

Youth Restiveness and Social Media Narrative in Contemporary Nigeria

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Abstract

There is an emerging social media narrative which has become an indispensable part of democratic setting where social media has come to shape the society as a result of the information on the Internet. Social media has come to put democratic actors on their toes and this is usually carried out by the youth. Social media has come with its frailties which have added to the existing conflict in Nigeria. Aside unemployment, poverty, bad governance, and drug abuse among others that are confronting the youth under democratic society in Africa, social media has come to compound the conflict situation. The unverified information represents negative aspects of social media such as hate speech, wrong information/messages, docile attitude of government under democratic system and a host of others. Has the emergence of social media alleviated the challenges on ground or has it come to compound the problem? The study adopted a documentary approach.

This method relies on secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, reports and other relevant materials. The study found that the relationship between the Internet and democracy has not been explored. The study also found that if government is not proactive in handling the gap between the Internet and democracy, the youth restiveness will go on unabated. The study recommends that strong legal framework and enforcement should be put in place to curb the menace of the negative side of social media. Even though democracy connotes freedom, it must be managed properly in order to accommodate the weaknesses of social media in the society and take advantage of the positive aspect of social media.

Key words: Social Media, Conflict, Democracy, Youth Restiveness

Introduction

Talking about youth restiveness in Nigeria is no longer new. Experiences in the past have shown that any society which does not give attention to the youth is preparing for crime and violence. The simple reason is that youth are adventurous and could perpetuate violence without minding the implications of their actions. Apart from being the leaders of tomorrow, youth out-number the middle-aged and the aged (Anasi, 2010). Besides numerical superiority, youth have energy and ideas that constitute great potential of the society (Ajufo, 2013). Youth are thinkers, innovators, adventurers and risk takers. They want to have the feel of every

experience irrespective of the consequences. In Nigeria, much of the violence experienced including the post-election violence of 2011 is predicated on the strength and activities of the youth at various localities and communities. The information from social media can be of help to the younger generation if properly harnessed and tailored to give positive impact to the audience. As it is today, social media information travels quite faster than the conventional media where people will have to listen to radio or read newspapers. However, today information within the context of social media can reach millions of people within a short period. Such information can be of help and it can also be dangerous to the society especially if it has a hate undertone.

According to Curras (1987), information has been likened to a stimulus that can condition a person to a certain behavior. This is why the kind of information that should be shared on social media must be the type that will have positive influence on the audience. Again, on the part of Ifidon and

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Ahiau (2006), information is “structured data that causes a human mind to change its opinion about the current state of real world and contribute to a reduction in the uncertainty of the state of the system”. Information is a change agent, a reinforcer of ideas and opinions. Social media information can reshape the society if it is not the type that will influence violence, hatred and breed ethnic or religious sentiments. Today, Nigeria is witnessing the proliferation of fake news on social media that sometimes look so real until the information is retracted. Nigeria is passing through a tough time in ascertaining the genuine and the fake news on the social media and this has tendency to spark off violence in the socio-political terrain.

This paper examines the implication of social media information on youth restiveness in contemporary Nigeria. The paper also identifies social media as an emerging cause of youth restiveness in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarifications

The term youth has been variously defined by different scholars depending on the prevailing circumstances. Scholars like Ndu (2000) and Yusuf (2001) saw youths as neither adolescents nor children characterized by excessive energy that needs to be exerted, which if not guarded is channeled into negative tendencies (Cited in Ushe, 2014). The United Nations General Assembly and World Bank cited in Adewuyi (2008) defined the youth as people between ages 15 to 24 years. In Nigeria, the people within the age limit of 30 years are considered as youths hence they are allowed to participate in the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC).

Again, The National Youth Development Policy (2001) defines youth as people aged 18-35. They constitute about 40 per cent of the more than 140 million people of Nigeria. The total population of youth between 10 and 24 in Nigeria was 45.4 million in 2006 which is 24 per cent of the total population. Therefore, for the purpose of the present study, the definition of the National Youth Development Policy is adopted. The reason is that the high level of unemployment in Nigeria has further widened the scope of youth. For instance, in the past an average person marries between the ages of 18 - at most 30, but the present economic

predicament has made people to mostly marry between ages 30 to 35 and above. The fraction of the unemployed is more on the youth than any other age group. Globally for instance, four out of every ten unemployed persons are young women or young men. In some countries, youth unemployment is three times higher than adult unemployment (Vremudia, 2012). Many youth have become pessimistic, feeling powerless to change their situation (Somavia, 2012).

