UNDERSTANDING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA
AMONG UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES: SOCIOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This paper is theoretical in scope as it highlights the positive and negative uses of social media among University Undergraduates in Nigeria. In a bid to understand the dimensional usage of social media, this paper draws from sociological perspectives, asserting that no sociologist would approach the study of social life without making a choice from the pool of perspectives available. Thus, this paper employed an eclectic approach in recognition of the postmodern era of the global society which entails that theoretical analysis using old sociological theories would not suffice but postmodern theories for a postmodern world. The tripartite theories analysed in this paper are to assist in forging understanding on the global phenomenon of social media and its implication on education and also serve as the underpinnings for the literature review on social media studies. This paper concluded that social media are symbols of evolution in university education and society at large, dangling between innovation (transformation of Nigerian education) and stability (preservation of Nigerian education). The implication is that university education and society are walking on a tight rope between system to promote stability and preserve its educational system for integrating values driven by social media which is akin to anarchy if not efficiently channeled.

Key words: Social media, Undergraduates, Sociological perspectives

Introduction

University education was established in Nigeria with the aim of giving any applicant who gains admission a very sound and qualitative education, to be able to function effectively in any environment. However, scholars such as Ajibade (2013), Okebukola (2006), and Nwagwu (2005) have shown that this level of education is struggling to achieve its lofty aim because of numerous problems confronting it. In recent years, social media have been included as part of the problems confronting university education. Social media are concepts which connote digital, interactive, integrative, global, communicative, participatory and collaboration in the sharing of information, knowledge and ideas among users and they are characterized mostly with internet proliferation, particularly, the second version of world wide web (web 2.0) (Onah&Nche, 2014). The qualities highlighted in the definition have endeared social media to millions of users worldwide, including undergraduates in Nigerian universities (Micaiah, 2014).

Negatives of Social Media Usage

The under-listed scenario is a compilation of the dark side of the use of social media among university undergraduates in Nigeria from April 2011 to April 2014:

> **April 2011**: Four undergraduates of the Abia State University raped a female student from another university in which one of them met via social media and invited to his

hostel. This incident made the headlines as the rapists recorded their dehumanized and obscene acts, uploaded and shared the video on social media, to mock the undergraduate lady and flaunt their male egos. Unfortunately for them, as Nigerians watched the video, outrage was felt from all corners of the country, including the then Minister of Youths and Social Development, BolajiAbdullahi and other human and women rights groups who initiated moves through which the police investigated the case and arrested the undergraduates involved.

> **April/June 2012**: social media have been described as the haven of fraudsters who use false identities on these platforms to deceive and defraud unsuspecting users. Dare, an undergraduate of the OlabisiOnabanjo University, Ago Iwoye was sentenced to five years' imprisonment over an attempt to obtain money under false pretense on social media (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, 2012a). Also, a federal high court in Kaduna State, Nigeria sentenced Imonima Kingsley, an undergraduate of University of Ilorin, Nigeria to twenty years' imprisonment for defrauding an Australian of one thousand dollars ($1,000) when he fraudulently presented himself as a gay from Republic of Benin on social media (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, 2012b).

> **June 2012**: Onah&Nche (2014) were dismayed when the Dana Airline crashed in Iju-Ishaga, Lagos State, saw thousands of young people residing in the area rushed to the scene, instead of rescuing the victims they were seen using their devices to snap pictures of the plane wreckage and dying victims. In the face of disaster, youths rather than come to the rescue of victims are seen taking pictures or recording the incidents with their devices, to upload and share on social media. This is evident in Nigerian youths who unfortunately turn to onlookers in times of disaster with no concern or regard for the dying-lives desperately in need of help (Onah&Nche, 2014). Young people in the name of being the first to know forget the sacredness of human life (Onah&Nche, 2014). Social media have been blamed for the loss of the sense of sacredness of human dignity and life.

> **July 2012**: Cynthia Osokogu, an enterprising young woman studying for her postgraduate degree at Nasarawa State University, was declared missing by her friends who posted her picture on social media. That picture of a pretty 25years old lady later became the face of the 'dark side of social media' as Church (2012) tweeted. A supposedly social media relationship motivated late Cynthia to visit Lagos for business and pleasure where she was drugged, gang-raped, tortured, stripped of her money and young life by two Nigerian university undergraduates, EchezonaNwabufor and Ezekiel Eloka at a hotel in Festac, Lagos State. Esene (2012) reported that both of them made confessional statements to the Nigerian police after their arrest for the gruesome murder of the only daughter of a retired Nigerian Army General, Frank Osokogu.

