

Evaluation of Social Media Influence on Benin City Residents' Perception of the 2024 Okuama Bloodbath in Delta State, Nigeria



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Abstract

This study provides an in-depth examination of the influence of social media on Benin City residents' perception of the 2024 Okuama bloodbath in Delta State, Nigeria. The objectives of this study were to establish the extent of awareness of Benin residents about the Okuama bloodbath. To ascertain the channels through which they were exposed to information about the event, and evaluate how social media influenced their perception of the incident. The researchers employed a survey research design, using a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. A total of 384 respondents were sampled from Benin City, with a response rate of 96.6% (n=371). The respondents comprised individuals aged 18-65, residing in Benin City, and who had access to social media platforms. Data analysis revealed that a substantial majority of respondents (65%) reported a high or very high level of awareness about the Okuama bloodbath. This finding suggests that the event received significant attention from the public, and that Benin City residents were well-informed about the incident. Social media was found to be the primary source of information for over half of the respondents (55%), with WhatsApp (30%) and Facebook (25%) being the most frequently used social media platforms for exposure to information about the Okuama bloodbath. The researchers found that social media played a significant role in shaping public perception, with a majority of respondents (75%) believing that social media effectively raised awareness about the Okuama bloodbath. Social media was seen as instrumental in mobilizing support and aid for the affected community, with 85% of respondents agreeing to its positive impact. However, the spread of misinformation on social media was also identified as a major concern, with 80% of respondents acknowledging its exacerbating effect on the conflict. The study's findings have significant implications for crisis communication, highlighting the importance of social media in shaping public

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perception during crises. The researchers recommend enhancing the use of official and verified social media channels, implementing media literacy campaigns, and collaborating with social media platforms to flag and remove harmful content. Through adopting these strategies, stakeholders can harness the power of social media to promote constructive engagement, mitigate the spread of misinformation, and facilitate effective crisis communication. Furthermore, it was recommended that social media platforms can play a critical role in promoting peace and stability during crises through providing a platform for dialogue and information dissemination on social media, which can help to reduce tensions, promote understanding, and facilitate conflict resolution. However, this requires responsible use of social media, and stakeholders must be aware of the potential risks and challenges associated with social media use during crises.

Keywords: *Influence, Social Media, Bloodbath, Conflict Resolution.*

Introduction

Social media has transformed how individuals and communities receive and disseminate information, particularly in times of crisis and conflict. The role of social media in modern conflict and crises is profound and multifaceted. Social media platforms have become crucial tools for communication during conflicts and crises, providing real-time updates, mobilizing support, and disseminating information rapidly. For instance, during the Arab Spring, social media was pivotal in organizing protests, raising awareness, and garnering international support for the movements (Howard & Hussain, 2011). Additionally, social media is used by various actors, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and activists, to influence public opinion and mobilize resources. In conflict zones, social media can be a double-edged sword, as it is also used to spread propaganda, misinformation, and hate speech, exacerbating tensions and violence (Zeitsoff, 2017).

In crises such as natural disasters, social media serves as a vital communication tool for both affected individuals and response organizations. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and WhatsApp are used to share real-time information about the crisis, coordinate relief efforts, and provide support to those in need (Houston, Hawthorne, Perreault, Park, Goldstein-Hode, Halliwell & Griffith, 2015). The immediacy and wide reach of social media make it an invaluable resource for crisis management, enabling swift dissemination of information and facilitating community resilience. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media encompasses a range of Internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. These platforms facilitate rapid information dissemination, allowing residents to stay informed about unfolding events and mobilize collective responses. The immediacy and reach of social media can amplify local incidents, as seen in the Okuama bloodbath, where reports, images, and videos were quickly shared, creating widespread awareness and reaction beyond the immediate vicinity of the conflict.

The role of social media in shaping public perception and community behaviour during the crises is significant. Studies have shown that social media can both inform and misinform, influencing public opinion and potentially exacerbating tensions (Adeyeye & Nwaoboli, 2023; Zeitsoff, 2017). In a crisis, social media serves as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it provides a platform for eyewitnesses and local journalists to report on the ground realities, offering crucial insights and updates that might have been otherwise inaccessible. On the other hand, the rapid spread of unverified

information and graphic content could have fuelled panic and heightened emotions, leading to a complex interplay of fear, outrage, and solidarity.

