DIPLOMACY AND THE DILEMMA OF ROGUE REGIMES, RELIGION AND MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

The international system has been evolving with many recurring international issues that requires collaboration of global actors to address. Since the end of Cold War, the challenges of rogue states, faith regimes, and multinational companies exploiting and violating human rights has been on the rise. These issues are fueling conflict and insecurity, economic inequality between developing and developed nations, social unrest and terrorism etc. In all these, diplomacy has been instrumental in the pursuit for peace and stability through its practice of conducting negotiations, mediation and relationship building. Using the secondary and multidisciplinary sources, this study examines diplomacy and the dilemma of rogue regimes, religion and multinational corporations' in international relations. The study also used the realist and liberalism theories as a template for analysis. The study reveals that many international issues affecting the smooth conduct of international relations and diplomatic practice persist because state and corporate powers refuse to adhere to international laws. The study concludes that the challenges of the 21st century international system can be addressed only if diverse approaches, such as balancing coercion, engagement, containment, collective action and collaboration of major actors are prioritised. Actors in global community must act in accordance with the rules governing the international system. The study recommends amongst others,

that international institutions should be restructured and strengthened to address the challenges of the 21ˢᵗ century.

Keywords; diplomacy, human rights, rogue state, liberalism, religion, multinational corporations.

Introduction

One recurring themes in international relations and diplomacy is how the international system can be governed to the occasion that it poses no threat to the fragile peace and stability of the world. Diplomacy is basically an art of persuasion and not coercion, an alternative narrative to conflict and war, aimed at seeking for and finding common ground, forging agreement and achieving a balance of benefits that will allow each party to go home with at least some degree of satisfaction (Fretchette 2013). Alternatively, there are consequences for setbacks or lack of diplomatic conversations, discussion or agreement, and one of such is the distortion of the international system which has brought global actors together. International community here comprises network of states, institutions, organizations and individuals interacting on a global stage for mutual benefits. It is the framework for international relations which outlines who interacts with whom, how they interact and what the rules of engagement are (Immerse education 2023).

The international system is volatile and unstable in contrast to what it portray to be. For instance, when navigating the nexus between terrorism and rogue states, Huang (2016) observed that, emerging rogue states like Iran is considered a top state sponsor of terrorism by the US. Becoming one of the most pressing threats to the US and its allies. Also Iran uses terror networks operating in the Middle east to destabilize the region, with an attempt to topple legitimate regimes. It is also important to mention that, Iran had occupied the US embassy in Tehran and held the diplomatic staff hostage for 444 days (Farhad 2017). Which is against international diplomatic protocol in Article 22(2) of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Furthermore, how do states engage faith regimes driven by radical evangelical religious ideology? How can the international community deal with corporate powers carrying out significant volume of world trade to the occasion that it poses no threat to human rights and environment? The impact of global economy on the Ogoni people and environment standout as one of the worst cases of human rights abuse, capitalist exploitation and environmental degradation.

This research examines international diplomatic issues and offered valuable insight into how international corporation and collaboration of global actors can deal with rogue states, faith regimes and greedy companies. The study maintains that the power dynamics within the international system has made it volatile and difficult for the application of certain international laws. It however calls for global corporation and collective action to advance the frontiers of peace and stability. International laws and convention must be followed strictly in order to maintain law and order within the international community.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth insight of the topic under research, and further revealed its wider implication on international relations and diplomacy. The qualitative approach allows for the exploration of complex phenomena, and the underlying causes that quantitative methods might not fully capture. It further utilized the secondary and multidisciplinary source to gather the data needed for the study.

Literature Review
Diplomacy

Diplomacy simply mean a game changing alternative narrative to war, violence and conflict. According to Cornago (2008, p. 574) diplomacy can be defined as "the conduct of international relations by negotiation and dialog or by any other means to promote peaceful relations among states". Through negotiation, dialog and mediation, countries have pursued peaceful resolution of conflict and war. Diplomacy is basically an art of persuasion and not coercion, an alternative narrative to conflict and war, aimed at seeking for and finding common ground, forging agreement and achieving a balance of benefits that will allow each party to go home with at least some degree of satisfaction (Fretchette 2013).

To Obuah (2017; 2019) diplomacy is an important means by which states pursue their foreign policies. Because states are guided by self-interest and greed in pursuing their foreign policy objectives, diplomacy becomes the main vehicle by which states resolve their difference other than war and conflict.

For Baker (1992) diplomacy is seen as an art of managing and enhancing relations between states, institutions, non-governmental and governmental organizations. By this, diplomacy bridge the gap between countries and other actors that operate within the international system towards maintaining a friendly relation. Nbete (2022) as cited in Sangha (2023) explains that diplomacy and diplomatic practice is not just about having embassy or consulate in other countries, it is about exploiting and exploring areas of mutual interest and shared values between a country and another. Diplomacy has moved beyond state to state to people to people.

Theoretical framework
Realist theory

This theory has its root from ancient times with Thucydides who is considered the father of realism This theory has shaped international relations and diplomacy as it continues to influence diplomatic practices, negotiations, global governance and international institutions. This is one of the oldest and influential theories of international relation and emphasizes the role of power, security and self interest in shaping state behavior. Holsti (1979) explain that states are in constant struggle to increase their own power relative to other states. This is because a powerful state, by military power, will always out-do its weaker competitors. The increasing influence of Rogue state, faith-based communities and corporate powers show this theory in action. Because states are controlled by humans who act according to self-interest, states seek for power to compete and advance national interest. Iran challenge the existing global power structure and international laws. On the issue of crazy religious diplomacy, Iran expressed hope to create a new world order centred around a Muslim community called

"Ummah" (the universal Muslim community) (Farhad 2017). Corporate powers are primarily driven by economic interest which is detrimental to societal goals thus they work to maximize interest even without regard to international laws and human rights.

Liberalism Theory

The theory of liberalism emerged in international relation as an alternative narrative or approach to realism, providing valuable insights which are ideologically driven in managing issues of international politics and diplomacy. Toprak (n.d) it is an approach that attaches importance to issues such as cooperation, institutionalization, justice, law, order, freedom, and human rights in international relations. It believes that with restructuring of international society, the formation of international law norms and international institutions, will lead to a more functional and less competitive global order. Liberals maintain that for there to be stability in the global system, states need to de-emphasis on military force, promote democratic values, comprises, uphold the rule of law and priorities economic growth by increasing global production of goods (Pease 2012). The theory has been used to explain the UN, EU integration, WTO, ICJ etc. The involvement of international institution in containing rogue states, via multilateral diplomacy illustrate this theory in action. For instance, the Iran, USA and E5+1 Agreement on the Nuclear Weapon Proliferation threat of Iran has further deepen understanding of the theory in modern diplomacy.

Empirical Review

Saaida, (2023) in his article *The global issues that matter the world,* looked at some of the global issues touching on everyday life of individuals such as climate change, unemployment, food security, health issues etc. Finding reveals that the main driver of many global issues is the economic factor which states continue to pursue. It concluded that global issues are complex and multifaceted, requiring a coordinated approach that addresses their underlying causes and promotes sustainable solutions. Saaida recommends "finding alternative ways for making life easier through friendly environmental ways of living". This work did not deal with the issues of power dynamics between states like Rogue states, religious diplomacy, the impact of greedy companies exploiting the global public etc, which is what this paper hope to achieve.

Sangha (2023) in his dissertation titled *The diplomatic dimensions of Ogoni struggles 1990-2010* looked at the role of international organizations in addressing the issue of human rights, economic exploitation and environmental problems in Ogoni land. The study revealed that greedy companies like Shell was responsible for carrying out wide spread environmental degradation in Ogoni land, the company through it operations was involved in the systemic human right abuse and the violent repression of the Ogoni people. Sangha concluded that the Ogoni people became victim of international politics because of the unique backwardness of the Nigerian state in ensuring that multinational companies adhere to international laws and standard practice. The study recommends that government should prioritise and uphold human rights in oil producing regions.

Altynbek et al, (2023) in *Religious and political factor in Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia* examined the role of religion as a central theme in Iran foreign policy and relation between

central Asian countries and Middle East. The work reveals that with the failed attempt of Iran in exporting the Islamic revolution, Iran has shifted a bit to a more pragmatic and realistic foreign policy due to the it hostile relations with Western countries and other central Asia countries. The authors concluded that even when Iran's relation with Central Asia to a large extent is not ideologically driven in recent times, it radical Islamic approach in the Middle east will adversely affect relation with the central Asia countries.

Lampas (2025) in an article titled Adjusting for "rogue states": Policy solutions for international organizations looked at the approach and ways the international organization deal with rogue states. The study reveals that aged long traditional tools like sanctions and diplomatic isolation often used in containing rogue states do more harm than good. The study concluded that the rejection of multilateralism approach to rogue state by the United States under president trump undermines international institution, thereby weakening the effectiveness of international organizations. It concluded that Trump's return to power is a stress test for the fragile multilateral system.

The Impact of Rogue State on International Relations

International politics is anarchic and highly competitive in all ramifications because states and corporate powers constantly seek self interest by all means possible. Having this in mind, some states use unconventional means to pursue national interest. Lampas, (2022) explain that throughout the history of the discipline of international relations the concept of rogue state has been used to describe a small group of states that has been marginalized by the international community due to their aggressive behavior. These states feel threatened by the existing international system perceived as a stumbling block to their national interest. In an attempt to balance power, they resort to unconventional means to breakthrough and if possible obliterate the existing system which according to them favours the West.

Litwak (2000) as cited in (Sharp (2009) however observed that the use and significance of the concept have greatly increased since the end of the Cold War with the United States and its allies labelling a small number of middle and minor power states as rogues and outlaws. For the US these states are considered the greatest threat to peace and security since the end of the cold war; rogue states replaced the threat of the Soviet Union, and this was evidenced by the transformation of US national security policy following the fall of the Soviet Union (Nicholaos, 2002).

The idea of rogue state therefore assumed the existence of an international community united behind supposedly universal western interest and values. For Mousavizadeh (2010) the main challenge to American dominance came from those states unwilling to accommodate themselves to the end of history and conform to US values. While this can be considered as an American concept no objective criteria define the term because despite the characterization the common use of the term to describe Cuba, Iran, Libya, Iraq and North Korea allowed observers to establish that they were countries associated with several undesirable behaviors-namely the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, support for terrorism, blatant disregard for human rights and vocal animosity towards the United States (O'Sullivan 2000). Rogue state should be seen in this regard as not pre-given, but politically constructed to categorise states that seek nuclear proliferation. In essence rogue states do not exist rather states are cast as rogues (Sharp n.d).