Restiveness has been defined as the act of being unable to stay still, or unwillingness to be controlled, especially because you feel bored or not satisfied with something (Patrick, Arisi, & Osah, 2013). Youth restiveness according to Ushe (2014) involves the combination of actions, conducts and behavior which constitutes unwholesome, socially unacceptable behavior exhibited by youth in the society. Elegbeleye (2005) succinctly identifies three major factors: the peer motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, and perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation. All these have led to the actions and inactions of youth in the society.

Social media, according to Sajithra and Rajindra (2013), is defined as 'an extension and explosion of traditional word of mouth networks. Word of mouth has always been the most effective and trustworthy means of disseminating information. With the enabling of technology, anybody with an internet access and has an opinion can be part of social media. According to Zarella (2010), there are some types of social media, like: Blog, Microblog (Twitter), Social Networks (Facebook, LinkedIn), Media sharing (YouTube, Flickr), Social News and Bookmarking (Digg, Reddit), Rating and reviews pages (Yelp), Forums and Virtual Worlds (Second Life). All activity within the confines of internet usage is termed as social media.

Theoretical Framework

In 1939, Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears published a monograph on aggression in which they presented what has come to be known as the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis (F-A). This hypothesis proved to have an immense impact. It appears to have influenced current Western thinking on aggression more profoundly than any

other single publication.

As to the principal hypothesis, Dollard et al. (1939) posited "that the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression". Frustration, in this context, was specified as the thwarting of a goal response, and a goal response, in turn, was taken to mean the reinforcing final operation in an ongoing behavior sequence. At times, however, the term 'frustration' is used to refer not only to the process of blocking a person's attainment of a reinforcer but also to the reaction to such blocking. Consequently, 'being frustrated' means both that one's access to reinforcers is being thwarted by another party (or possibly by particular circumstances) and that one's reaction to this thwarting is one of annoyance.

It was soon recognized that the initial claims – (a) that aggression is *always* based on frustration and (b) that frustration *always* leads to aggression – were far too general. These claims made frustration both a necessary and sufficient condition for aggression. Miller (1941) was quick to retract the latter part of the proposal. Quite obviously, frustrations do not cause hostile or aggressive outbursts by necessity. Potential outbursts may be effectively inhibited or may result in alternative actions, such as the pursuit of other, more readily available reinforcers. Miller therefore rephrased the second part of the hypothesis to read: "Frustration produces instigations to a number of different types of response, one of which is instigation to some form of aggression". Therefore youth restiveness is anchored in frustration aggression theory.

Causes of youth restiveness in Nigeria

Social media

There is an emerging cause other than the existing ones that society seems to be neglecting which is a social media activity. The arrival of social media is the arrival of opinion; people now have a platform to air their opinions. However, the various opinions now can either be positive or negative. The positive aspect of social media is meant to unite the people without causing harm while the negative can be patterned to cause disunity and harm.

The arrival of social media has further added to the prevailing restive tendencies in the society.

Social media has both positive and negative traits. The positive side ought to stand as an informed avenue for the people since we are in the age of knowledge economy where people can learn new things and ideas. Social media is an ICT-based platform where people can exchange ideas, innovations, and other forms of exchanges that will assist the society positively. However, the trend now is that the negative aspect of social media has engulfed the society through the use of pornography and other vices, hate speech, and disrespect for the societal norms and values.

The trend of hate speech on social media has led to violence in one part of the country or the other. The audience that receive messages must have Media Intelligence Literacy (MIL). It is not every message that must be acted upon without verifying the veracity of the information. There are messages that are totally false and must not be spread. False messages could be on the platform of ethnicity, politics, religion and other aspects. For instance, there was a report in October concerning the Ibos attacking the Hausas in South East; this led to reprisal attacks in Jos Plateau State. Some of the information are either baseless or lack facts. Yet, the people at the other side did not bother to verify it; hence, it led to violence and mayhem. This type of cause is relatively new and, if not nipped in the bud, it will further widen the fragile relationship among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Unemployment