However, the use of social media during the Okuama bloodbath also raises important questions about the ethics and responsibilities of information sharing. The unchecked spread of graphic images and videos can have psychological impacts on viewers and potentially lead to the desensitization of violence (Lynch, 2014). Furthermore, the propagation of unverified information can contribute to the spread of rumours and misinformation, complicating efforts to manage the crisis effectively. As Obar and Wildman (2015) note, the governance and regulation of social media platforms are critical to ensuring that they serve as reliable and ethical sources of information during conflicts and crises. Hence, the influence of social media on the Okuama bloodbath among Benin City residents illustrates the profound and multifaceted impact of digital communication platforms in contemporary conflict scenarios. Social media can significantly shape public perception, community responses, and crisis management efforts, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges it presents. As the use of social media continues to evolve, understanding its role and implications in such contexts remains crucial for fostering informed and resilient communities. Therefore, the profound influence of social media on public perception and community responses during a crisis cannot be overemphasised.

The Benin people and the Okuama community have shared ancestral and cultural heritage, with the Okuama community being part of the Urhobo ethnic group, which has historical connections with the Benin Kingdom. The Benin Kingdom, which was established in the 13th century, was a powerful and influential empire that stretched across present-day Edo and Delta states. The Okuama community, which is located in Delta State, has historical ties with the Benin Kingdom, and many of its people have ancestral links to the kingdom. Therefore, the Okuama bloodbath incident is of significant interest to Benin residents, who have a shared cultural and historical heritage with the Okuama community.

The tragic events of the Okuama bloodbath in Delta State, Nigeria, marked by violent clashes and significant loss of life, is the focal point for evaluating social media influence on Benin City residents' perception of the 2024 Okuama bloodbath in Delta State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The Okuama bloodbath in Delta State represents a significant and tragic event that highlights the critical role of social media in shaping public perception and community responses among Benin City residents. While social media platforms have the potential to provide timely information and mobilise support during such crises, they also pose challenges related to the spread of misinformation, panic, and emotional distress. The rapid dissemination of unverified information and graphic content can exacerbate tensions and complicate crisis management efforts. This study aims to analyze the dual influence of social media during the 2024 Okuama bloodbath, focusing on its influence on public perception, community behaviour, and crises response among Benin City residents, thereby identifying both the benefits and potential pitfalls of social media usage in conflict situations.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Establish the extent of awareness of Benin residents to the 2024 Okuama bloodbath in Delta State.
2. Ascertain the channels of exposure of Benin residents to the 2024 Okuama bloodbath in Delta State.
3. Find out how social media influences the perception of Benin residents to the 2024 Okuama bloodbath in Delta State.

Review of Literature

Okuama Bloodbath: An Overview

Okuama, located in the Ewu Kingdom of Delta State's Ughelli South Local Government Area, is a historically significant community on the banks of the majestic Forcados River. Surrounded by the Ijaw communities of Ogodobri and Okoloba, this tranquil enclave has been marred by a long-standing land dispute, casting a shadow over its residents' peaceful coexistence. According to the Independent (2024), recent events culminated in tensions following a former NIMASA boss's alleged construction of a shrine on the disputed land, leading to the tragic deaths of three Okuama youths: Igbo Meshack, Power Awusa, and Okiemute Agbabulaka. The community's subsequent outcry, captured in a petition dated January 29, 2024, addressed to the Commissioner of Police in Delta State, reflects their fervent plea for justice and peace. Although the petition went unanswered, the ongoing conflict led to continued killings by both communities. The situation escalated when the people of Okoloba claimed that Okuama had kidnapped one of their sons, Mr. Anthony Aboh (Independent, 2024).

Local sources reported that the situation further deteriorated when an Okoloba community member was allegedly held hostage, prompting a former militant leader in the Niger Delta, who now maintains a good relationship with security agencies, to contact one of the service chiefs for assistance. It was this service chief who allegedly directed top military officers to conduct a rescue and peace mission in the area (Independent, 2024). On Thursday, March 14, an allegation surfaced that a manager from a well-known security firm sent some of their personnel, along with a group of young people, to Okuama in two gunboats for what was supposedly a peace negotiation with the community chairman and other leaders. The community welcomed them warmly, offering kola nuts as a gesture of hospitality, paving the way for productive and peaceful dialogue (Independent, 2024).