> **October 2012**: "For those of you who have the misfortune to watch the video of four Nigerian students being beaten and burnt to death…naked, muddied, bloodied,

they were set ablaze and a crowd watched them, shouting, die, die" (Ros, 2012). That was the grim commentary of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) podcast on the murderous video that surfaced on social media which left many Nigerians and international community, aghast to the barbaric nature of those involved, including those who recorded the incident and uploaded it on social media. Four male undergraduates of the University of Port-harcourt were brutally murdered in broad day light where tens of residents of that local community stood, watched while some bizarrely recorded the incident which was later uploaded and shared on social media. It was claimed that the residents thought they were thieves, whereas, it was a false alarm by the true culprits, this was revealed by the father of one of late undergraduates on British Broadcasting Corporation (Ros, 2012).

➢ **October 2012**: Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta suspended AyanniyiKayode who mischievously tweeted his account number at Nollywood actress Funke Akindele, pretending that it was Funmi Lawal's account number, graduate of law from University of Lagos who was diagnosed of cancer. Kayode's home address was traced, school and matriculation number identified, and was reported to the authorities in Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta by the youths who had volunteered to raise money for Funmi Lawal on social media (Omojuwa, 2012).

➢ **August 2013**: after Cynthia's tragic story, social media almost claimed another victim but for the coincidental effort of the Nigerian police who raided the hide-out of suspected kidnappers. Oludoyi Bamidele Samuel, an undergraduate of Kogi State University was lured by Michael, a friend he met on social media, from Enugu to Warrri where he was kidnapped. Michael who was aware that Bamidele is the only son of his wealthy parents abducted him with some other collaborators and demanded for a five million naira ransom from Bamidele's parents. Bamidele was set free to narrate the tale of his ordeal to the police and later his parents who he never informed of his trip to Warri.

➢ **December, 2013**: Olawale Joseph Aderibigbe, a graduate of LadokeAkintola University created a false female social media account and after gaining the trust of fellow users (mostly male) for about a year, news was spread smartly that she was suffering from kidney problem and needed a transplant. Money was raised and even a donor was ready to give away her kidney before it was announced that it was too late, she died. While sympathizers were sending condolences on social media, it was discovered that the social media account is not a real person but was run by Olawale who was referred to as a conman and serial scammer who had defrauded several social media users (Omojuwa, 2013; TechCabal, 2013). This presents an example of fake social media profile which is quite different from the individual's true personality, a show of dishonesty.

➢ **March 2014**: Bellanaija (2014) blogged that impersonation of famous individuals is another dark side of social media. It was reported that unscrupulous elements have

been impersonating famous Nigerians (entertainers, politicians, etc.) on social

media platforms such as Instagram, facebook, twitter, bbm, etc. For instance, Nollywood actress Stella Damasus closed her social media account because miscreants have been using her name for dubious reasons. Also, former winner of big brother Africa and actor cum television host, UtiNwachukwu was also a victim of impersonation.

➢ **April 2014**: Sirkenayo (2014) blogged that Covenant University expelled an undergraduate, Bisi when a video of her twerking (dancing) naked went viral on social media platforms. Apparently, Bisi and her roommate recorded a video of themselves twerking. Bisi was completely naked while her roommate was with her clothes. The video which they claimed was deleted found its way to a male course mate who copied it on his flash drive and began bullying and blackmailing Bisi for sex which she declined. As a response to Bisi's rejection, the male course mate uploaded the video on social media, the attention of management of Covenant University was drawn to the video, and Bisi was duly expelled from the faith-based university.

Quite unfortunate for the parents of Bisi but her case is not an isolation, almost the norm these days on social media is that nude pictures are exchanged among lovers, only for these sour grape lovers to post the nude pictures to social media whenever the relationship ends in bad taste. This is a copy-cat phenomenon as the release of nude pictures on social media started with American entertainers who sought to punish their lovers for either cheating or jilting them. Also, social media are flooded with nude pictures and sex videos, as sending of nude pictures and sex videos have become potent method to gain more followers and attention, and the marketing strategy that keeps promoting cyber-prostitution, not to mention pornography, one of the main drivers of sexual immorality in our contemporary age.