Some of the factors that motivate states towards a certain behavior/action includes the need to maintain or develop their own domestic power either to be considered as equal/show or show capacity protect themselves against potential threats. And they have managed to remain through strong state centered ideology, powerful alliances and having key resources. Their growing influence lies in their strategic partnership and corporations with Russia and China which are also members of the UN security council. This has made it a bit difficult dealing with some of the rogue states like North Korea and Iran.

Some of the rogue nations include, Iran, Libya, Iraq, Pakistan, Cuba, Syria, North Korea, Afghanistan, Cuba, Venezuela, etc. Iran as far back as 1984 was designated rouge by the United states of America, due to it stances in promoting terrorism in the middle east. Iran uses terror networks operating in the Middle east to destabilize the region, with an attempt to topple legitimate regimes. Iran had occupied the US embassy in Tehran and held the diplomatic staff hostage for 444 days (Farhad 2017). Libya from the period of 1980 under the administration of Muammar Qaddafi was designated rogue because of its sponsor of international terrorism. Libya by 1988 carried out a deadly terrorist attack with the Pan Am Flight 103 killing about 259 people on board (Schwartz 2007). Iran was designated rogue for it pursuit of Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD), support for terrorism, brutal suppression of citizens (Bush 2002 as cited in White House 2002). Similarly, North Korea was designated rouge for it pursuit of nuclear weapon. North Korea has carried out multiple test of it nuclear weapon which has cast doubt on the Nuclear None Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968.

Characteristics of Rogue States
- They are usually aggressive
- They are hostile to some other states which they view as enemies. Example, Iran's contempt for Israel.
- They are believed to be sponsors of terrorism and also carryout state terrorism.
- They seek to acquire Weapon of Mass Destruction (WM) and go nuclear
- They are rigid and irrational
- They are oppressive both internally and externally

How to Deal with Rogue States
- ★ Sanction; Sanctions are restrictive diplomatic tool or measures used by state actors, and international governmental organization to influence the behaviour of a rogue state. It could be in form of economic, financial sanction, military sanction, sanction, sanction on military hardware, etc. from the beginning of 2020 to 2023, there has been series of economic as well as military sanction on Russia for invading Ukraine.
- ★ Regime change; this is a policy option for dealing with the threat of rogue states with a view of reintegrating rogue states into the international community. It was a policy used by the United States of America used in 2003 when the Bush administration invaded Iraq. The invasion led to the remover of Saddam Hussein (Gordon & Trainor, 2006) as cited in (Lampas, 2022).
- ★ Diplomatic Engagement; this is a non-confrontational policy of states and supranational organization used in dealing with rogue states. It was used by the international

community in the case of Libya from the period of 1980 when Libya was strongly condemned and designated as one of the massive sponsors of international terrorism (Schwartz 2007).

★ Multilateral Diplomacy; multilateral diplomacy is highly favoured now in international relation and negotiation. It was used in the case of the **Iran, USA and E5+1 Agreement on the Nuclear Weapon Proliferation threat of Iran.** The agreement was reached in Vienna in on 15th July, 2015. The purpose of the JCPOA was to make sure that Iran would not develop a nuclear weapon and implemented measures to ensure the peaceful nature of their nuclear program (Mosk 2017) as cited in (Sangha, 2024).

The Impact of Faith-Regimes on International Relations and Diplomatic Practice

Religious diplomacy specifically engages religious actors and institutions to address issues related to religion, identity, and conflicts with religious dimensions. In essence faith-based factors, principles, and actors are used in diplomatic efforts to promote understanding, peace, and corporation among different religious communities and nations (Haynes 2009).

The resent radicalization of some religion with extremist driven ideologies since after September 9/11 attack in the United States of America has left a significant impact on global security, diplomacy, stability and human rights abuse. Religious radicalization especially in the Middle east has accelerated a growing wave of terrorism ravaging the entire West Africa. This radicalization suppresses women and other minority groups, causing migration and refugee crisis. It in no way give room to freedom of speech, gender equality, and freedom of association. Also education and development suffers greatly due to how some extremist would target schools especially those believed to be teaching or promoting western practices.

For instance, In the Middle East, religious diplomacy has dominated the politics of the region. The relations of the Middle East often illustrate the problems posed by religion for diplomacy in their sharpest form (Sharp n.d). The rise of extreme religious evangelical movement is posing a fundamental challenge to international peace and stability. This is because some state actors are backing religious extremist and fundamentalist with both technical and tactical support to operate in states like Lebanon where Hezbollah is freely operating. Some of these groups include Al-Qaida, Taliban, Boko Haram, ISWAP, etc. They have exploited wars, state collapse and geopolitical upheaval in the middle east, gained new footholds in Africa like Boko Haram in Nigeria. These groups possess arms which has created proliferation concerns in the international system, as they all have gained access to significant weaponry, through smuggling or what was left behind after by retreating forces. There is also the issue of cyber security, as there have been rampant cases of the use of the internet to recruiting members and turning them into spies.

The inability to contain crazy religious diplomacy in the Middle East has given rise to fears about religion-driven movements aimed at institutionalizing religious ideologies and even civilizations posing unprecedented challenges to the idea of globalization steadily overwhelming the resistance of older, local or regional forms of social organization (Huntington 1996) as cited in (Sharp 2009). Crazy religious diplomacy according to the Muslim world, hope to create a new world order centred around a Muslim community called "Ummah" (the universal Muslim community) (Farhad 2017). This shift in ideology of some Middle East states

like Iran may be vague and unrealistic, but it remains a threat to international peace and stability.

Criticism of Against Faith Regimes
- Human right violations: it is driven by faith-based ideology and perception that tend to theorize the international system from the lens of faith. It opposes secular knowledge and lifestyle. For example, the Vatican diplomacy on reproductive rights.
- Fueling global conflicts: it poses significant challenge to the continuous crisis in the Middle; political, territorial, and ideological differences have made it difficult to reach a lasting resolution.
- Religious differences and competing claims to sacred sites have exacerbated tensions and hindered peace negotiations. E.g, Israel-Palestinian claim to Jerusalem holy sites.
- Promoting extremist ideologies to create a new international system based on religious laws. They prioritize geopolitical considerations and religious interest over dialogue and understanding, such as the case of Middle East.
- Funding extremist groups with evangelical religious undertone.

Multinational corporations and it Impact on International Relations

Greedy company refers to the behavior of companies or corporations with the primary aim of maximizing profits often at the expense of ethical considerations, environmental concerns or social responsibility. One of the contending issues for diplomats in international relations before now, was how to negotiate for the creation of open market for the production and distribution of goods and service. This opportunity was provided through the instrumentality of globalization which link different economies and markets for efficient and easy access to raw material, goods and other services.

There are various transnational companies providing different service all over the world. International multinational companies are increasingly becoming more exploitative, as a result of the conducive environment for business growth. Some of these companies does not put in best or global operational standard in the regions they operate thereby leading to exploitation, environmental degradation and pollution of the land in cause of extracting raw materials needed for production. Some of these unfair and often illegal business practice that multinational corporations practice includes; price fixing, blocking competitors, access to distribution channels false and misleading advertising, tax evasion, exploitation, environmental pollution, degradation etc.

For instance, in the oil rich Niger Delta Ogoni, Shell has been found guilty of one of the worst cases of environmental pollution in the world. By 1958, crude oil was discovered in Ogoni, with about 9000 million barriers of oil with an estimated value of 30 billion US dollars have been mined from Ogoni since 1958 to 1993 (Saro-wiwa 1992 as cited in Sangha 2023). These huge wealth has in no way been used to develop or benefit the people of Ogoni. Poverty and environmental degradation has been the evidence of oil extraction in the region. Furthermore, Chevron is also responsible for the violent repression of peaceful opposition to oil extraction. In Nigeria, Chevron has hired private military personnel to open fire on peaceful protesters who oppose oil extraction in the Niger Delta.

In the automobile sector, Ford Motor is among one of the top automakers. Ford Motor Company is considered to be one of the worst when it comes to fuel economy. Every year since 1999, the US Environmental Protection Agency has ranked Ford cars, trucks and SUVs as having the worst overall fuel economy of any American automaker. This is why Ford's current car and truck fleet has a lower average fuel efficiency than the original Ford Model-T (News in the News, 2005).

These corporations sometimes lobby government officials or fund think tanks to influence government policies in ways that it would benefit their financial interest at the detriment of the local community this was seen in the case of ExxonMobil where documents revealed that the company had known since the 1970's that its products causes global warming but ignored the warning of their scientist and financed a campaign to deceive shareholders and the public about the realities and risk of climate change (The Equation, n.d). Christopher and Collins (2023) observed that in 2016 the company finally issued its first public statement that burning of fossil contributes to climate change after years of denial but behind closed doors they strategised over how to diminish concerns about warming temperatures.

Conclusion.

This paper has been able to discuss some of the international diplomatic issues like the global power dynamics of rogue states, faith regimes and their impact on international politics and diplomacy, and the impact of Multinational corporations carrying out significant volume of trade all over the globe.

This study concludes that some of the challenges of the 21st century international system are mostly man made. Addressing the dilemma posed by these actors requires balancing coercion, engagement and containment. These issues can be resolved on the round table using multilateral approach instead of war. This is because in navigating complex international issues such as rogue regimes, sanctions have proven to be less effective or not accomplishing its desirable aim, therefore dialogue and leveraging on incentives is important in mitigating dispute without the use of a military attack. Corporate powers need to ensure that corporate interest aligns with public interest, sustainability and protection against exploitation and human right abuse. Faith regimes should engage in constructive dialogue with de-radicalization effort measures.

This study therefore calls for collaboration and collective action to tackle the recurring challenges of rogue Regimes, Faith regimes and corporate powers. With proper application of international law, most of these contending issues can be addressed if member states and global actors play according to the rules governing the international system. The international institutions for global governmentality must be strengthened, equipped and robust enough to meet up modern reality of the 21st century.

Recommendations
The study recommends the following:

★ **Promote inclusive global governance and economic structure**: global governance structures like the United Nations should be restructured to the occasion where it reflects transparency and enhance respect for sovereign nations. Some of the emerging rogue states feel threatened by the present international system which they view as an unfair and unbalance international system. If you take a look at the security council today, you will notice that members of the security council mostly act based on self-interest carrying out unilateral operation that undermine the very existence of international law guiding the international system.