Tensions rose when the military proposed detaining the community chairman and several leaders for further questioning following the peace talks, which sparked public outrage. The people's refusal reportedly enraged military personnel, leading them to open fire at the town hall during a meeting with community members, resulting in casualties among the population (Independent, 2024). Sources from the Okuama community did not explain the community's role in the heinous killing of the 17 soldiers later that day. However, they revealed that on March 15, the military returned for a second attack, setting fire to houses in the community and forcing residents to flee. The deaths of the 17 soldiers remain a mystery, as various accounts of the events leading up to their deaths conflict, and the circumstances that allowed civilians who escorted them to remain unharmed while all the soldiers died are also unknown (Independent, 2024).

Social Media: An Overview

Social media has revolutionized the way people communicate, interact, and share information. Defined as platforms that enable users to create, share, or exchange information, ideas, and content in virtual communities and networks, social media has become an integral part of modern life. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Similarly, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) describe social media as a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards, chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs, and social networking websites.

Furthermore, Obar & Wildman (2015) define social media as a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers' intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues. Boyd and Ellison (2007) characterize social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. We therefore consider social media as dynamic, interactive ecosystems that facilitate the co-creation, dissemination, and negotiation of meaning among individuals and communities, thereby reconfiguring the boundaries of communication, identity, and collective action.

Role of Social Media in Modern Conflicts

Social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of modern conflicts by reshaping how information is disseminated, influencing public perception, and altering the strategies of both state and non-state actors. Its pervasive influence extends from organizing and mobilizing grassroots movements to spreading propaganda and misinformation. This multifaceted role of social media in modern conflicts demands a thorough examination to understand its implications for both conflict escalation and resolution.

One of the most significant roles of social media in modern conflicts is its ability to disseminate information rapidly and mobilize individuals. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp provide real-time updates that can inform and coordinate actions during conflicts. The Arab Spring serves as a prominent example where social media was used to organize protests, spread awareness, and mobilizes international support (Howard & Hussain, 2011). The immediacy and reach of these platforms enable activists and ordinary citizens to bypass traditional media channels, which may be subject to censorship or state control, thus facilitating a more democratized flow of information (Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides & Freelon, 2010). Also, social media significantly impacts public perception and opinion during conflicts. The platforms allow for the rapid spread of both accurate information and misinformation, shaping narratives and influencing public sentiment. Zeitzoff (2017) and Omoera and Nwaoboli (2023) note that social media can amplify emotions and reactions, often escalating tensions by spreading unverified reports and graphic content; this phenomenon was evident during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, where both sides used

social media to disseminate their versions of events, influencing both domestic and international opinion.

In the same vein, State and non-state actors increasingly use social media as a tool for propaganda and psychological warfare. Social media enables these actors to spread their ideologies, recruit supporters, and undermine the morale of their adversaries. The Islamic State (ISIS), for instance, effectively used social media to recruit fighters, spread its propaganda, and instil fear globally (Farwell, 2014). The strategic use of social media for propaganda purposes allows these groups to reach a wider audience and craft powerful narratives that can sustain their operations and influence public perception. The rapid spread of misinformation and fake news on social media poses significant challenges in conflict situations. False information can escalate conflicts by creating confusion, spreading fear, and provoking irrational responses (Starbird, Maddock, Orand, Achterman & Mason, 2016). During the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, for example, social media platforms were used to spread inflammatory content and misinformation, exacerbating ethnic tensions and violence (Fink, 2018). The lack of effective mechanisms to verify information on social media can thus lead to significant repercussions in conflict settings.

Conversely, social media also plays a crucial role in crisis management and humanitarian response during conflicts (Asemah-Ibrahim, Nwaoboli & Asemah, 2023). Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook can be used to coordinate relief efforts, share vital information, and mobilize resources quickly (Obayuwana, Nwaoboli & Ogono, 2023). Houston et al. (2015) emphasize that social media enables effective communication between affected populations and response organizations, enhancing the overall efficiency of humanitarian operations. For instance, during the Syrian civil war, social media was used to document human rights violations and coordinate humanitarian aid, providing critical support to those in need (Meier, 2015).