Lack of gainful employment has made youth to be psychologically traumatised. Coleman (1996) observed that psychological variables and deprivation is the basic product of conflict and restiveness of any kind. He further argued that the more widespread and intense deprivation is among members of a population, the greater is the magnitude of violence and crime in one form or the other. Chukwuemeka (2008) on his part observed that composite unemployment in Nigeria increased from 3.8% in 2006 to 4.2% in the first half of 2011. He further stated that structural unemployment results in talents not being used where they are available; hence, an idle mind is definitely the devil's workshop. The training they received in school must be used in one way or the other. Some would have used it positively if there had been an enabling

environment to do so, but in the absence of that the youth have engaged in restiveness. Analytically, one can argue that the unequal socio-economic development of the various ethnic groups and geo-political zones in Nigeria has led to inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts. For instance, Chukwuemeka, Anazodo and Nzewi (2011) found that dissatisfaction of the people of South-South especially the youths on the level of attention given to development of their region and the damage to their ecology by oil spillage are the major causes of the alarming rate of youth restiveness.

Again, lack of employment has multiplier effects on the society. For instance, the issue of kidnapping is a function of unemployment. Organized crime cannot be carried out by a mediocre; it is carried out by intelligent people in the society. It takes calculation and intelligence to successfully carry out kidnapping and abduction without being traced or tracked by the security agencies.

Poverty

Unemployment has given birth to poverty. One of the indices of youth restiveness is poverty. Poverty is a state of inability to live and feed properly as a result of lack. This has also culminated in mental poverty where lack and want have suddenly become psychological especially after having gone to school without getting a commensurate job. At this level, any minor thing can trigger anger and violence. Of course, there are poor environments where people are living in peace with less criminality but when an environment is occupied by the unemployed educated, crime and violence are inevitable. This means employment is a key factor to crime and criminality.

Human trafficking and prostitution

Lack of employment among young women has contributed to increasing feminization poverty. According to Somaya (2011), unemployment has also encouraged prostitution as a means of survival in several towns and cities and 'trafficking in women and girls' across international borders to engage in prostitution. Girls trafficked from Nigeria come mainly from Niger Delta states such as Edo State, Delta, Imo and other states in the Southern part of Nigeria (Gilbert, 2010; Alabi & Alabi, 2012). This

has led to young girls migrating from Africa to Europe en route Libya that led to many of them being sold into slavery in Libya; others died on the high sea as a result of turbulence while some were turned to sex machines.

Sometimes, parents or relatives sell these young women and girls to traffickers; they are then trapped within an illegal migration environment where they are exposed to many forms of abuse including bonded labour and forced prostitution. The sex industry is a particular target for traffickers as it offers great profits at the expense of trafficked migrant women. Victims of trafficking are mainly young women between the ages of 17-20 years with some as young as 14 years (Ekwu, 2008). Many of them are exposed to many venerable diseases including HIV/AIDS. Poverty, unemployment and lack of economic prospects, the absence of regular migration opportunities, parental and peer pressures, and misconceptions concerning job prospects in North American and European countries are among the principal factors giving a push to massive migration of educated as well as educationally and socially disadvantaged youth, including young women, from Nigeria (Alabi & Alanana, 2012; Vremudia, 2012). Also, poverty and economic hardship has led to people selling their children for money (Baby Factories and sales) and the price is predicated on the sex of the child. This has been reported frequently in the media in Nigeria.

Drug abuse

Another cause of youth restiveness in the society is the high use of drug abuse. Most times, youth restiveness is carried out under the influence of drug abuse. There are two schools of thoughts regarding drug abuse in this context, first is the frustration aggression theory while the other is likened to poverty. Many of the youth that engage in drug abuse do so because of frustration with the hope that drug abuse will wipe away their sorrow and the other is still that they do not have enough money to buy mild alcohol, so the little they have is spent on hard drugs that will last longer in them. If these young people are gainfully employed, they would not have engaged in drug usage and the society would have been with less criminality.

Lack of good governance

Good governance is sacrosanct to society's growth and development. The Government occupies a strategic place in the development of people and society. Developing countries largely depend on the activities of government for people to survive adequately by creating an enabling environment for development. Lack of good government has distorted development beyond the imagination of the people. It has led to poor infrastructural development, corruption, unequal distribution of the available resources, disintegration, ethnicity and other vices. According to World Bank Report (1992), the main characteristics of bad governance include: failure to properly distinguish between what is public and what is private, leading to private appropriation of otherwise public resources; inability to establish a predictable framework for law and government behaviour in a manner conducive to development, or arbitrariness in the application of laws and rules; excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirement and so forth which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking; priorities that are inconsistent with development, thereby resulting in misallocation of national resources; and exceedingly narrow base for, or non-transparent, decision making. All these have been witnessed in Nigeria for decades and this has compounded the issue of youth restiveness in Nigeria. Again, the place of youth development has been neglected and this has forced youth to indulge in restive activities such as electoral violence, 'yahoo yahoo' syndrome, kidnapping, armed robbery, unnecessary migration for white collar jobs, baby factories and markets among others. These and more are the features of most administrations in Nigeria. Scholars observe that successive administrations in Nigeria have not allocated much to the need of youth, and, worse still, the meagre allocation is often diverted by government officials to their private accounts and projects.

