the body of knowledge on the influence of social media on awareness of human rights among undergraduates in a Nigerian University but with a focus on students in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of social media on awareness of human rights among undergraduate students in Nigerian University. Specifically, the objectives of the study include the following:

- i. To assess the general level of awareness of human rights among undergraduate students of Niger Delta University Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
- ii. To determine the influence of social media on awareness of human rights among

undergraduate students in Niger Delta University.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions were posed to guide the study:

- i. What is the general level of awareness of human rights among undergraduate students in Niger Delta University?
- ii. To what extent do social media influence the awareness of human rights among undergraduate students in Niger Delta University?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive design to get relevant information on the influence of Social Media on awareness of Human Rights among Undergraduate students in a Nigerian University. The target population of the study consisted of final students of Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. A proportionate sampling technique was used to sample 300 undergraduate students in six faculties (Basic Medical Sciences, Clinical Sciences, Education, Law, Nursing, and Social Sciences) of the twelve faculties in the university. The instrument for data collection was a researcher's designed 22-items questionnaire titled "Social Media and Undergraduate Students' Awareness of Human Rights Questionnaire (SMUSAHRQ)". The SMUSAHRQ consisted of two sections (A & B). Section 'A' focused on the respondents' demographic variables such as gender and class while section 'B' consisted of 22 items that addressed the two research questions. The instrument was structured based on a modified 4-point Likert scale of Extremely Aware (EA), Moderately Aware (MA), Slightly Aware (SA), and Not Aware (NA) which was scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The face and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by two experts in Educational Research, Test and Measurement in the Department of Educational Foundations, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa state. The expert's comments and observations were used to modify the instrument before administering to the respondents. The test retest technique was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The research instrument was

administered twice to sample of 20 students outside the study area within a space of two weeks. The result of the first and second responses was correlated using Pearson Product Coefficient (PPMC) which yielded a reliability index of 0.81. The Researchers personally visited the selected faculties under the research locale in which three days was used to distribute the copies of questionnaire. The data collected from respondents was analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation. And, 2.50 were taken as the

decision threshold for each item; all point less than 2.50 were Disagreed.

**Results**

**Analysis of Research Questions**

Research Question One: What is the general level of awareness of human rights among undergraduate students in Niger Delta University?

**Table 1 Undergraduate Students’ Awareness of Human Rights**

S/N	Items	EA	MA	SA	NA	N	FX	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1.	Right to life	149	66	26	5	246	851	3.5	Accepted
2.	Right to dignity of human person	123	71	42	10	246	799	3.2	Accepted
3.	Right to personal liberty	116	84	35	11	246	797	3.2	Accepted
4.	Right to private life	122	83	33	8	246	811	3.3	Accepted
5.	Right to private and family life	125	80	31	10	246	811	3.3	Accepted
6.	Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	122	81	37	6	246	811	3.3	Accepted
7.	Right to freedom of expression and press	111	91	32	12	246	793	3.2	Accepted
8.	Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association	107	82	41	16	246	772	3.1	Accepted
9.	Right to freedom of movement	116	76	36	18	246	782	3.2	Accepted
10.	Right to freedom from discrimination	108	84	40	14	246	778	3.2	Accepted
11.	Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria	90	84	47	25	246	731	3.0	Accepted
<b>Grand Mean Score</b>								<b>3.2</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

**Source: Field Survey Data, 2019.**

Table 1 show that students are aware of the existence of human rights. The data presented in Table 1 was accepted because the mean scores

were up to the criterion mean of 2.5. The grand mean scores 3.2 was also accepted because it was higher than the criterion mean of 2.5

Research Question Two: To what extent do social media influence the awareness of human rights among undergraduate students in Niger Delta University?