Despite its benefits, the use of social media in modern conflicts raises several ethical and practical challenges. The spread of graphic content and violent imagery can have psychological impacts on viewers and desensitize them to violence (Lynch, 2014). Furthermore, the proliferation of hate speech and incitement to violence on social media platforms necessitates robust regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines to mitigate these risks (Gagliardone, Gal, Alves & Martinez, 2015). Balancing the need for free expression with the responsibility to prevent harm remains a critical challenge for policymakers and social media companies. Therefore, the role of social media in modern conflicts is complex and multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative impacts (Okeibunor & Nwaoboli, 2024). It serves as a powerful tool for information dissemination, mobilization, and humanitarian response while also posing significant risks related to misinformation, propaganda, and ethical concerns.

Influence of Social Media on Public Perception

Social media has become a dominant force in shaping public perception in contemporary society. By offering platforms for instantaneous communication and widespread dissemination of information, social media has transformed the way individuals and communities form opinions and make decisions. The influence of social media on public perception is multifaceted, encompassing areas such as politics, health, consumer behaviour, and social movements.

One of the primary ways social media influences public perception is through the amplification of information (Ekhareafo & Nwaoboli, 2022). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram enable the rapid spread of news, opinions, and multimedia content, often reaching millions of users within minutes. This amplification effect can have both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, social media can raise awareness about important issues, mobilize support for causes, and democratize information dissemination. For example, during the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, social media played a critical role in bringing attention to incidents of police brutality and systemic racism, leading to widespread public engagement and activism (Anderson, Toor, Rainie & Smith, 2018). However, the same mechanisms that allow for the rapid spread of information can also propagate misinformation and fake news, distorting public perception. Vosoughi, Roy and Aral (2018) found that false news stories spread significantly faster and more broadly on Twitter than true stories, particularly in the domains of politics, urban legends, and science. This phenomenon is driven by the emotional and novel nature of false information, which captures user attention and encourages sharing. The proliferation of misinformation on social media can have serious implications, including undermining public trust in legitimate news sources and influencing political outcomes, as seen in the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Social media platforms use algorithms to personalize content, showing users information that aligns with their preferences and past behaviour. While this personalization enhances user experience, it also creates echo chambers and filter bubbles, where individuals are exposed predominantly to information that reinforces their existing beliefs (Obayuwana, Nwaoboli & Ogono, 2023). This selective exposure can lead to the polarization of public opinion, as people become less likely to encounter diverse perspectives and more entrenched in their views (Pariser, 2011). A study by Sunstein (2017) highlights that echo chambers and filter bubbles contribute to group polarization, where deliberation among like-minded individuals leads to more extreme positions. This effect is particularly pronounced in political discourse, where social media can exacerbate partisan divides and reduce the likelihood of compromise. The formation of echo chambers thus poses a challenge to democratic processes, as it hinders informed and balanced public debate. Social media also exerts a significant influence on public perception through the mechanism of social proof. Social proof is a psychological phenomenon where individuals look to the behaviour and opinions of others to determine their own actions and beliefs, especially in situations of uncertainty (Cialdini, 2009). On social media, metrics such as likes, shares, and comments serve as indicators of social proof, signalling the popularity and credibility of content.

The impact of social proof on public perception is evident in various domains, including consumer behaviour and health communication. For instance, online reviews and ratings on platforms like Amazon and Yelp significantly influence consumer decisions, with higher ratings often correlating with increased sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Similarly, in the context of health information, social media endorsements by peers and influencers can shape public attitudes toward health behaviours and interventions. A study by Chu, Allem, Cruz & Unger (2019) found that social media campaigns promoting vaccination were more effective when they leveraged social proof, demonstrating community support for vaccines.

The influence of social media on public perception is profound and multifaceted, affecting various aspects of society from politics and health to consumer behaviour and social movements. While social media has the power to democratize information and mobilize collective action, it also poses significant challenges related to misinformation, polarization, and biased framing.