Nexus between social media and youth restiveness

Information is very crucial to the nature of violence in every society. There is information that can divide the society and there is information that can further unite the society. Unguided statement online can fuel violence especially if it is laden with

misinformation, and undermine religion, ethnicity, and other forms of belief system.

Strategies to mitigate crimes and youth restiveness in Nigeria***Legal framework and Enforcement***

The cybercrime Act 2015 regulating social media and other internet activities should be enforced by the regulatory agencies such as NITDA, National Communication Commission (NCC) and other related agencies saddled with the responsibility of monitoring and enforcing the various aspects of laws regulating social media and hate speeches which are spread by social media. Hence, there is need to enforce the necessary provisions to halt the menace of hate speeches in the society.

Enabling environment

It is the duty of government to create an enabling environment for foreign investors to come in. Enabling environment include security, power, friendly foreign exchange and others. Government do not create jobs in other climes but private sector does. Investors cannot invest in an atmosphere of insecurity and rancour. Sometimes, the issue of power can be improvised by the investors but insecurity cannot be played with. If the environment is made friendly for investors to come in, unemployment rate would be reduced to the barest minimum. Government should as a matter of urgency address the issue of kidnapping, armed robbery, militancy, insurgency and other crimes. It is on this platform that foreign investors can be attracted to the country.

Nepotism

Nepotism is taking root in Nigeria polity. Appointments to various offices should be based on merit and not ethnic cleavages, religious affiliation and quota system. This is breeding mediocrity in the system. Appointments should be based on merit and not political party affiliation or geo-political arrangement. This undermines effectiveness and productivity. Appointing people into political offices on the basis of religion or ethnicity has caused more damage to the system than good. Addressing this will reduce youth restiveness in the society.

Restorative Justice System

The concept of restorative justice is all encompassing depending on the concept to be adopted per time. Every offender can be punished so as to serve as a deterrent to others. However, there are situations where the offenders and the victims can be brought together to discuss the modality if the offender can be forgiven (mercy and forgiveness) or not. This can be done in a participatory manner where all the actors are involved in the modality.

Conclusion

In any nation where youth are neglected, such a nation is sitting on a time bomb waiting to explode. No nation can achieve growth or any form of stability that will enhance socio-economic development in an atmosphere of chronic youth unemployment. The role of Nigerian government must include the formulation of policies and laws that could help improve the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens and wealth creation. There is a need to increase jobs through small enterprises and poverty alleviation schemes. Economic growth in Nigeria is not the only solution to curb unemployment as the official statistics illustrates that previous unemployment did not decline economic growth. Other solutions such as the provision of right skills to youth should be given importance. If factors that are responsible for youth unemployment in Nigeria are addressed, youths' criminality would be reduced to the barest minimum.

Recommendations

The study recommends that strong legal framework and enforcement should be put in place to curb the menace of the social media. Even though democracy connotes freedom, it must be managed properly in order to accommodate the weaknesses of social media in the society and take advantage of the positive aspect of social media.

Government should create an enabling environment to encourage and train youth in various vocational skills and give incentives for start-up entrepreneurs in order to shun restiveness among the youth.

Government and non-state actors should work together to give attention to the needs and yearnings

of youth so as to reduce tendencies for violence and other forms of illicit behaviour among the youth.

The number of youth that have indulged in substance abuse is on the increase in Nigeria partly due to lack of employment or economic hardship, government needs to establish rehabilitation centres to cater for the needs of the youth that have engaged in such abuse. This is particularly important because most of these people are used to foment trouble during electioneering campaign; they indulge in kidnapping, robbery among others under the influence of substance. When this is done it would reduce the extent of damage to the community and society at large.

Parents, religious leaders and cultural leaders should all work together at various level to ensure children and youth are oriented on the negative side of restiveness and inculcate the positive values into them in order to restiveness among the youth.

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