**Table 2**  
**Influence of Social Media on Awareness of Human Rights among Undergraduate Students**

S/N	Items	EA	MA	SA	NA	N	FX	$\bar{X}$	Decision
12.	I became aware of my right to life through my use of the social media	40	69	57	80	246	561	2.3	Rejected
13.	I became aware of my right to dignity of human person through the social media	42	80	52	72	246	584	2.4	Rejected
14.	I became aware of my right to personal liberty through the social media	33	63	74	76	246	545	2.2	Rejected
15.	I became aware of my right to private life through my use of social media	33	61	80	72	246	547	2.2	Rejected
16.	I became aware of my right to private and family life through the social media	33	61	70	80	246	535	2.2	Rejected
17.	I became aware of my right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion through the social media	38	71	67	70	246	569	2.3	Rejected
18.	I became aware of my right to freedom of expression and press through the social media	30	77	68	71	246	558	2.3	Rejected
19.	I became aware of my right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association through the social media	32	82	58	74	246	564	2.3	Rejected
20.	I became aware of my right to freedom of movement through the social media	45	68	61	72	246	578	2.3	Rejected
21.	Through the social media I am aware that I have right to freedom from discrimination	41	65	60	80	246	559	2.3	Rejected
22.	My awareness of my right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria comes through the social media	59	70	60	57	246	623	2.5	Accepted
<b>Grand mean score</b>								<b>2.3</b>	<b>Rejected</b>

**Source: Field Survey Data, 2019.**

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that item 22 with mean score of 2.5 was accepted because the mean score is up to the criterion mean of 2.5 while the other items with mean scores of 2.3, 2.4, 2.2, 2.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.3, 2.3, 2.3,

and 2.3 were rejected because their mean scores were below 2.5. The grand mean score 2.3 was also rejected because it is not up to the criterion mean of 2.5.

## Discussion

This discussion is based on the two research questions raised in the study. The data in the tables shows that most students in Niger Delta University are aware of human rights such as; right to life, dignity of human person, personal liberty, private life, private family life, freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, press, peaceful assembly and association, movement, discrimination, right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria. However, the level of awareness of their fundamental human rights was not made possible by the social media as indicated in the results obtained in Tables 1 and 2.

First of all, the findings of this present study is not in agreement with the research of Akiri (2013) on students' and human rights awareness in secondary school environment in Delta State who reported among others, that there is limited awareness of the fundamental rights amongst secondary school students and teacher. This discrepancy could be due to the fact that the understanding of secondary school students to social-civic issues cannot be on the same pedestal with undergraduate students considering their maturity level and level of exposure in curriculum contents offered at these levels. However, the finding of this study is in line with the study of Goli (2016) which focused on the awareness of human rights among different teaching professionals in Waragal District of Telengana State. It indicated that there is moderate level of awareness on human rights among teaching professionals. The findings correlates with the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) who stated that member states of United Nations (undergraduates inclusive) recognized the inherent dignity and equal and ineligious rights of all members.

From these tables the analysis also enables us to understand that the undergraduates in Niger Delta University are very much aware of their human rights the data also shows that the undergraduates have been influenced by the social media. This finding is in line with the study carried out by Akakandelwa and Walubita (2018) in a case study of the University of Zambia, the study found that more than half of

the students found themselves doing something else and felt their academic productivity suffered because of social media.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident that majority of the final year undergraduate students in the University where the research was carried out are moderately aware of Human Rights. Some students have different views on the influence of social media towards their attitude via social media. Notwithstanding, more awareness and attitudes to Human Rights through the social media still has to be put in place, especially on the part of schools who should be in the vanguard sustained sensitization. This school has more to impact to the undergraduate students not only academic, but issues that tend to be a challenge to the society.

On the basis of the above findings, the following are recommended.

- a. Nigerian university undergraduate students should be sensitized to use the social media correctly especially with regards to issues relating to human rights.
- b. Institutions should be created to regulate and moderate the influence of social media on human rights.
- c. The school management in Nigerian Universities should carry out more awareness campaigns on human rights to enable undergraduates to develop a positive attitude towards these rights.
- d. Governmental and non-governmental agencies in charge of promoting and safeguarding human rights should do so without fear or favour.

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