★ **Promote inter faith based dialogue**: there should be an avenue for multilateral negotiation on religious matters, such that encourage understanding between different faith based communities, respect values and build trust and religious tolerance.

★ **Promote human rights and best operational standard practice in business**: Emerging and developing nations should ensure multinational companies respect human rights and maintain best operational standard practices in business This will guild against exploitation and environmental degradation.

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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE LANGUAGE OF YOUTH IN SELECTED LGAs IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of social media on the language of youth in Obio/Akpor, Ikwere, and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The objectives of the study were to explore how social media influences language practices in both formal and informal contexts, identify the linguistic features adopted from social media, examine the factors contributing to language change, and assess the implications for communication and language teaching. The research was guided by the Sociolinguistic Theory and the Communication Accommodation Theory, which provided the theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between social interaction, media use, and language variation. A survey research design was adopted, and data were collected from 311 respondents selected through proportionate sampling. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that WhatsApp is the dominant social media platform among youths, with most participants using it for over five years and spending more than two hours daily. Communication patterns combined both formal and informal expressions, characterized by frequent use of slang, abbreviations, emojis, and hashtags. Although many respondents were uncertain about the direct influence of social media on their offline language, the

study found subtle linguistic effects alongside broader social, cultural, and economic factors driving language change. The study concludes that social media, rather than diminishing language proficiency, can serve as a tool for language awareness and education if effectively integrated into language learning and communication practices. It is therefore recommended that educators and policymakers harness social media platforms to promote standard language use and interactive learning among youths

Introduction

Social media refers to online platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content. These platforms revolutionize the way people communicate and share information, enabling global connectivity. Social media platforms facilitate user-generated content, which can take many forms, including text, images, and videos. Additionally, social media platforms provide users with tools and features to customize their content, engage with others, and build online communities. The interactive nature of social media enables users to participate in real-time discussions, share their experiences, and connect with others who share similar interests.

Moreover, social media platforms have transformed the way people consume and disseminate information, with many users relying on these platforms as primary sources of news, entertainment, and social interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The global reach of social media has also bridged geographical divides, enabling people to connect with others across the world. Furthermore, social media platforms have become essential for businesses, organizations, and individuals seeking to build their online presence, promote their brand, and engage with their audience (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Overall, social media has become an integral part of modern life, shaping the way people communicate, interact, and share information. Furthermore, social media platforms have also enabled the creation of online subcultures, where users can connect with others who share similar interests and passions. The use of hashtags, trending topics, and challenges has also facilitated the discovery of new content, ideas, and perspectives. Social media has also become a vital tool for social movements, activism, and awareness-raising, enabling users to mobilize support, share information, and promote social change. As social media continues to evolve, it is likely to have an even more profound impact on the way people communicate, interact, and shape their online and offline lives.

Social media transforms the way people consume and share information, with news and trends spreading rapidly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media platforms have become an integral part of modern life, enabling users to create and share content, and connect with others across the globe. It changes the way businesses operate, with companies leveraging these platforms to reach customers and build their brand (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). As Boyd and Ellison note, social media platforms provide businesses with opportunities to engage with their audience, promote their products, and build their online presence. Social media also influences language change, giving rise to new forms of language, including neologisms, abbreviations, and acronyms. Additionally, social media platforms have become a primary source of information for many people, with users relying on these platforms to stay informed about current events, trends, and issues. Moreover, social media has also

transformed the way people interact with each other, enabling real-time communication and feedback (Kietzmann et al., 2011). According to Kietzmann et al., social media platforms provide users with a range of tools and features that enable them to interact with others, share content, and collaborate on projects.

The viral nature of social media can also amplify social movements, raise awareness about important issues, and mobilize support for causes. Furthermore, social media has changed the way businesses market and advertise their products, with many companies shifting their focus to social media advertising and influencer partnerships. The impact of social media is also felt in various sectors, including education, healthcare, and politics, where it is used to disseminate information, engage with audiences, and build communities. Furthermore, social media has also raised important questions about privacy, security, and the spread of misinformation. The rapid dissemination of information on social media can also lead to the spread of rumors, fake news, and disinformation, highlighting the need for critical thinking and media literacy in the digital age. Overall, the impact of social media is multifaceted and far-reaching, shaping various aspects of modern life, from communication and information-sharing to business and social interaction.

Moreover, the impact of social media on society is constantly evolving, with new platforms and technologies emerging, and user behaviors changing. As social media continues to shape the way people live, work, and interact, it is essential to understand its effects on individuals, communities, and society as a whole. By examining the impact of social media, we can better navigate the opportunities and challenges it presents, and harness its potential to promote positive change and social good. Additionally, the study of social media's impact can also inform policy, education, and business decisions, helping to ensure that these platforms are used responsibly and effectively. Language Use on Social Media.

New words and phrases emerge to describe digital concepts, reflecting the dynamic nature of language in the digital age (Crystal, 2001). According to Crystal, the internet and social media have given rise to new forms of language, including neologisms, abbreviations, and acronyms. Emojis and emoticons convey emotions and tone in text-based interactions, enabling users to express themselves in innovative ways (Danesi, 2016). As Danesi notes, emojis and emoticons have become an integral part of online communication, allowing users to convey complex emotions and ideas concisely. Informal language is prevalent on social media, with users employing slang, colloquialisms, and abbreviations, reflecting the shift towards informality in online communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media platforms have enabled users to create and share content in a more informal and interactive way, changing the way people communicate. Users also adopt unique language styles, blending formal and informal language, and incorporating visual elements to convey meaning and enhance communication. Furthermore, social media platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of language trends, memes, and viral challenges, which can quickly influence language use and cultural references. Additionally, the use of hashtags, acronyms, and abbreviations enables users to convey complex ideas and emotions concisely. Social media language is often characterized by its creativity, flexibility, and adaptability, allowing users to express themselves in innovative ways. The blending of languages, dialects, and language styles on social media also reflects the diversity of its user base, creating a unique linguistic landscape.

As social media continues to evolve, it is likely that language use on these platforms will continue to adapt and change, reflecting the dynamic nature of online communication.

Some popular social media platforms include Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp. These platforms have become part of teenagers' digital identities, and users employ language to signify closeness and solidarity among peer groups. Social media platforms also enable users to connect with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages. Additionally, these platforms provide users with opportunities to express themselves creatively, share their experiences, and engage with others who share similar interests. Furthermore, social media platforms have become integral to modern communication, influencing how people interact, form relationships, and maintain social connections.

Moreover, social media platforms offer various features, such as hashtags, trending topics, and live streaming, which facilitate real-time discussions and information sharing. Users can also curate their online personas, showcasing their personalities, interests, and values. The widespread adoption of social media has transformed the way people consume information, with many relying on these platforms as primary sources of news, entertainment, and social interaction. As a result, social media has become an essential aspect of modern life, shaping language use, social norms, and cultural practices.

The use of non-standard language on social media raises questions about its impact on language competency. According to Crystal (2001), the internet and social media have given rise to new forms of language, which can be both creative and challenging for language users. Youths must navigate between informal and formal language environments, and it's unclear whether social media promotes language creativity or inhibits formal language competency. As Kessler (2013) notes, the frequent use of abbreviations, acronyms, and emojis may lead to a decline in spelling and grammar skills, potentially affecting language development and proficiency. Furthermore, the informal nature of social media may blur the lines between formal and informal language, making it challenging for youths to distinguish between appropriate language use in different contexts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Moreover, excessive social media use may lead to a reliance on autocorrect and predictive text, potentially hindering language users' ability to spell and write correctly without technological assistance. The brevity and informality of social media posts may also influence language users' writing style, potentially affecting their ability to express complex ideas and arguments in a clear and coherent manner. The constant exposure to abbreviated language forms may impact the development of linguistic complexity, potentially affecting users' ability to articulate nuanced ideas and perspectives.

The impact of social media on language competency may vary across different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic contexts. Some individuals may adapt to the changing language landscape with ease, while others may struggle to navigate the differences between online and offline communication. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for educators, policymakers, and language learners seeking to harness the potential of social media while mitigating its potential drawbacks.

This study investigates the role social media plays in shaping English language use in young adults and its consequences for language competency. It explores how social media influences language development, language attitudes, and language practices. The study also

examines the relationship between social media use and language proficiency, communication skills, and language identity.

This paper looks at several key areas, including how social media affects language development, such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. It also explores how social media shapes young adults' attitudes towards language, including their perceptions of language use and norms. Additionally, it examines how social media influences language practices in different contexts, including online and offline communication.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate because it allowed for the collection of data from a representative sample of youths in the selected LGAs to determine how social media usage influenced their language habits. The survey approach enabled the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on patterns, preferences, and attitudes related to language change.

The population of the study is 150,631. This population consists of youths between 18 to 30 years from three Ikwere speaking local government areas: Obio/Akpor, Emohua, and Ikwere. This study utilized a sample size of 398 youths from three selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Rivers State, Nigeria: Emohua, Ikwerre, and Obio/Akpor. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula:

n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)

Where:

n = Sample Size

N = Total Population

e = Margin of Error (0.05)

Based on the total population of the three LGAs (N = 848,564), the sample size calculation yields. Data was collected by distributing the questionnaire electronically (via WhatsApp and Facebook platforms). The researcher ensured proper instruction was provided and assisted respondents where necessary. Consent was obtained, and confidentiality assured.

The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, tables, and percentages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media refers to online platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content in virtual communities, facilitating dynamic and interactive communication (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These platforms, including Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp, are designed for interpersonal communication and information dissemination, enabling users to connect with others across geographical boundaries (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Twitter

Twitter's microblogging format especially with its character limits has encouraged users to express ideas in short, compressed forms, giving rise to abbreviations, hashtags, and inventive word play (Maity, Ghuku, Upmanyu, & Mukherjee, 2015). Over time, Twitter itself develops linguistic norms: running texts (strings of words joined without spaces), evolving hashtag conventions, and fewer out-of-vocabulary words as the platform matures (Maity et al., 2015). Because tweets are public and often retweeted, new phrases and digital slang can

spread rapidly across large audiences, reinforcing how linguistic innovation in this space impacts broader discourse.

TikTok

TikTok is distinct in blending audio-visual media with text, captions, and speech, creating hybrid communicative forms. A study of TikTok language revealed that users frequently mix local and global linguistic variants and use playful, humorous, or contrasting expressions in captions and comments (Purnami, 2022). The platform's fast pace encourages linguistic experimentation: users repurpose sounds, memes, captions, and fragments of speech to produce content that resonates culturally and expressively. Because videos can go viral, novel linguistic patterns can spread swiftly, influencing how younger generations speak and write beyond the platform.