Positives of Social Media Usage

Just like Nnabuko and Anatsui (2012) described Nollywood movies as a double-edge sword of both positive and negative impact, social media fall within similar sphere, albeit, at a higher frequency. Social media are not bereft of positives where university undergraduates have channeled it as a tool to solve societal problems. Ogunlesi (2014) credited social media as a tool employed by young Nigerians in leading the charge in curtailing the spread of deadly scourge of Ebola, managing its impact and containment of the Ebola threat in Nigeria.

A campaign was also launched in University of Lagos which raised four million naira for Funmilayo Lawal, a law graduate of the institution who was diagnosed with sacorma (cancer at the shoulder region). This researcher also joined some other young Nigerian volunteers to raise three million naira for a three year old boy to undergo surgery in India with the hashtag #SaveMusibaudeen. Young Nigerians on social media are using the platforms to launch several save citizen projects to bring back the culture of hospitality,

good neighbourliness and collective group spirit.

In September 2011, as Nigeria neared her 51st independence anniversary, a project entitled, '419 Reasons to Like Nigeria' was launched. It was geared towards portraying positive characteristics and intriguing traits of Nigeria and her people beyond the unfortunate stereotyped term of 419 (Durojaiye, 2011). The project was centred on an encyclopedic list of 419 reasons to Nigeria and her people without the mention of internet fraud, scam, advance payment, cyber-crime, and yahoo-boys. In this manner, when internet users google search 'Nigeria 419', they retrieved and gained access to positive information on Nigeria as a land of potential and opportunity, through her geography and natural resources, culture, food, way of life, music, movies, dance, art, tourism and sports while the resilient spirit, industrious, innovative, enterprising and achievements of her great people were extolled. The major tool used to drive this project, acknowledged as a viable rebranding Nigerian project outside the official government activity, was social media and involved young Nigerians as volunteers. This depicts the objective of moral education in the National Policy on Education (NPE) as shared responsibility for the common good of the country (FRN, 2013).

Edegoh, Asemah and Ekanem (2013) investigated facebook and relationship management among undergraduates of Anambra State University and found that these undergraduates engaged social media platforms to reunite and maintain existing relationships, and create new relationships. The study concluded that facebook, one of the platforms of social media is an important medium that can be used for relationship management among university undergraduates in Nigeria. Orlu-Orlu and Nsereka (2014) x-rayed the immoral posture of Nigeria and identified social media as a zone of opportunities and a potent instrument for correcting the moral ills of the Nigerian society. Since social media are exciting tools to university undergraduates, adopting it as a positive tool to stem out immoral activities would be seamless.

Researchers are making serious academic incursions everyday into the role of social media in education and are giving new interpretations to the significance of social media to teaching and learning in Nigeria. There exists copious studies on social media and education, the few studies have explored the construct of social media in utilizing its tools for education, for instance, in entrepreneurship education (Aniemeka, 2013). Armstrong (2009) in Aniemeka (2013) viewed social media as a way of bringing together learners of all ages to assist each other with homework and research but he is disappointed that this is not happening on expected scales. Twitter, a social media and micro-blogging platform is viewed as the fastest way to find information on breaking news; blogs can be used to encourage creative writing and develop proper grammar skills; and Cramster is a question and answer board platform (Aniemeka, 2013). This falls under the microscope of acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance in the objectives of moral education of the National Policy on Education.

Sanusi, Adelabu and Okunlade (2014) reckoned that social media started out as a fun way to connect with friends and families but experts have seen it as a powerful tool for education beyond their uses as an avenue to socialize. They outlined social media platforms such as facebook, twitter, linkedin, youtube, flicker, slideshare, skype as educational tools used by undergraduates and educationists to connect undergraduates to learning opportunities in new

and exciting ways such as, sharing of lecture timetable, assignments, tutorials, and gain access to study materials. Micaiah (2014) analysed that though, there exists impressive website presence for Nigerian universities, yet, social media awareness for this level of education is below par.

