

## DANGEROUS USE AND ABUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY NIGERIAN YOUTHS: THE WAY OUT

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### Abstract

*The use of social media has become popular in the world due to their efficacy in disseminating information without delay. The speed of information dissemination gives them an edge over other media platforms. This has made them popular among youths and adults and the more reason they enjoy high patronage globally. However, the value and relevance of social media in this technological age seems gradually being eroded through dangerous use and abuse by the youths and this has undoubtedly become a serious source of worry to the larger society. This paper therefore examined advantages of social media, their abuse by the Nigerian youths and dangerous ways by which the youths have been using social media to affect themselves negatively. The paper also explained the effects the dangerous use and abuse can have on the youths and the society. Suggestions on how to use social media profitably, ensure their relevance and bring the youths excesses under control were highlighted.*

**Keywords:** Dangerous use, abuse, effects, social media, Nigerian, youths.

### Introduction

The social media is a fast means of sending, receiving or broadcasting information through phones, laptops or other computer devices. Wikipedia (2016) describes social media as computer-mediated tools that allow people, companies and other organisations to create, share or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. They are referred to as web2.0 internet-based applications. According to Wikipedia (2016), user-generated content such as text, digital photo or digital video posts are the lifeblood of the social media organism. Users create their own profiles for the website or application which is designed and maintained by the social media organisation.

Mobile social media refers to the use of social media on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. This is a group of mobile marketing applications that allow creation and exchange of user-generated content. Its advantage over other media includes mobile use, liveliness and business potential management. Kietzmnn, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2016) present a framework that defines social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. Social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups. They allow networked individuals to create, edit and manage content in collaboration with other networked individuals in order to expand knowledge.

In this age of technology, social media have increasingly become popular among youths and adults due to their efficiency in spreading information without delay. The speed of information dissemination gives them an edge over

other media platforms. They are also cost effective when compared with other media platforms such as radio, newspapers and television that cost a lot to send information through them. Every user of any of the social media platforms is aware that with data subscription, it is not necessary to have credit on phone to converse with or contact people on social media. Connecting people on social media is also cheaper compared to using prepaid credit card. Networking on social media is easy for everyone that possesses android phone.

Most popular sites of social media networks according to "Leading global social networks 2016 Statistics" are Facebook, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, QQ, WeChat, QZone, Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, Baidu Tieba, Skype, Viber, Sina Weibo, Line and Snapchat. Others that are not so popular are LinkedIn, Youtube, Telegram etc. The leading social networks based on number of global active users' accounts as at April 2016 are shown below:

S/N	Social Media Sites	Number of Users
1	Facebook	1,650,000,000
2	WhatsApp	1,000,000,000
3	Facebook Messenger	900,000,000
4	QQ	853,000,000
5	WeChat	706,000,000
6	QZone	653,000,000
7	Tumblr	555,000,000
8	Instagram	400,000,000
9	Twitter	320,000,000
10	Baidu Tieba	300,000,000
11	Skype	300,000,000
12	Viber	280,000,000
13	Sina Weibo	222,000,000
14	Line	215,000,000
15	Snapchat	200,000,000

**Source:** Statista (2016): Leading Global Social Networks 2016 Statistics

### **Advantages of Social Media**

Social media platforms enjoy high patronage globally due to the advantages derivable from them which include:

- They are popularly and commonly used as means of chatting, pinging, sending/receiving text messages, sending/receiving pictures/photos, video clips etc.
- They are also used as means of advertising products/goods such as shoes, phones, clothes, cars, furniture, health products etc.
- Social media are used to document memories, learn about and explore things, publicise people, advertise goods and form relationships.
- They allow political information (whether true or not) to spread quickly and easily among peer networks.
- The popularity of getting political news from social media is greatly increasing as the sites now encourage political involvement by uniting people of like-mind, reminding users of their civic responsibilities (such as voting in elections) and analysing users' political affiliation.
- They are used for campaigns to sell political ideas. It is also possible to employ social media to make (or mar) a political aspirant by supporters.
- Social media is an open forum that gives voice to those who have not had the opportunity to be heard. Users are at liberty to express or share ideas.
- Contributions can be made to issues of political, social and economic importance being discussed on social network anytime, any day and from anywhere in the world. With social media, distance and boundaries do not constitute problem.