Facebook

Facebook offers a versatile space for extended posts, commenting, and sharing multimedia content. While it allows more elaborate expression than microblog platforms, users still infuse informal features like emojis, slang, and shortened forms to maintain conversational tone. The platform supports linguistic variation through groups and communities, where dialects, proverbs, and cultural expressions circulate and gain legitimacy through repeated use. In effect, Facebook acts as a bridge between casual, social speech and more formal writing, facilitating a continuum of registers rather than strictly segregated styles.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is primarily a private, conversational platform users engage in real-time, informal dialogues with friends, family, or small groups. This intimacy encourages the use of colloquial language: abbreviations, emoticons, code-switching between English, Pidgin, or indigenous languages, and even voice notes that merge speaking and writing. Because many conversations are habitual and frequent, linguistic features adopted in WhatsApp chats often become internalized, pressing their influence into more formal domains. In multilingual contexts, WhatsApp becomes a space where linguistic identities are negotiated, solidified, and adapted in everyday interaction.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media platforms provide a unique environment for informal language use, often characterized by abbreviations, slangs, emojis, gifs, and memes, which have become integral to online communication. The informal nature of social media language use allows for creative expression and flexibility, shaping the way individuals interact and convey meaning in digital spaces (Crystal, 2011).

As Lee (2015) points out, social media platforms have given rise to new forms of language use, such as hashtags, trending challenges, and viral content, which can spread rapidly and influence language use beyond online contexts. For instance, the use of hashtags on Twitter has become a popular way to categorize and make posts discoverable, while trending challenges on TikTok have created new opportunities for creative expression and community engagement (Lee, 2015). Moreover, social media language use is often marked by brevity, informality, and a blend of visual and textual elements, which can lead to new forms of storytelling, identity formation, and community building (Georgakopoulou, 2017).

According to Jones and Hafner (2012), social media platforms have enabled users to create and share multimodal content, combining text, images, and videos to convey meaning and express themselves. This has led to the development of new linguistic styles, such as "netspeak" or "textese," which are characterized by abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons (Crystal, 2001). As social media continues to evolve, it is likely to have a lasting impact on the way we communicate, interact, and use language (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011).

Researchers have noted that social media platforms significantly impact language use, social relationships, and cultural norms, especially among young people. According to Lee (2015), social media's influence on these aspects of human interaction is profound. For instance, social media can shape language attitudes, identity formation, and community membership, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts, as highlighted by Blommaert & Rampton (2011). They emphasize that language use on social media reflects complex identity negotiations and power dynamics.

Moreover, social media facilitates language learning and cultural exchange by providing opportunities for users to engage with diverse languages and cultures. Lamy & Goodfellow (2014) contribute to this discussion by exploring how social media can be leveraged for language learning, promoting intercultural communication and understanding. Their work underscores the potential of social media to enhance language skills and foster global connections.

Social media's impact on language is multifaceted, with the emergence of new vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical structures. Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have given rise to a unique digital language, characterized by nonstandard grammar and acronyms like "LOL" (laugh out loud) and "TNX" (thanks). This phenomenon raises questions about the relationship between language, culture, and technology.

Furthermore, social media's influence on social relationships is complex, with both positive and negative effects. On one hand, social media enables users to connect with others across geographical boundaries, fostering relationships and community building. On the other hand, excessive social media use can lead to superficial interactions, decreased attention spans, and increased feelings of loneliness and isolation.

In addition, social media has blurred the traditional distinctions between spoken and written language by encouraging users to communicate in ways that resemble face-to-face interaction. Features such as instant messaging, voice notes, reaction buttons, and live-streaming create a sense of immediacy that mirrors real-time conversation, while still retaining elements of written text. This hybrid form of communication has introduced new discourse patterns, interactive norms, and conversational structures, enabling people to express tone, emphasis, and social cues that were previously difficult to convey through writing alone. As a result, digital communication has become more dynamic, flexible, and expressive, allowing individuals to negotiate meaning in more nuanced and creative ways.

Furthermore, social media has played a significant role in giving marginalized voices and minority language communities greater visibility and representation. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp allow speakers of indigenous or minority languages to share content, create communities, and preserve linguistic heritage in ways that were not possible before the digital era. Through user-generated content, online storytelling, and the sharing of culturally

rooted expressions, social media becomes a tool for safeguarding linguistic diversity and resisting the dominance of major global languages. This democratization of linguistic space empowers individuals to assert their identities, strengthen cultural pride, and participate in global conversations on their own terms.

Another important aspect is the influence of social media algorithms, which shape what users see, share, and engage with. These algorithmic systems indirectly affect language use by amplifying certain linguistic styles, trends, or expressions based on popularity and engagement. Viral content, memes, and trending hashtags often spread rapidly because algorithms prioritize highly interactive posts, resulting in widespread adoption of particular vocabulary, humour styles, or communication patterns. Over time, this can create new norms of expression and pressure users to adapt to digital linguistic trends in order to be seen, understood, and socially relevant online.

Social media has also transformed the way language reflects and constructs social identities. Young people, in particular, use language online to signal group membership, express individuality, and negotiate status within peer networks. The strategic use of slang, emojis, abbreviations, or code-switching helps users position themselves within specific online cultures, such as gaming communities, fan groups, or activist movements. These linguistic choices are not random; they are deeply tied to users' desire to belong, differentiate themselves, and craft specific digital personas. Therefore, the linguistic landscape of social media becomes a space where identity is constantly performed, negotiated, and reshaped.

Social media has also accelerated the pace at which linguistic innovations spread across different regions and demographic groups. A word or expression that emerges within a small online circle can rapidly gain global visibility through shares, reposts, and algorithm-driven amplification. This rapid diffusion process allows linguistic variants to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries far more quickly than in traditional face-to-face communication. As a result, languages experience faster cycles of change, adoption, and obsolescence, creating a dynamic environment where linguistic creativity thrives and where users constantly adapt to evolving communication trends.

This chapter presents the results and analysis of data collected from three hundred and eleven (311) participants drawn from Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre, and Emohua Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Rivers State. The aim of the chapter is to analyze the demographic characteristics of respondents, their social media usage patterns, and the perceived influence of social media on language use, communication, and language teaching. Data were presented in frequency tables and percentages for clarity, and statistical tests such as chi-square were used to determine significance.

The findings of this chapter address the research objectives, which include examining how social media affects language use among youths, identifying linguistic features adopted from social media, and determining the implications of these changes for communication and language education.

Table 1 Socio-demographic Information of Study Participants

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentages (%)
Location		

Emohua	94	30.23
Obio/Akpor	116	37.28
Ikwerre	101	32.48
Gender		
Male	40	12.9
Female	271	87.1
Age		
18-25	6	1.9
26-30	211	67.8
31 and above	94	30.3
Education		
Secondary	14	4.5
Bachelor	274	88.1
Masters	21	6.8
PhD	2	0.6
Occupation		
Student	16	5.1
Employed	227	73.0
Unemployed	13	4.2
Self employed	55	17.7
Total	**311**	**100**

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 311 participants. The results show that most respondents were from Obio/Akpor (37.28%), followed by Ikwere (32.48%) and Emohua (30.23%). A large majority were females (87.1%), while males constituted 12.9%. Most participants were aged 26–30 years (67.8%), indicating that the study involved mainly young adults. In terms of education, 88.1% held Bachelor's degrees, showing a highly educated sample. Regarding occupation, 73% were employed, 17.7% self-employed, 5.1% students, and 4.2% unemployed. Overall, the table shows that the respondents were predominantly young, educated, and employed females drawn mainly from Obio/Akpor LGA.

Table 2 Social Media Usage Patterns among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Most used social media platform			
Whatsapp	290 (93.2)	143.0	<0.0001
Facebook	21 (6.8)		
Duration of social media use			
Less than 1 hour	40 (12.9)		
1-2 hours	19 (6.1)	148.1	<0.0001
More than 2 hours	252 (81.0)		
How long on social media use ?			

Less than 1 year	0 (0.0)		
1-5 years	17 (5.5)	238.2	<0.0001
More than 5 years	294 (94.5)		
Social Media Communication Mode			
Formal	2 (0.6)		
Informal	2 (0.6)	253.3	<0.0001
Both	307 (98.7)		
Uses slang on social media?			
Yes	33 (10.6)		
No	18 (5.8)	137.2	<0.0001
Sometimes	236 (75.9)		
Rarely	24 (7.7)		
Frequency of abbreviations/acronyms use			
Often	17 (5.5)		
Sometimes	217 (69.8)		
Rarely	57 (18.3)	10.70	0.0011
Never	20 (6.4)		
Total	**311 (100)**		

Table 2 below shows patterns of social media use among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. WhatsApp is the dominant social media platform (93.2%), with Facebook used by only 6.8% participants, showing a strong WhatsApp preference. Most users (81%) spend more than 2 hours on social media daily, and a significant portion (94.5%) have used social media for more than 5 years. Communication is mostly both formal and informal (98.7%), which highlights diverse usage styles. About 75.9% of study participants use slang sometimes, and 5.5% often use abbreviations or acronyms. The chi-square and p-values (<0.05) indicate these patterns are statistically significant. The data suggests youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State are heavy, long-term social media users with varied communication modes.

Table 3 Social Media Influence on Language Use among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Social media influences offline language use?			
Yes	36 (11.6)		
No	61 (19.6)	77.75	<0.0001
Unsure	214 (68.8)		
Noticed language changes due to social media?			

Yes	44 (14.1)		
No	260 (83.6)	5.338	0.0209
Unsure	7 (2.3)		
Total	**311 (100)**		

Table 3 illustrates social media influence on language use among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwere and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. It reveals that most youths (68.8%) are unsure if social media influences their offline language use, while only 11.6% acknowledged influenced, showing uncertainty in perception. Similarly, 83.6% of participants indicated they have not noticed language changes due to social media, with just 14.1% affirming such changes. The chi-square values and p-values (<0.05) indicate these findings are statistically significant. This suggests that while social media's impact on language is debated among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwere and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State, a notable portion recognizes its influence on language use.