Theoretical Framework

Social Judgement Theory

Social judgment theory seeks to explain how an audience processes messages. According to Asemah Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, (2022), the theory was formulated by Muzafer Sherif, Carolyn Sherif & Carl Hovland in 1961. The theory says that audience-members interpret and judge a message and take a position. According to Matthews (2019), the theory says that the audience interprets and judges a message and takes a position and that people make evaluations (judgements) about the content of messages based on their anchors or stance, on a particular message. Asemah et al., (2022) add that in addition to an individual's anchor, each person's attitudes can be placed into three categories. First, there is the latitude of acceptance, which includes all those ideas that a person finds acceptable. Second, there is the latitude of rejection, which includes all those ideas that a person finds unacceptable. Finally, there is the latitude of non-commitment, which includes ideas for which you have no opinion; you neither accept nor reject these ideas. A person's reaction to a persuasive message depends on his or her position on the topic (Yarooson & Asemah, 2008; Asemah et al., 2022). Concerning this study, Benin residents, when they receive information about Okuama bloodbath, will compare such information to their existing beliefs and a decision to accept or reject the information is made. This denotes that social media stories about Okuama bloodbath will either be accepted or rejected based on an individual's cognitive map.

Methodology

This study employed the survey research design with a questionnaire as data collection instrument. According to Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo & Okpanachi (2022), survey involves describing certain features of the population using data collected to explain the relationships and associations between and among selected variables. This method was employed because of its ability to gather quantitative data from a large number of respondents efficiently. The population covers residents of Benin City, Edo State. The population, according to National Population Commission (NPC) (2018), stood at 1,495,800. The sample size of 384 was determined using the Monkey sample size calculator, while the multistage sampling technique was used in administering copies of the questionnaire on the respondents. In the first stage, Benin was purposively divided into two zones: North Zone and South Zone. In stage two, cluster sampling was used in dividing Benin City into clusters based on LGA; Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, and Ovia North-East Zones. In stage three, random sampling was used to select a predetermined number of neighbourhoods from the list of clusters created in Stage 2. Hence, Ekenhuan, Uselu, Ikpoba-Hill and Ugbowo were selected. This step ensures that the city is adequately represented in the sample. In stage four, 384 copies of questionnaires were randomly sampled from respondents in the selected areas. Data was analysed using simple percentages and presented in tables based on a response rate of 96.6% (n=371).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Respondents' Extent of Awareness on Okuama Bloodbath

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	130	35.0
High	111	30.0
Moderate	74	20.0
Low	37	10.0
Very Low	19	5.0
Total	371	100%

Data from Table 1 above indicates that a substantial majority of respondents (65%) reported a high or very high level of awareness about the Okuama bloodbath. This suggests that the incident has significantly permeated the respondent's consciousness, indicating effective information dissemination.

Table 2: Respondents' Level of Exposure on the Okuama Bloodbath in Delta State

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	149	40.0
High	111	30.0
Moderate	56	15.0
Low	37	10.0
Very Low	19	5.0
Total	371	100%

Table 2 above shows that a significant majority of respondents (70%) reported a high or very high level of exposure to information about the Okuama bloodbath, indicating that the event was widely covered and that respondents had substantial access to this information.

Table 3: Respondents' Primary Channels of Exposure on the 2024 Okuama Bloodbath in Delta State

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Social Media	204	55.0
Television	56	15.0
Radio	37	10.0
Newspaper	19	5.0
Magazines	7	2.0
Internet Blogs/Forums	37	10.0
Others	11	3.0
Total	371	100%

From Table 3 above, more than half of the respondents (70%) identified social media as their primary source of information, highlighting its dominant role in information dissemination. Traditional media such as television (15%) and radio (10%) also played significant roles, but to a lesser extent than social media. Again, newspaper (5%) and magazines (2%) had a minimal impact on exposure; while a small percentage used online forums and blogs (10%), reflecting the diverse sources of digital information.

Table 4: Respondents' Social Media Platform of Exposure on the 2024 Okuama Bloodbath in Delta State

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	93	25.0
X (Formerly Twitter)	74	20.0
WhatsApp	111	30.0
TikTok	37	10.0
Instagram	26	7.0
YouTube	19	5.0
Others	11	3.0
Total	371	100%

Data from Table 4 reveals that WhatsApp (30%) and Facebook (25%) were the most frequently used social media platforms for exposure to information about the Okuama bloodbath, indicating their widespread use and influence. Also, X (Formerly Twitter) (20%) and TikTok (10%) also played significant roles in information dissemination, though to a lesser extent than WhatsApp and Facebook while Instagram (7%) and YouTube (5%) contributed to a smaller portion of the exposure. A small percentage (3%) used other unspecified social media platforms.