It can be argued that infusion of social media as a teaching and learning tool might dissuade learners from distraction in their academic activities as a result of use of social media. The presence of social media has influenced university undergraduates to the twin possibility of working and studying, hence, the upsurge of several young entrepreneurs in Nigeria. These young entrepreneurs have helped to rebrand the image of Nigerians dented by misinformed cyber-criminals. The amount of job opportunities inherent in social media is limitless and has continued to challenge the creativity of Nigerian youths.

Interestingly, several young Nigerians have utilized social media to modify their unemployment status as the social media landscape in Nigeria is filled with so many employers of labour who have used these platforms to recruit job seekers. In the same vein, employed Nigerian youths are engaging social media as a form of networking, to raise awareness about their capability and connect for business transactions. In a nutshell, social media has led to solutions and services which further highlight the transformative nature of these platforms and their capacity to promote development in Nigeria. Also, this has assisted in the appreciation of the respect for the dignity of labour among Nigerian youths and inculcation of that moral virtue among university undergraduates through the limitless job opportunities available on social media.

SociologicalPerspectives

This paper on understanding the positive and negative usage of social media among university undergraduates: sociological perspective, is a necessary theoretical exercise on a global phenomenon (social media) and education, and involves quite a number of variables which demands an expository understanding through tripartite theories of postmodernism, social reflexivity and technological determinism. No sociologist would approach the study of social life without making a choice from the pool of perspective available. Nor would the information drawn from such a study be of use to people in their daily lives unless the perspectives from which the study is approached and the ways in which that perspective differs from others are known.

The tripartite theories serve as foundation for this paper, hence, the theoretical approach adopted is eclectic in nature. Reason for this eclectic approach is in recognition of the postmodern era of the global society which entails that theoretical analysis using old sociological theories would not suffice but postmodern theories for a postmodern world. Openstax College (2013) explained that sociological theory is constantly evolving and should never be considered complete. Calhoun (2002) considered old or classic sociological theories as still important but new sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and added to them. As it is often argued that knowledge does not exist in vacuum, these theories provided the explanation for the observable phenomenon of social media in this paper.

Technological Determinism: Giddens (2013) and Aina (2013) both acknowledged that we now live in an 'information age' which is characterized with the evolution in technology.

Technology defined by Nolan and Lenski (2006) as a cultural information about how to use the material resources of the environment to satisfy human needs and desires. In recognition of the place of technology in our contemporary era, sociologists advanced a suitable concept to define it, known as technological determinism theory. Technological determinism theory was expanded and interpreted by Marshall McLuhan in 1962, who assertively stated that technology shapes or influences the way people think, feel and act and also determines how society organise themselves and operates (Baran, 2010). It explains the way in which technology is employed to drive social change. Asogwa and Ojih (2013) cited Croteau and Heynes who explained that technological determinism is an approach that identifies technologies, or technological advances, as the central causal element in processes of social change. Sociologists understand that technology itself does not necessarily cause social change but it does make provision for the acquisition of new capacities and impose restriction in its own form (Kombol, 2014).

In reference to this paper, social media have often been described as the technological form of socialization which brings about social change. In recent years, the use of social media has increasingly influenced the form of socialization. Asogwa and Ojih (2013) maintained that with every innovative technology, society will change in order to adapt to the technology which explains the different reasons for individuals, especially university undergraduates' gravitation towards social media. African scholars like Abanyam (2013) lamented that Africa is witnessing the effects of western technology with its occupying blessings and curses. He accepted that Africa lags behind in accelerating appropriate indigenous technological knowledge to solve African problems, hence, they depend on western technology, a situation tagged, 'dependency syndrome' which throws up another enormous challenge on African moral education. Asogwa and Ojih (2013) asserted that the attitude and behavior of university undergraduates' on social media platforms underscores the postulation inherent in technological determinism, i.e. changes in communication technology inevitably produce profound changes in both culture and social order. This supports the assertion of Abanyam (2013) that western technologies such as social media are not congenial to African context and have rather helped to erode African values to zero mark. This theory shows the negative use of social media by university undergraduates to suit their different idiosyncrasies.