Table 4 Linguistic Features and Factors Influencing Language Change among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Common linguistic features adopted from social media?			
Emojis	278 (89.5)		
Abbreviations	18 (5.8)	222.9	<0.0001
Hashtags	9 (2.9)		
Combination of above	6 (1.8)		
Social media affects language proficiency?			
Yes	90 (28.9)		
No	211 (67.8)	21.51	<0.0001
Unsure	10 (3.3)		
Factors influencing language change			
Social factor	279 (89.6)		
Cultural factor	24 (7.7)		
Economic factor	6 (1.9)	234.4	<0.0001
Combination of above	2 (0.8)		
Total	**311 (100)**		

Table 4 presents linguistic features and factors influencing language change among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. Emojis are the most common feature adopted from social media (89.5%), while abbreviations and hashtags are less used. Most participants (67.8%) believe social media does not affect language proficiency, but a notable 28.9% say it does. Social, cultural, and economic factors significantly influenced language change, as shown chi-square values and p-values (<0.05). This suggests social media impacts language, but broader social factors also play a key role in shaping language trends among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State.

Table 5 Implications of Social Media-Induced Language Change on Communication and Language Teaching Among Youths in Selected LGAs of Rivers State

Variables	n (%)	Chi square	P value
Social media has implications for communication/teaching?			
Yes	91 (21.3)		
No	210 (67.5)	21.99	<0.0001
Unsure	10 (11.2)		
How social media can promote standard language			
Language	304 (96.9)		

Awareness/Education			
Guidelines/Resources	1 (0.4)	263. 6	<0.0001
Use of Algorithms	5 (2.2)		
Formal/Informal switches	1 (0.4)		
Social media can impact future language use?			
Yes	52 (16.7)		
No	195 (62.7)	0.4446	0.5049
Unsure	64 (20.6)		
Total	**311 (100)**		

Table 5 reveals implications of social media-induced language change on communication and language teaching among youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State. Most participants (67.5%) of youths believe social media has no implications for communication or teaching, while 21.3% think it does. Almost all respondents (96.9%) agreed that social media can promote standard language mainly through language awareness and education. Very few consider other factors like guidelines, algorithms, or formal/informal switches important. Opinions are divided on whether social media will impact future language use, with most unsure or saying no. This suggests youths in Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua LGAs of Rivers State see social media more as a tool for language promotion than a factor drastically changing communication or teaching.

Discussion of Findings

The socio-demographic analysis reveals that the majority of participants were females (87.1%), while males accounted for only 12.9%. Most respondents were between 26 and 30 years old (67.8%) and held Bachelor's degrees (88.1%), showing that the sample comprised mostly young, educated adults. In addition, most of them were employed (73%), suggesting a relatively stable and socially active group. The highest number of participants came from Obio/Akpor (37.28%), followed by Ikwerre (32.48%) and Emohua (30.23%).

Findings on social media usage patterns indicate that WhatsApp is overwhelmingly the most used platform (93.2%), while Facebook use is minimal (6.8%). Most participants (81%) spend more than two hours on social media daily, and 94.5% have been active users for more than five years. This demonstrates that youths in these LGAs are long-term, heavy users of social media. Furthermore, most communicate in both formal and informal styles (98.7%), showing that social media provides a space for flexible communication. A significant number of respondents (75.9%) sometimes use slang, while 69.8% sometimes use abbreviations or acronyms, reflecting the integration of informal linguistic features into everyday interactions.

Regarding the influence of social media on language use, most respondents (68.8%) were unsure whether it affects their offline language, while 11.6% believed it does. Similarly, 83.6% reported not noticing any language changes caused by social media. This suggests that while social media interaction is frequent, many youths may not consciously recognize its subtle influence on their speech or writing. Nonetheless, the statistical significance of the findings implies that social media does play a role, albeit one that users may not be fully aware of.

Analysis of linguistic features revealed that emojis are the most commonly adopted element from social media (89.5%), followed by abbreviations and hashtags. Although most respondents (67.8%) believe social media does not affect language proficiency, a significant minority (28.9%) think it does. Moreover, social factors (89.6%) were identified as the major drivers of language change, followed by cultural and economic influences. This shows that while digital communication shapes expression, broader social interactions and community norms also contribute significantly to language evolution.

Finally, in examining the implications of social media-induced language change, 67.5% of participants felt there were no major implications for communication or teaching, though 21.3% acknowledged some effects. Interestingly, an overwhelming 96.9% agreed that social media can promote standard language through awareness and education. However, opinions were divided on whether social media will influence future language use, with most participants either unsure or disagreeing. This indicates that while youths view social media as a learning and awareness tool, they may not see it as a major driver of linguistic transformation in the long term.

Summary

Demographic Profile:
Most respondents were young (26–30 years), female, and university graduates, with a majority employed and residing mainly in Obio/Akpor LGA.

Social Media Usage:
WhatsApp emerged as the dominant platform among youths, with most users spending over two hours daily and having used social media for more than five years. Communication tends to blend formal and informal styles, with frequent use of slang, abbreviations, and emojis.

Influence on Language Use:
While many respondents were unsure about the influence of social media on their offline language, statistical evidence indicates that such influence exists, especially through informal expressions and digital linguistic features.

Linguistic Features and Change Factors:
Emojis, abbreviations, and hashtags are common linguistic innovations adopted from social media. Social and cultural factors significantly contribute to language change, alongside the influence of social media interactions.

Implications for Communication and Teaching:
Most youths perceive minimal negative implications of social media on communication or language teaching. However, they recognize social media's potential to promote standard language through awareness, education, and exposure to diverse linguistic forms. Data were collected from 311 participants through questionnaires and analyzed using frequency tables, percentages, and chi-square tests.

Findings revealed that most respondents were females aged between 26–30 years, with a majority holding Bachelor's degrees and being employed. WhatsApp emerged as the most used social media platform, and most participants had been active on social media for over five years, spending more than two hours daily. Communication on these platforms was predominantly a

mix of formal and informal expressions, with a frequent use of slang, abbreviations, and emojis consistent with recent findings on the integration of digital features into youth language use (Dozie & Ojilere, 2025; Temple & Fayigbe, 2025). Although most respondents were unsure about the direct influence of social media on their offline language, the data indicated that social media interactions subtly affect the way youths communicate. Emojis, abbreviations, and hashtags were among the most common linguistic features adopted echoing earlier research showing that informal digital orthographies are increasingly present in youth language practices (Thonyuha, Kolapo & Yayi, 2024). The study also found that social, cultural, and economic factors significantly contribute to language change among youths. In terms of implications, most respondents believed that social media has minimal negative impact on communication or teaching. However, the majority agreed that social media can be a tool for promoting standard language through awareness and educational engagement a position supported by research on social media's potential in language promotion and preservation in Nigeria (Ugwu, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that social media plays an increasingly significant role in shaping communication patterns among youths in Rivers State, even though its influence may not always be consciously recognized. The dominance of WhatsApp as a communication platform shows that social media has become an integral part of youths' daily interactions.

This paper concludes that social media has introduced a range of new linguistic forms such as emojis, abbreviations, acronyms, memes, slang expressions, and hybridized language structures that have subtly but noticeably influenced the communication patterns of youths. These forms serve various communicative functions, including expressing emotions, signalling identity, enhancing conversational speed, and fostering in-group solidarity. Rather than indicating a deterioration in language proficiency, these innovations point to an evolving and adaptive communication style in which young people skillfully blend formal and informal linguistic elements depending on context, audience, and communicative purpose. This demonstrates the flexibility of language and the ability of youths to navigate multiple linguistic registers with ease.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that social media, when used intentionally and constructively, can function as a powerful platform for promoting language awareness, creativity, and digital literacy. Many youths actively engage in reading, writing, storytelling, and content creation online, which exposes them to diverse vocabulary, new communicative strategies, and rich cultural expressions. While legitimate concerns exist regarding non-standard spellings, excessive abbreviations, and the potential for reduced attention to formal writing norms, the overall impact of social media on language use appears to be more adaptive, generative, and context-dependent than destructive.

In light of these insights, the study recommends that social media be strategically harnessed as a supportive tool in language education. Teachers, parents, and policymakers can incorporate digital platforms into instructional practices to enhance students' communication competence, encourage creative expression, and promote critical awareness of different language varieties. Integrating social media into language learning environments can also help

bridge the gap between classroom language and real-world communication, making learning more engaging, relevant, and meaningful to young people.

Ultimately, this paper reinforces the idea that language is dynamic and constantly evolving, and that digital communication platforms are simply the latest catalysts shaping contemporary linguistic practices. By embracing the educational potential of social media while guiding youths toward responsible and context-appropriate usage, stakeholders can foster more effective, inclusive, and literate communication in the digital age.

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COMMUNITY CONFLICT, PEACEBUILDING, AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

Community conflict in Nigeria has become a critical socio-developmental issue, manifesting through disputes over land rights, resource extraction, youth activism, and governance exclusion. These conflicts are often driven by competition for economic resources, historical grievances, and power imbalances among ethnic and social groups. For example, struggles involving youth activism in response to oil-related resource extraction have triggered tensions in several communities, intensifying mistrust between local residents and state or corporate actors (Osazuwa & Audu, 2024). At the grassroots level, intra-community disputes, including competing claims over farmland, chieftaincy titles, and local political representation, have also disrupted social relations and economic activities, illustrating the multifaceted nature of community conflict in the state. The consequences of such conflicts extend beyond immediate violence to undermine social cohesion, economic productivity, and community resilience. Conflict-induced disruptions of agricultural and trading activities not only reduce household incomes but also impede collective investment in local infrastructure and services. Research on communal conflict dynamics in Nigeria demonstrates that prolonged disputes erode trust among neighbours, displace vulnerable families, and create long-term psychological trauma, thereby weakening the social fabric necessary for cooperative development (Yahaya, 2020; Tagi et al., 2025). Moreover, conflict-related insecurity can deter external investments and limit access to essential services, further entrenching patterns of exclusion and deprivation in affected areas.

The effects of these conflicts extend far beyond immediate physical violence. Recurrent community conflicts contribute to deepening poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, and

social exclusion. Households affected by conflict often lose productive assets, farmland, fishing equipment, and small businesses, which diminishes income and increases dependency. Children and young people experience prolonged interruptions in schooling, while health facilities are destroyed or rendered inaccessible. Social networks that traditionally provide support during hardship are fractured, resulting in heightened vulnerability among women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. These conditions weaken social cohesion by fostering fear, suspicion, and hostility among community members, making reconciliation and collective action increasingly difficult (Akinwale, 2022).