Researches have shown that some of these social media platforms are good for educational activities. Twitter for example, is used by some to discuss health issues between patients and health professionals. Domizi (2013) utilised Twitter in a graduate seminar requiring students to post weekly tweets to extend classroom discussion. Students reportedly used Twitter to connect with content and other students and they found it to be useful professionally and personally. Students do create groups on whatsapp to serve as means of passing information that are related to their academic activities such as date, time, venue for lecture, test, tutorial classes, submission of assignments etc. LinkedIn is a site for professionals to connect, share ideas and information on whatever is relevant and of benefit to members' profession.

### **Dangerous Use of Social Media by the Youths**

The rate at which crimes are committed through social media in recent times is another source of worry. Dangerous use of social media is demonstrated by hacking users' online accounts.

Once the account is hacked and access is gained, the hacker can use the account to solicit for financial assistance from the owner's relatives asking such people to send money to get him/her out of one particular health problem or the other. Social media is also used by '419ers' and 'yahoo boys' to perpetrate evil. Pictures of beautiful ladies are posted on social media to attract gullible men that are interested in forming relationship with such ladies. The resultant effect usually is loss of huge amount of money to the fraudsters. Fictitious accounts are opened in some of the social media sites where fraudulent messages are sent to unsuspecting citizens canvassing hot business proposals. A lot of people have met untimely and gruesome death through strangers they got acquainted with on social media platforms. The unfortunate case of a lady called Cynthia who was lured to Lagos and murdered in a hotel by her Facebook friends is still very fresh in the memory of Nigerians (Radio Nigeria, 2014).

Many youths have met their untimely death while chatting or pinging on the road. They carelessly and unconsciously jump into highways and high speed vehicles while chatting with the earpiece tightly glued to their ears. The way the youths even stick the earpiece to their ears is another unruly behaviour. They do it in such a way that they are completely oblivious of what operates around them. Often, they need to be touched to know that someone is around or talking to them. It was also reported in a newspaper review on radio recently that an avoidable accident occurred on one of the Nigerian railway stations where some youths wearing earpiece were in a car driving and dancing to the tunes of sound system. They were so engrossed in the dancing that they could not hear the voice of people shouting and warning them of an approaching train until they were crushed to death beyond recognition.

### **Abuse of Social Media by the Youths**

With all the benefits derivable from social media, observations have shown that they have been abused by many Nigerians especially the youths who have taken advantage of them to disseminate false or wrong information that have left behind huge negative consequences. Circulation of false information on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and whatsapp on use of salt and kolanut to prevent the spread of ebola disease was a way of abusing the social media. Radio Nigeria (2014) reported that many people had already embraced the message out of fear which eventually turned out to be dangerous for them. The spread of false news on social media is so bad that such news is later found to be mere groundless rumour that should not be taken seriously by the people. The news on social media that cloths with particular colours should or should not be worn at a particular time also caused a lot of problem for some people. Even, the unsolicited prayers on Facebook to which people

are requested to type 'amen', refusal of which would attract a curse is uncalled for.

Observation also shows that youths indulge in chatting and pinging to the detriment of other beneficial activities that should ordinarily form integral part of their existence. For example, chatting and pinging are carried out in unauthorised places like churches, mosques and class/lecture rooms. In fact, the noise from phone ringing tones is enough to disrupt church service for example. Having observed that people like to chat and ping on phone especially when preaching is going on, it is now a common practice for churches to post captions like 'please switch off your handset/phone', 'remember you are in the presence of God' etc on walls to warn members.

Students unconsciously and inadvertently result to the use of chatting slangs and abbreviations in school work or examinations just the way they use them while chatting on phone. They use codes that cannot be decoded even by their lecturers to write examinations. This researcher has seen situations/cases where undergraduates write 'n' instead of 'and', 'ple' to mean 'people' and 'd' to represent 'the' in examinations. These are the simple ones that can be decoded easily. This is a very bad habit that must be discouraged among the youths.