Postmodernism Theory: scholars have posited that technology has accelerated the society and it has now entered a new era, known as postmodern era where all old ideas in society became antiquated (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Some sociologists posited that human societies have passed through certain broad phases of development, distinguishing between pre-modern and postmodern societies (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013).Proponents of postmodern theory such as Jean Baudillard, Jean Francois Lyotard, Bogard, Binkley, etc. posited that electronic media with his correlate, social media, have destroyed human relationship to the past and created a chaotic empty world (Giddens, 2013; Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). Haralambos and Holborn (2013) maintained that modern societies have always been characterized by rapid change, increasing pace of change, making it difficult for individuals to retain a single, unified sense of what to do and what not to do. In the process of acceleration to postmodern society, immoral ways of life such as fraud, prostitution, and perversion of injustice, not known in pre-colonial era were inculcated into the Nigerian society. For this reason, some African scholars like Ahule (2012) have warned against the full embrace of postmodern values:

"Nigerian value system have metamorphosed from its collective orientation to take on a western form. Instead of African form, values congruent with western society have come to dominate, and rather than solidify the Nigerian, it degenerate him" *(Ahule, 2012, p.6).*

Haralambos and Holborn (2013) described postmodern society as an era where the media have become increasingly important in societal live. Giddens (2013) emphasized this point on postmodern theorists' argument that rather than economic forces shaping society as postulated by Marxist theorem, social life is influenced, above all, by signs and images, hence, social life is dominated by the mass media which can be interpreted as social media in recent times. Cultural ideas are being integrated across the globe with western culture becoming dominant because of its technological superiority which has taken control of knowledge and information. Abanyam (2013) raised the assumption that the control the west has over knowledge and information influences other cultures through social media.

Thus, Nigerian university undergraduates who are the largest group using social media have the tendency to imbibe and exhibit attitudes which are antithetical to the establishment of university education in the country. African scholars like Abanyam (2013) contended that university graduates now possess certificates without moral value to complement with. Bribery and corruption is now the norm, nudity and indecent dressing as the new cool, indiscipline and disorderliness become the order of the day, get-rich-quick syndrome pervades, honour and regard only goes for material worth, because Nigerians seem to have lost their moral integrity in a bid to meet up with postmodern society. In understanding the opposition to the use of social media and the hue and cry over its negative moral implication, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2008) explained:

"Moral panic is a common reaction to new forms of communication...The story with social media is not different. Unsafe disclosure of information and addiction, are few of the concerns raised about the use of social media" (Valenzuela, et al 2008, p.3).

Social Reflexivity Theory: Anthony Giddens developed another theoretical perspective on the contemporary changes in the world and reckoned that we live today in á 'runaway world', a world marked by new risks and uncertainties of the sort. Giddens (2013) suggested that the notion of trust should be placed alongside that of risk, as trust refers to the confidence we have either in individuals or institutions. He explained that traditional forms of trust seemed to be dissolved which is the effect of globalized society where individual lives are influenced by people they have never seen or met and who may be living on the far side of the world. Social reflexivity is well pronounced in this current information age and social media arena. It refers to the fact that as social animals, individuals have to constantly think, reflect on current circumstances which gives room for modification to suit current situations. In this vein, social reflexivity brings to the fore the dynamism of societies, rather than be static due to custom and tradition, members could follow established ways of activities in innovative fashion

Conclusion
The rapid growth of social media platforms, their popularity among university undergraduates and their relative success in retaining users, has ensured that social media

continue to be pivotal and indispensable. This paper identifies social media as a symbol of evolution in university education and society at large, dangling between innovation (transformation of Nigerian education) and stability (preservation of Nigerian education). The implication is that university education and society are walking on a tight rope between system that maintains stability, preserving its educational system and integrating values driven by social media which may be akin to anarchy if not efficiently channeled. This situation is described by scholars in the field of sociology as *edge of chaos* and this paper views social media as a double-edged sword that threatens the fabric of stability and also facilitates dynamism of the society. In conclusion, this study contends that negative use of social media is on the horizon because of the lack of relevant knowledge, self-regulation and control, and individual responsibility. Hence, this study opens the debate on the possibility of bringing to the fore the positive use of social media as against its negative use, particularly, as it borders on educational development. It is believed that a vivid understanding of the efficacy of the climate of the use of social media and education of its users would serve as a pragmatic approach and also assist in instituting a positive use of social media among university undergraduates.

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