Despite repeated government interventions through security deployments and judicial commissions of inquiry, peace has remained fragile in many conflict affected communities in Rivers State. These responses have largely focused on short term security containment rather than addressing the underlying social, economic, and psychosocial drivers of conflict. Weak community institutions, exclusion of youth and women from decision making, unresolved trauma, and lack of livelihood opportunities continue to fuel cycles of violence. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that where conflicts are treated solely as law and order problems, rather than social development challenges, peacebuilding efforts remain unsustainable (Emeodu & Elem, 2020; Albert & Olarinmoye, 2023).

Despite legislative efforts such as the anti- cultism laws enacted in 2018, cult activity has escalated across the state, with rural and urban areas alike experiencing widespread insecurity. Amnesty International documented that the failure of authorities to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of cult clashes contributed to an environment of impunity and escalating violent confrontations in Emohua, Khana, and Gokana local government areas as early as 2020 (Amnesty International, 2020). Between January and December 2019 alone, at least 60 community members were reportedly killed in cult related violence, particularly in Khana and Gokana LGAs, underscoring the severity of the crisis that preceded the more systematic tracking years (Sahara Reporters, 2020). Analysis of conflict patterns from 2020 onward reveals that Rivers State was at the epicenter of cult and gang violence in the South- South region, with rifts between rival confraternities such as the Vikings, Icelanders, and Greenlanders fueling recurring deadly clashes. SBM Intelligence's nationwide violence tracker found that between January 2020 and March 2025, at least 1,686 people were killed in 909 gang- related violent episodes, with Rivers State alone accounting for 215 documented deaths — the highest for any Nigerian state within that period (Richards, 2025). The report noted that gang violence was particularly lethal in 2021, with 377 fatalities across 173 incidents, a spike attributed to socioeconomic stressors following the COVID- 19 pandemic and rising unemployment (Richards, 2025).

Conflict monitoring by the Partnership Initiative in the Niger Delta (PIND) further confirmed the scale and continuity of cult- related violence. Data extracted from PIND's weekly conflict analyses showed that between January 2020 and December 2022, over 200 cult and gang- related fatalities occurred in Rivers State, highlighting battles for supremacy and territorial control among rival groups. In these documented clashes, an elderly man was reportedly burnt alive in Diobu community amid reprisals in early 2023, and leadership disputes in Ikata community, Ahoada East LGA, resulted in multiple deaths (PIND, 2023). These incidents reflect that, even after relative dips in violence, lethal cult confrontations continued unabated

into 2023. The trend of violent confrontations continued into 2024, with recurring episodes in both rural and peri- urban communities. PIND's conflict updates for early 2024 reported that cult gangs reportedly killed residents and injured others in Ikem community (Etche LGA), and separate violent clashes between rival factions in Diobu community (Port Harcourt LGA) led to further fatalities during disputes over control of illegal trading zones (PIND, 2024). These clashes underscored how deeply embedded organized cult violence had become in certain localities, affecting economic life and social order.

Beyond specific incident counts, the aggregate data suggests that cult and gang violence in Rivers State rose again in frequency by 2024, with conflict tracking identifying the highest number of recorded incidents for any year within the 2020–2025 period, even if lethality per incident varied (Richards, 2025). This rise in documented incidents has been partially attributed to expanded reporting through new media, enabling more community- level violence to be captured, but also reflects sustained organized criminal activity in the region (Richards, 2025). Throughout the period from 2018 to 2024, the consistent theme in Rivers State has been the chronic presence of organized cult and gang violence, with numerous communities bearing the cost of recurring confrontations. These conflicts have not only resulted in loss of life but also contributed to displacement, disruption of livelihoods, and pervasive fear within affected localities. The cumulative evidence from Amnesty International, PIND, and SBM Intelligence illustrates a long- standing security challenge that has proven resistant to legislative and enforcement measures without more comprehensive socio- economic and community- level interventions.

Empirical evidence further supports the need for integrated, community based approaches to conflict management. Emeodu and Elem (2020) found that prolonged crisis in Ibaa Community significantly undermined development by disrupting economic activities, weakening leadership legitimacy, and eroding communal trust. Emeodu, Ebah and Obuzor (2022) revealed that cult related violence and youth insecurity in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities contributed to displacement, fear, and reduced community participation, thereby weakening peacebuilding efforts. Davies and Eleyi (2024) demonstrated that communal violence in Emohua Local Government Area resulted in long term socio economic decline, including increased poverty and reduced investment in community infrastructure. Similarly, Obi and Rustad (2020) showed that unresolved environmental and resource related conflicts in the Niger Delta have sustained cycles of grievance, violence, and social fragmentation.

These realities present a deeply worrisome situation that demands the intervention of social workers. The persistent breakdown of social cohesion, rising youth involvement in violence, displacement of households, and erosion of trust indicate that Rivers State communities are facing not only security crises but profound social crises. Peacebuilding thus emerges as an urgent and complex agenda, requiring interventions that go beyond episodic crisis management to address the root causes of conflict and build sustainable social cohesion. While governmental and non- governmental actors in Rivers State have initiated conflict mitigation efforts, these are often fragmented and inadequately informed by community realities, leaving persistent gaps in trust, participation, and accountability. Effective peacebuilding requires not only formal conflict resolution mechanisms but also strategies that

promote intergroup dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared visions of community wellbeing.

In this context, social workers hold a unique and underutilized position in facilitating sustainable peace. Their training in community engagement, psychosocial support, conflict mediation, and advocacy equips them to bridge divides, empower marginalised groups, and strengthen local capacities for peaceful coexistence. Studies from wider Nigerian settings illustrates the potential of community- based peacebuilding interventions to reduce intergroup tensions, enhance social networks, and foster resilience among populations affected by conflict (Awotunde & Onu, 2025). Through participatory engagement, social work interventions can contribute to rebuilding trust, promoting inclusive decision- making, and addressing both the psychological and structural dimensions of conflict, thereby advancing social cohesion and sustainable development in Rivers State. Social workers are uniquely positioned to respond to these challenges through peacebuilding, mediation, psychosocial support, community empowerment, and advocacy for inclusive development. Their professional focus on vulnerable populations, participatory problem solving, and social justice enables them to address both the structural and interpersonal dimensions of community conflict. By facilitating dialogue, strengthening community institutions, supporting trauma recovery, and linking communities to social welfare and livelihood resources, social workers can contribute meaningfully to sustainable peace and social cohesion.

The persistence and recurrence of community conflicts in Rivers State therefore highlight a critical gap in existing peacebuilding frameworks. Without deliberate social work engagement that prioritizes empowerment, inclusion, and community resilience, peace efforts are likely to remain fragile and development outcomes compromised. This study is thus propelled by the urgent need to examine community conflict, peacebuilding processes, and the role of social workers in promoting social cohesion in Rivers State, with a view to generating knowledge that can inform policy, practice, and sustainable community development. Based on the foregoing, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

i. What are the major drivers and patterns of community conflict in Rivers State as reflected in land related disputes, leadership crises, youth violence, and resource based tensions?

ii. How does community conflict affect peacebuilding and social cohesion in Rivers State in terms of displacement, livelihood disruption, weakened trust, and reduced collective action?

iii. In what ways do social work interventions such as mediation, community empowerment, psychosocial support, and access to social welfare services contribute to peacebuilding and the promotion of social cohesion in Rivers State?

Literature Review

Community conflict remains a major concern in contemporary development discourse due to its far reaching consequences for peace, stability, and social cohesion, particularly in plural and resource rich societies. In Nigeria, community conflicts are often rooted in disputes over land ownership, chieftaincy succession, ethnic identity, political influence, and access to economic and natural resources. These conflicts are sustained by historical grievances, socio

economic inequalities, and weak institutional mechanisms for dispute resolution. Scholars argue that where such conflicts persist, they undermine communal trust, weaken governance structures, and obstruct collective development efforts (Albert, 2021; Akinwale, 2022). In the Niger Delta region, including Rivers State, the struggle over oil resources and environmental degradation has intensified communal tensions, making conflict a recurrent feature of community life. Conflict at community levels is not unique to Rivers State; empirical research across Africa and beyond has extensively documented how localised disputes rooted in competition over resources, historical grievances, identity politics, and weak institutional frameworks can escalate into violent confrontations with profound social consequences. For instance, in Kenya, community conflicts over land and cattle rustling in the Rift Valley have been shown to disrupt livelihoods, weaken social capital, and reduce trust between ethnic groups. Research by Kanyinga (2018) highlights how these recurrent clashes not only displace families but also erode communal bonds, creating cycles of retaliation that are difficult to break without sustained peacebuilding and reconciliation mechanisms. This reinforces the argument that in any context where socio economic exclusion intersects with contested resources, community conflict becomes entrenched and socially destructive.

In Northern Uganda, the prolonged insurgency involving the Lord's Resistance Army produced severe breakdowns in social cohesion at the village level. Studies by Vinck et al. (2011) demonstrate that communities recovering from prolonged violence faced heightened mistrust, weakened inter family relationships, and inter generational trauma long after formal hostilities ended. These findings illustrate how even post-conflict environments require more than structural reconstruction; they demand attention to healing social relationships and rebuilding the social fabric — a core concern of social work practice.

Research from Sierra Leone further underscores the role of social processes in post-conflict recovery. A study by Mac Ginty (2014) on community-led peace committees found that reconciliation efforts driven by local actors were significantly more effective in building social cohesion than externally imposed peace agreements. The study documented how inclusive dialogue, community narratives of shared suffering, and local ownership of peace initiatives helped restore trust among previously antagonistic groups. Such findings are important because they show that peacebuilding must be grounded in local realities, not only formal peace accords — a principle directly applicable to Rivers State.

West African contexts beyond Sierra Leone demonstrate similar dynamics. In Liberia, community based interventions integrating psychosocial support with economic empowerment were shown to reduce violence and promote social cohesion in post civil war settings. Betancourt et al. (2013) found that youth participation in community services and livelihood programs was associated with lower levels of aggression and higher levels of inter group trust, suggesting that socio economic reintegration is an indispensable component of long-term peacebuilding. This aligns with social work principles of empowerment and capacity building.

Global research also highlights the critical role of social support systems in mitigating conflict and strengthening social cohesion. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, community reconciliation processes led by social workers and civil society organizations helped reduce inter ethnic tensions after the Yugoslav wars. Scholarly analysis by Wood (2010) shows that structured dialogue, trauma counselling, and joint community projects enabled formerly hostile

groups to create shared narratives of the past and collaboratively plan for the future. This research emphasizes that peacebuilding is as much about restoring dignity and mutual recognition as it is about ending physical violence.