It is worrisome that youths no longer attach importance to human dignity as they now post provocative and morally debasing pictures on sites for different purposes. Some youths have gone to the extent of posting nude pictures of ladies and girlfriends on social media for reasons best known to them. What reason could possibly be given by a sane person for posting a nude picture of another person on social media network for the whole world to see in this modern world? This is purely barbaric, degrading and a disgrace to humanity.

### **Effects of Abuse of Social Media on the Youths and the Society**

From the explanation given above, it is evident that dangerous use and abuse of the social media by the youths constitute negative effects. There are other negative effects which the social media can have on people (youths inclusive) and the more reason they should be used cautiously and carefully by everyone.

Abuse of social media by the youths has caused significant problems for some job seekers in employment market. Many of the youths make online comments with a lot of impunity and without remorse. They do not care about whoever is reading or the effect it can have on them. A survey by Elaine (2013) found that one out of ten people aged 16-34 have been rejected for a job because of online comments they made on social media websites. Another survey by Poppick (2014) showed that 93% of recruiters check candidates' social media postings.

Studies have shown that angry and emotional conversations can get users into dangerous situations and that social media can have negative effects on self-esteem as well as self-worth of people. Vogel, Rose, Okdie, Eckles and Franz. (2015) found that some people like to compare their own lives with their friends through such friend's posts. Often, what people post online through social media platforms are the positive aspects of their lives which make other people question why their own lives are not as exciting or fulfilling. This can lead to depression and other self-esteem issues. Chan (2014) while commenting on the effects of Facebook on users' emphatic social skills and life satisfaction believed that the more time people spend on Facebook, the less satisfied they feel about their lives.

Another negative effect of the dangerous use and abuse of social media is their being used as means of recruiting or initiating youths into secret societies or organisations. The extremists group and political movements have also began to see social media as a major organizing and recruiting tool. Mustapha (2014) claimed that ISIS has used social media to promote their cause through an online magazine in an attempt to recruit more fighters. Mustapha (2014) said further that al-Qaeda and the Taliban are increasingly using social media to raise funds and recruit persons and this has become increasingly effective. Two Canadian girls were claimed to have left their Montreal city in an effort to join ISIS in Syria after being recruited on social media. Youths' unnecessary overindulgence in social media, their dangerous use and abuse have inevitably become a serious source of worry to the larger society. If this is allowed to continue unabated, the social media will definitely lose its relevance and focus in the society.

### **The Way Out**

In order for social media to continue to be useful and relevant in the society and to check the excesses of the youths, the following measures can be taken by appropriate bodies:

- 1) The law enforcement agents, Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) and other regulatory agencies must quickly address the issue of false news usually circulated through the social media. They should try to expose the rumour peddlers and prosecute them to serve as deterrent for others.
- 2) Youths should stop the practice of chatting and pinging in places of worship, school and most especially on the road.
- 3) Churches and mosques should enforce regulations on the use of phone when service is going on
- 4) Lecturers should ban chatting and pinging while lectures are going on. They should also scrutinize the scripts of their students to sanction those who indulge in the use of chatting abbreviations in school work.

- 5) Nigerians should be more careful about information being dished out on social media sites to avoid becoming victims of social miscreants. They should critically verify information received before spreading or acting on them.
- 6) Parents should closely monitor and guide their children against dangerous use and abuse of social media.
- 7) Teachers should encourage the intellectual development of students by giving them regular take home assignments. This will make them get more engaged academically than wasting precious time on trivial activities on social media.
- 8) Youths should desist from using social media to affect their lives negatively, they should learn to make education their priority and use their time wisely.

### Conclusion

This paper examined dangerous use and abuse of the social media by Nigerian youths. It has dealt extensively with the meaning of social media and their numerous advantages. The paper also described how youths abuse and dangerously use social media to consciously destabilize them and probably allow social media to lose its relevance and focus in the society. The negative effects of dangerous use and abuse of social media on the youths and how to bring these excesses under control were discussed.

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