Table 5: Respondents' Perception on the Influence of Social Media on the Okuama Bloodbath in Delta State

Items	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Social media effectively raised awareness about the Okuama bloodbath.	167 (45%)	111 (30%)	37 (10%)	37 (10%)	19 (5%)
The spread of misinformation on social media exacerbated the conflict.	204 (55%)	93 (25%)	30 (8%)	26 (7%)	19 (5%)
Social media helped in mobilizing support and aid for the affected community.	186 (50%)	130 (35%)	26 (7%)	19 (5%)	11 (3%)
The graphic content shared on social media contributed to public fear and panic.	223 (60%)	74 (20%)	37 (10%)	19 (5%)	19 (5%)
Social media played a role in facilitating dialogue and peace negotiations.	149 (40%)	111 (30%)	56 (15%)	37 (10%)	19 (5%)

The table 5 above reflects a broad consensus among respondents on several key points regarding social media's influence on the Okuama bloodbath. A significant majority believe that social media effectively raised awareness (75%) and mobilized support (85%), but also acknowledge that it exacerbated the conflict through the spread of misinformation (80%) and graphic content (80%), which increased public fear and panic.

Opinions were more divided on the role of social media in facilitating dialogue and peace negotiations, indicating that while many saw its positive potential (70%), others were less convinced (15%) of its impact in this area. Overall, the data underscores the powerful and complex role of social media in modern conflict situations.

Discussion of Findings

This study was carried out to evaluate social media's influence on Benin City residents' perception of the 2024 Okuama bloodbath in Delta State, Nigeria. In achieving the first research objective, which seeks to establish the extent of awareness of Benin residents about the Okuama bloodbath, data from Table 1 and Table 2 provide needed insights. In Table 1, a substantial majority of respondents (65%) reported a high or very high level of awareness about the Okuama bloodbath. The high levels of awareness among the majority suggest that information about the Okuama bloodbath has been widely circulated and discussed among Benin City residents. However, the existence of a minority with low awareness highlights the need for targeted efforts to ensure that all community members are equally informed. This might involve using more diverse communication channels or addressing barriers to information access. These findings align with Social Judgment Theory, which posits that individuals are more likely to accept messages that fall within their latitude of acceptance. If the majority of residents are already aware of the event, they are more likely to respond positively to further communications about it, reinforcing the importance of effective messaging strategies to reach those with lower awareness.

The second research objective aimed to understand the channels through which Benin residents are exposed to the Okuama bloodbath. It was found that social media was the primary means of exposure among the majority of residents. Specifically, more than half of the respondents (55%) identified social media as their primary source of information, highlighting its dominant role in information dissemination. In the digital era, social media has revolutionized how people access and share news. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and YouTube can amplify media coverage of issues and happenings in society. Social media enables real-time updates, engagement with newsmakers, and opportunities for citizens to express their opinions. In addition, traditional media such as television (15%) and radio (10%) also played significant roles, but to a lesser extent than social media. This suggests that television remains a popular medium for accessing news and information in many households as local and national news channels often provide extensive coverage of topical issues. Television offers the advantage of visual storytelling, enabling the audience to see and hear announcements, interviews, and debates, enhancing their understanding of the issues. These findings are consistent with research by Zeitzoff (2017), which discusses how social media changes the landscape of information dissemination, particularly in crises, thus supporting the idea that social media is becoming a more favorable source for immediate news compared to traditional media.

From Table 4, the data reflects the importance of WhatsApp (30%) and Facebook (25%) in disseminating information during the Okuama bloodbath. Their significant usage suggests that they are effective tools for reaching a large audience quickly. The varied use of other platforms like X (formerly Twitter) (20%) and TikTok (10%) indicates that different demographic groups may prefer different social media for information. This highlights the need for a multi-platform approach to ensure broad and effective

communication in crises. Therefore, the predominance of social media as a primary channel for information underscores its crucial role in modern communication, particularly in crises. The significant role of television and radio indicates that traditional media still hold relevance. The low reliance on print media suggests a shift towards digital and broadcast media for information. These insights highlight the importance of leveraging multiple platforms to ensure comprehensive and effective information dissemination. This multi-platform approach corresponds with Social Judgment Theory, which emphasizes the need to tailor messages to different audiences based on their preferences and beliefs, thereby enhancing the likelihood of message acceptance.