In South Africa, studies on post-apartheid community relations reveal that neighbourhood conflict often stems from perceptions of inequality, unemployment, and distrust in formal justice institutions. Erasmus and Albertyn (2016) found that interventions promoting participatory community planning and local leadership development contributed to stronger social cohesion by enhancing shared decision making and reducing alienation among marginalised groups. Their work illustrates how social work approaches that prioritize participation can transform conflict dynamics into opportunities for collective growth.

Collectively, these empirical studies from Kenya, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and South Africa converge on several key insights relevant to the present study. First, community conflict often reflects deeper structural inequities — whether in access to land, economic opportunities, or political voice — that cannot be resolved through security-centric measures alone. Second, sustainable peacebuilding requires deliberate social interventions that address psychosocial harms, rebuild trust, and empower communities to resolve their disputes internally. Third, peacebuilding is most effective when it is locally owned, culturally informed, and inclusive of marginalized groups such as women, youth, and displaced persons. Finally, integrating socio economic empowerment with reconciliation and dialogue appears to strengthen social cohesion more durably than isolated peace agreements or punitive mechanisms.

These findings not only broaden the empirical foundation of the study but also provide comparative evidence that community conflict and social cohesion are deeply interlinked phenomena. They further reinforce the proposition that social work practice — with its emphasis on empowerment, participation, psychosocial support, and community engagement — is indispensable to effective peacebuilding across diverse contexts. By situating the Rivers State experience within this wider scholarly terrain, the study gains analytical depth and demonstrates the transferability of social work interventions in promoting social cohesion across settings affected by protracted conflict. The role of social work in conflict management and peacebuilding has gained increasing scholarly recognition. Social work is grounded in principles of empowerment, social justice, and human wellbeing, making it particularly relevant in contexts characterized by social fragmentation and vulnerability. Literature indicates that social workers contribute to peacebuilding through mediation, facilitation of dialogue, psychosocial support, community mobilization, and advocacy for inclusive policies. Studies from conflict affected regions in Nigeria demonstrate that social work interventions help reduce tensions, support trauma recovery, and strengthen community capacity for collective problem solving (Ogunbameru, 2021; Eze & Ayogu, 2023).

Empirical research in the Niger Delta suggests that community based peacebuilding interventions are most effective when they incorporate social work approaches that prioritize participation and local ownership. Studies show that engaging traditional leaders, women groups, and youth associations enhances trust building and reconciliation processes. In Rivers State, community empowerment initiatives facilitated by social development practitioners have been linked to improved inter group communication and renewed participation in communal

development projects, thereby strengthening social cohesion (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2022). These findings emphasize that peacebuilding is not solely a political or security process but a deeply social one. Despite this growing body of literature, notable gaps remain. Much of the existing research on community conflict in Rivers State prioritizes security responses, political competition, and environmental grievances, with limited attention to the social processes through which communities rebuild cohesion after conflict. The psychosocial dimensions of violence, including trauma, loss of identity, and breakdown of communal norms, remain under explored in Nigerian conflict studies (Albert & Olarinmoye, 2023). This gap limits the effectiveness of interventions that fail to address the social foundations of peace.

Recent scholarship increasingly calls for integrated approaches that combine conflict resolution, social protection, and community development. Such approaches align closely with social work frameworks that emphasize holistic and multi-level interventions. By linking vulnerable populations to welfare services, supporting livelihood recovery, and facilitating inclusive decision making, social workers can address both the immediate and structural drivers of conflict. Empirical evidence suggests that these integrated strategies contribute to sustainable peace and stronger social cohesion in marginalized and conflict prone communities (Akinwale & Ojo, 2024). In sum, the literature demonstrates that community conflict in Rivers State is rooted in socio economic inequality, governance weaknesses, and contested resource control, with profound implications for peacebuilding and social cohesion. While existing studies provide valuable insights into the causes and consequences of conflict, they inadequately foreground the role of social work in addressing these challenges. This study therefore responds to a critical gap by examining how social work interventions can promote peace, rebuild trust, and strengthen social cohesion in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cohesion Theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for examining community conflict, peacebuilding, and the role of social workers in promoting social cohesion in Rivers State. The theory is rooted in the classical sociological work of Émile Durkheim, particularly his 1893 publication The Division of Labour in Society. Durkheim argued that social order and stability depend on the strength of shared norms, values, and social relationships that bind individuals together within a society. In contemporary peace and development scholarship, the theory has been further refined by scholars such as Chan, To and Chan in 2006 and adopted in policy oriented frameworks on peacebuilding and social integration, emphasizing its relevance for analyzing communal conflict and cohesion in plural societies.

- A central assumption of Social Cohesion Theory is that societies function effectively when there is a high level of trust, shared identity, and mutual obligation among members. When these social bonds are weakened, communities become susceptible to conflict, violence, and social disintegration. The theory assumes that cohesion is sustained through inclusive participation, equitable access to resources, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms. In contexts where these conditions are absent, tensions are likely to emerge and escalate into communal conflict.

- Another key assumption of the theory is that inequality, marginalization, and social exclusion undermine cohesion and increase the risk of conflict. Groups that perceive

themselves as excluded from political power, economic opportunities, or social recognition are more likely to express grievances through confrontation. This assumption is particularly relevant in communities experiencing resource related disputes, leadership struggles, and youth marginalization, where feelings of injustice erode trust and fuel recurring conflicts.

- The theory further assumes that social cohesion is not a natural or permanent condition but one that must be actively nurtured, especially in post conflict settings. Peacebuilding therefore requires deliberate efforts to rebuild trust, restore social relationships, and strengthen collective identity. Dialogue, reconciliation, participatory governance, and social support systems are seen as essential processes for reestablishing cohesion and preventing the recurrence of conflict.

- Social Cohesion Theory also recognizes the strategic role of professional actors such as social workers in restoring and sustaining peace. The theory assumes that social workers contribute to cohesion by addressing psychosocial trauma, facilitating mediation and dialogue, empowering marginalized groups, and strengthening community networks. Through these roles, social workers help transform conflict ridden communities into spaces of cooperation, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Applied to the context of Rivers State, the theory provides a useful lens for understanding how community conflicts in areas such as Andoni, Ogoni, Emohua, Okrika, Etche, and Ikwerre reflect underlying breakdowns in trust, shared norms, and social integration. Conflicts arising from land disputes, chieftaincy crises, youth violence, and resource competition can be interpreted as outcomes of weakened social cohesion rather than isolated acts of violence. The theory helps explain why peace remains fragile in these communities despite repeated interventions. In applying Social Cohesion Theory to this study, peacebuilding is understood as a process of rebuilding social bonds and restoring inclusive community structures. Social work interventions such as community mediation, empowerment initiatives, psychosocial support, and access to social welfare services are conceptualized as mechanisms for strengthening cohesion. By fostering dialogue, inclusion, and collective problem solving, social workers contribute to sustainable peace and improved social cohesion in Rivers State communities.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to provide an in depth understanding of community conflict, peacebuilding, and the role of social workers in promoting social cohesion in Rivers State. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows for a critical interpretation of social realities, historical experiences, and institutional responses associated with communal conflict and peacebuilding processes. The study relies exclusively on secondary sources of data. These include peer reviewed academic journal articles, scholarly books, government publications, policy documents, peace and security reports, social welfare assessments, and institutional studies relevant to community conflict, peacebuilding, social cohesion, and social work practice in Nigeria and comparable contexts outside the study area. Emphasis is placed on recent literature published within the last decade to ensure that the analysis reflects current conflict dynamics and peacebuilding frameworks. Data were analyzed

using thematic content analysis. Relevant materials were systematically reviewed, coded, and organized into key thematic areas.

The major drivers and patterns of community conflict in Rivers State as reflected in land related disputes, leadership crises, youth violence, and resource based tensions.

Community conflict in Rivers State is shaped by a combination of structural, economic, political, and socio-cultural drivers that intersect to produce recurring tensions and outbreaks of violence. One of the most prominent drivers is resource related tensions, especially those connected to oil extraction and its impacts on local livelihoods and environments. Empirical research on the Kegbara Dere Community in Rivers State demonstrates that oil exploitation by multinational corporations directly contributes to social conflict, as environmental degradation from spills and pollution undermines agriculture, fishing, and land productivity, jeopardising livelihoods and generating grievances among local residents. These environmental and livelihood losses have been shown to spark confrontations between community members, traditional authorities, and corporate actors, reflecting how resource based tensions are central to conflict dynamics in the region (Tajudeen & Nyiayaana, 2024).

Closely linked to resource based conflict are land related disputes, which frequently arise where contaminated or degraded lands — once fertile and central to community survival — become contested among families and clans struggling to secure diminishing economic opportunities. Research from the broader Niger Delta area indicates that as extractive activities erode usable land and water resources, communities experience increased competition over remaining productive space, leading to bitter disputes over land ownership, boundaries, and access rights. These contestations are exacerbated by weak land governance and inadequate dispute resolution mechanisms, reinforcing patterns of mistrust and hostility between neighbouring settlements where agricultural and fishing livelihoods are essential for survival.

Youth violence and mobilisation is another significant driver of conflict in Rivers State. Contemporary studies highlight the relationship between youth activism and broader conflict dynamics, showing that young people, often marginalised economically and politically, become deeply involved in disputes related to resource extraction and community control. Research specifically on youth activism in Rivers State reveals that youth groups have been central actors in movements such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and more recent campaigns against gas flaring, with these movements emerging from shared grievances over environmental degradation, unemployment, and perceived injustices. While youth engagement can foster community empowerment and advocacy for social justice, it also contributes to patterns of confrontational conflict when institutional channels for redress are limited or ineffective, illustrating how youth violence and activism intersect with structural sources of tension (Osazuwa & Audu, 2024; Arowolo & Akpan, 2023).

Leadership crises and competition over local authority positions further drive conflict patterns in Rivers State. In many communities, traditional institutions, town unions, and local councils play pivotal roles in mediating disputes and allocating communal resources. However, when leadership succession processes are contested or perceived as dominated by elite interests, rival factions often mobilise supporters, including youth groups, to assert competing claims. This was observed in the context of environmental clean-up initiatives and community co-management in areas affected by oil pollution, where political factions vied for control of

traditional authority structures to influence benefits from remediation programmes. Disputes over authority and representation weaken community governance and create openings for conflict escalation, as ordinary residents become aligned with competing leaders whose legitimacy is questioned.

The patterns of these community conflicts reveal complex feedback loops: resource based tensions and environmental harm weaken livelihoods and spur land disputes; youth groups, frustrated by marginalisation and economic insecurity, align with activism that can escalate into confrontation; and leadership crises undermine mechanisms for peaceful dispute resolution, allowing grievances to spiral into broader conflict. These dynamics have been documented within Rivers State's oil producing areas, where environmental degradation, socio-economic exclusion, and political competition combine to produce sustained communal instability and recurring violence. Addressing these drivers thus requires holistic approaches that go beyond security responses to tackle structural inequities, strengthen inclusive governance, and build social cohesion.

Ways community conflict affect peacebuilding and social cohesion in Rivers State in terms of displacement, livelihood disruption, weakened trust, and reduced collective action.

Community conflict in Rivers State severely undermines peacebuilding and social cohesion by forcing internal displacement that disrupts family and communal networks. Empirical research on internal displacement in Nigeria shows that when conflict displaces residents from their homes, affected individuals often lose access to social support systems that once provided safety nets and mechanisms for cooperative engagement. Displacement fractures neighbourhood ties and severs intergenerational relationships, creating social fragmentation that is difficult to repair. In many cases displaced households become marginalised in host communities, where competition over basic resources and services can further entrench mistrust between long-standing residents and newcomers. Such dynamics complicate efforts at reconciliation and community cohesion because displaced persons often confront both economic and social exclusion long after physical violence has subsided (Paul & Stein, 2020; Ibrahim & Okereke, 2022).

Closely linked to displacement is the disruption of livelihoods, which has profound implications for both individual wellbeing and community stability. In conflict-affected areas, agricultural activities, fishing, artisanal enterprises, and small informal businesses — key sources of income for many households — are frequently interrupted or abandoned altogether. Empirical studies in conflict zones across Nigeria indicate that livelihood disruption not only increases household poverty but also weakens social networks that are essential for collective coping strategies. When families cannot participate in communal labour, market exchange, or cooperative economic activities due to insecurity, the community's economic interdependence erodes, reducing incentives for collective engagement and strengthening divisions between conflict lines (Onuoha & Chukwu, 2021; Nwankwo, 2023). For example, in communities where farmland and fishing waters are deemed unsafe due to conflict, households shift into precarious informal work or migrate in search of alternative livelihoods, further weakening the local economy and social bonds that underpin peacebuilding.

A third major impact of community conflict is the weakening of trust, which is central to social cohesion. Trust between neighbours, between citizens and local leadership, and between communities and institutions provides the foundation for cooperative behaviour and peaceful coexistence. Research on post‑conflict reconstruction consistently shows that violence undermines interpersonal trust, often leaving deep psychological scars that hinder reconciliation. In Nigeria, studies of communal conflicts reveal that repeated cycles of retaliation, rumours of collusion, and collective punishment reduce the willingness of individuals to engage with 'the other', whether former rivals or neutral parties perceived to have been complicit in violence. This erosion of trust undermines informal social sanctions and diminishes civic cooperation, making it harder for peacebuilding initiatives to gain traction even after active hostilities have ceased (Adebayo & Balogun, 2021; Okeke & Ume, 2024).

Finally, community conflict significantly reduces collective action — the capacity of community members to mobilise together toward shared goals. Collective action is essential for community driven development, maintenance of local infrastructure, and participatory governance. However, when conflict creates fear, anxiety, and social fragmentation, individuals are less likely to participate in communal activities or to invest time and resources in collective enterprises. Empirical research in conflict contexts shows that participation in cooperative schemes, such as community savings groups, local councils, and development associations, declines in the aftermath of violence, because people prioritise individual survival strategies over group initiatives. This decline in collective action not only slows reconstruction but also weakens the social capital that underpins future peacebuilding and community resilience (Mbachu & Eze, 2022; Akinola, 2023). In Rivers State, where many community development projects rely on unpaid local participation, reduced collective action during and after conflict periods has been identified as a key barrier to sustaining peace and rebuilding trust.

In summary, the effects of community conflict on peacebuilding and social cohesion in Rivers State are profound and interrelated. Displacement dissolves established social networks and institutional memory; livelihood disruption deepens economic fragility and erodes cooperative economic activity; weakening of trust damages the social glue needed for reconciliation; and reduced collective action diminishes community capacity to pursue shared development goals. Collectively, these impacts highlight the need for holistic peacebuilding interventions that not only address immediate security concerns but also prioritise the restoration of social bonds, economic recovery, and participatory governance — all core areas where social work practice can make vital contributions.

Ways do social work interventions such as mediation, community empowerment, psychosocial support, and access to social welfare services contribute to peacebuilding and the promotion of social cohesion in Rivers State.

Social work interventions play a fundamental role in peacebuilding and promoting social cohesion in conflict‑affected communities such as those in Rivers State by addressing both the structural and relational wounds of conflict. At the core of these interventions is mediation, which involves professional facilitation of dialogue between conflicting parties to resolve disputes peacefully. A qualitative study on social work engagement in community cohesion in Ogun State demonstrates that social workers use negotiation, dialogue facilitation, and conflict resolution training to build trust and cooperation among divided groups, thereby fostering

long‑term peace and sustainable development within communities. Mediation by social workers creates space for adversaries to articulate grievances, understand each other's perspectives, and agree on mutually acceptable solutions, reducing the likelihood of violence recurrence and strengthening communal bonds (Azorondu et al., 2025).

Closely connected to mediation is community empowerment, where social workers support community members to participate actively in peace processes and decision making. Empowerment strategies include capacity building, leadership training, and inclusive community dialogues that allow marginalised voices — particularly those of women, youth, and minority groups — to contribute meaningfully to local governance and conflict resolution. Community empowerment reinforces local agency and ownership of peace initiatives. Empowered communities are better equipped to identify underlying conflict drivers, mobilise resources for collective action, and sustain peacebuilding outcomes because they are collaboratively involved in shaping solutions rather than having them imposed externally (Azorondu et al., 2025).

Psychosocial support is another critical social work intervention that directly contributes to peacebuilding and social cohesion. Conflict experiences often inflict deep psychological trauma, mistrust, and social alienation, all of which impede reconciliation and collective healing. Research on psychosocial and peacebuilding integration in Nigeria's conflict‑affected areas shows that structured mental health and psychosocial support programmes — including counselling, group support sessions, and trauma healing activities — significantly reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among participants. These improvements are closely correlated with reduced vulnerability to violent extremism and a greater capacity for peaceful interaction and cooperation. By addressing emotional wounds and rebuilding psychological resilience, social workers help restore interpersonal relationships and community trust that are essential for cohesive and peaceful coexistence (Paphitis et al., 2023).

Beyond individual healing, access to social welfare services such as community resource linkage, legal aid, basic needs support, and advocacy for vulnerable groups is central to stabilising conflict‑affected populations and preventing new tensions from emerging. Social workers advocate for equitable access to services that address economic and social inequalities, which are often root causes of conflict. By linking households to welfare resources, promoting access to education and health services, and supporting livelihood recovery programmes, social workers help reduce grievances related to marginalisation and exclusion. Academic reviews of social work practice in post‑conflict contexts indicate that such interventions contribute to rebuilding social structures and resilience by addressing both immediate needs and underlying socio‑economic disparities that fuel discord (Amedari et al., 2020; Ike et al., 2022).

Importantly, these social work interventions do not operate in isolation but reinforce one another to produce more sustainable peace outcomes. For example, mediation supported by empowerment builds inclusive participation, while psychosocial support enhances individuals' readiness to engage in collective decision making and trust building. Social welfare access reduces competition over scarce resources, lessening triggers of communal conflict and creating a more stable environment for dialogue and reconciliation. By combining psychosocial, economic, and relational support, social workers help transform fragmented communities into cohesive, resilient societies capable of withstanding conflict pressures and collaboratively

pursuing development. In summary, social work contributes to peacebuilding and social cohesion in Rivers State by mediating disputes, empowering communities, delivering psychosocial support to heal trauma, and facilitating access to social welfare services that address socio-economic vulnerabilities. These interventions help restore trust, foster inclusive participation, and strengthen collective capacities to resolve conflicts non-violently, thereby embedding peace within the social fabric of conflict-affected communities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that community conflicts in Rivers State, driven by land disputes, leadership crises, youth violence, and resource-based tensions, have profound adverse effects on social cohesion, peacebuilding efforts, and community development. These conflicts result in displacement, disruption of livelihoods, weakened trust among community members, and reduced capacity for collective action, creating cycles of vulnerability and tension that impede sustainable development. Evidence indicates that social work interventions are critical in addressing both the immediate and structural impacts of these conflicts. Mediation facilitates dialogue and reconciliation between conflicting parties, while community empowerment initiatives strengthen local participation, foster inclusivity, and enhance collective ownership of peace processes. Psychosocial support addresses trauma and fosters resilience among affected individuals, restoring trust and interpersonal relationships vital for cohesive community interactions. Access to social welfare services mitigates socio-economic vulnerabilities, reducing grievances that often trigger or escalate conflict. Collectively, these interventions demonstrate that social workers play a pivotal role in promoting peace, rebuilding social capital, and facilitating sustainable community development. By integrating mediation, empowerment, psychosocial support, and welfare services, social work practice provides a holistic approach that strengthens individual, household, and community capacities to prevent conflict recurrence and foster resilient, cohesive societies. The evidence underscores the necessity of systematically embedding social work strategies into community conflict management and peacebuilding frameworks in Rivers State to achieve inclusive and long-term social stability.

Recommendations

Strengthen Community Mediation and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Local governments and community stakeholders in Rivers State should establish and support formal mediation structures that enable dialogue and negotiation among conflicting parties. These mechanisms should focus on transparency, fairness, and inclusivity to prevent escalation of disputes and foster mutual understanding within communities.

Promote Community Empowerment and Participation: Social workers and community organizations should implement empowerment programs that engage residents in decision-making, resource management, and peacebuilding initiatives. By building local capacities and encouraging active participation, communities can develop ownership of conflict prevention strategies and sustainable solutions.

Provide Psychosocial Support Services: Authorities and social work agencies should prioritize psychosocial support for individuals and families affected by conflict. Counseling, trauma

management, and resilience-building programs can restore trust, improve interpersonal relationships, and strengthen social cohesion, which are essential for long-term peace.

Integrate Social Welfare Services with Peacebuilding Initiatives: Social welfare interventions, such as access to basic services, livelihood support, and safety nets, should be coordinated with peacebuilding programs. Reducing socio-economic vulnerabilities decreases tensions and grievances that often lead to conflict, thereby creating conditions conducive to sustained social harmony and community development.

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