Ascertaining how Benin residents perceive social media's influence on the Okuama bloodbath is the third objective of this study. The data from Table 5 provides insight into how social media has shaped the perception of Benin residents towards the Okuama bloodbath. It was found that the majority of respondents (75%) strongly agree or agree that social media effectively raised awareness about the Okuama bloodbath. This indicates that social media platforms were successful in disseminating information and making the public aware of the incident. The high level of agreement suggests that social media acted as a crucial information channel, reaching a wide audience quickly and efficiently. Also, a significant portion of respondents (80%) believe that the spread of misinformation on social media exacerbated the conflict. This underscores the double-edged nature of social media, where the rapid dissemination of unverified information can inflame tensions and contribute to misunderstandings or escalation of conflicts. Again, a majority of respondents (85%) acknowledge that social media helped in mobilizing support and aid for the affected community. This indicates that social media platforms were not only sources of information but also instrumental in organizing and galvanizing community support, which is crucial in crises. These findings resonate with Meier's (2015) argument that social media can significantly enhance humanitarian response by mobilizing support and disseminating information rapidly in times of crisis. Additionally, the acknowledgment of misinformation aligns with Social Judgment Theory, suggesting that individuals may reject messages that conflict with their pre-existing beliefs, thereby complicating the information landscape.

Furthermore, a substantial majority (80%) believe that the graphic content shared on social media contributed to public fear and panic. This highlights the powerful emotional impact that visual content can have, amplifying the perceived severity of the situation and potentially leading to heightened anxiety and fear among the public. However, a significant number of respondents (70%) also feel that social media played a role in facilitating dialogue and peace negotiations. This suggests that social media provided a platform for communication and negotiation, which is essential for conflict resolution. However, 30% were neutral or disagreed, indicating that not all respondents perceived social media as effective in this role. This could reflect challenges in translating online dialogue into tangible peace efforts or skepticism about the sincerity and effectiveness of such dialogues. These findings align with Ekharefo and Nwaoboli (2022), who discuss how social media can foster dialogue while also presenting challenges related to misinformation and emotional response. The varied perceptions among respondents reflect Social Judgment Theory, indicating that individuals' acceptance of social media's role in conflict resolution depends on their prior beliefs and experiences.

These findings, therefore, indicate that social media has a profound impact on public perception, acting as a powerful tool for raising awareness, mobilizing support, and

facilitating dialogue, while also having the potential to spread misinformation and induce fear. This dual impact underscores the need for responsible use of social media, including the dissemination of accurate information and the promotion of constructive dialogue. The complexities of social media's influence, as revealed in this study, mirror the insights from Adeyeye and Nwaoboli (2023), who emphasize the importance of responsible social media usage in shaping public narratives. By understanding how social media affects perceptions, stakeholders can better navigate the challenges it presents, aligning with the tenets of Social Judgment Theory to foster informed and constructive dialogue within communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study on the influence of social media on the Okuama bloodbath among Benin City residents reveals the significant role social media plays in shaping public perception during crises. From the findings, the study concludes that social media proved highly effective in raising awareness and mobilizing support, with a majority of residents using it as their primary information source. However, the rapid dissemination of information also led to the spread of misinformation, exacerbating the conflict and inducing public fear and panic through graphic content. Despite these challenges, social media also facilitated dialogue and peace negotiations, highlighting its dual impact. Thus, while social media is a powerful tool for information and mobilization, its responsible use is essential to mitigate negative effects and promote constructive engagement. It is in line with the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

1. Given the dominance of social media as a primary source of information, it is recommended to enhance the use of these platforms through official and verified channels to disseminate accurate and timely information. Additionally, partnerships with local television and radio stations should be strengthened to ensure that critical updates reach those who rely on traditional media.
2. To mitigate the negative impacts of misinformation and graphic content on social media, it is recommended to implement a robust media literacy campaign. This campaign should educate members of the public on how to identify credible sources, verify information, and engage constructively online. Moreover, efforts should be made to collaborate with social media platforms to flag and remove harmful content quickly.

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