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Narcotising us through the Social Media in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper highlights how narcotization is a social consequence of the social media in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper examines the various ways social media narcotize us and the social consequences of social media narcotization. This is basically a literature review, using secondary data and theoretical assumptions to make deductions about how the social media narcotize people in Nigeria. The theory used was the social cognitive theory. This paper understands that social media have the propensity to lull the Nigerian users into passivity; give them the impression that just by commenting on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., they have solved Nigeria's social or political problems without taking any practical action.
Keywords: .Narcotization .Social media .Cognitive theory .Behaviour

Introduction

Social media have been called a "hot topic, and a new spirit" (Levy 2007, p. 120) and one of the most significant social and technological developments of the 21st century. Social media constitute of communications among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Halonen and Heinonen, 2008). They refer to 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, and they depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

According to Bennett, Owens, Pitt and Tucker (2009, p. 140), social media arc "channels that enable a collection of individuals linked together by a set of relations. They enable rapid exchange of knowledge, high levels of dialogue and collaborative communication through text, audio and video."

In terms of their origin, the first application of social media originally became popular among youth in the late 1990s; during the 2000s social media has started to draw attention in every part of the world. And in terms of their functions, McAfee (2006) stresses that the social media facilitates organizational communication and knowledge work which was previously not possible. Social media networks have created a phenomenon on the internet that has gained popularity over the last decade. "People use social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace to create and sustain relationships with others" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 37). These social media sites let those who use them create personal profiles, while connecting with other users of the sites. Users can upload photographs, post what they are doing at any given time, and send personal or public messages to whomever they choose.

The mass media - whether social or traditional - are important institutions in society. This is because, for society to exist, certain communication needs must be met. These needs existed from the cradle of human society long before the advent of modern mass

communication media-print and electronic (Dominick, 1993). The social or traditional media have significant basic function in society - to inform, educate and entertain.

Lasswell (1960) in Konkwo (2003) notes that the media perform the functions of surveillance of the environment, the transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next and correlation of parts of society in responding to the environment; and Wright (1959) in Konkwo (2003) adds the media's role in entertainment.

It does not, however, end there. The media may also have dysfunctions; consequences that are undesirable for the society or its members (Severin and Tankard, 2001). The dysfunctional aspects of the media include the corruption of moral sense of viewers, causing anxiety and panic, promotion of crime through television violence, promotion of gender inequality, sex and pornography, drugs and alcoholism and, most prominently, narcotisation of the audience. Narcotisation is a dysfunction of the mass media which means that the media -whether social or traditional - inundate people on a particular issue they become apathetic to it, substituting knowledge for action Consumption of media offerings may elicit only a superficial concern with the problems of society, while importance of real action is neglected, and this superficiality often cloaks mass apathy. The term narcotizing dysfunction was coined by Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton.

How does narcotisation happen? Because the individual has plenty information of issues and problems and they are knowledgeable about or discuss these issues on the media, mostly the social media, they believe they are helping in the solution. Society has confused knowing about an issue with doing something about it. The audience have forgotten that being informed about society's issues and being concerned about them is not a replacement for action. Even though there are increasing numbers of political messages, information, and advertisements, real social participation continues to decline. This paper highlights how narcotisation is a social consequence of the social media in Nigeria.

Methodologically, this is basically a literature review, using secondary data and theoretical assumptions to make deductions about how the social media narcotize users in Nigeria.

That means, the paper will look at:
i.   The extent of usage of social media in Nigeria.
ii.   Social media platform that is mostly used in Nigeria.
iii.   Various ways social media narcotize people.
iv.   The social consequences of social media.

Literature Review

Social Media Use in Nigeria
According to World Development Indicators (2013), social media users in Nigeria are officially put at 53.5% of the population, in 2012. This is higher than the national average for 2008, which was put at 23.9%. Projected, in 2016, over 80% of those who live in urban areas in Nigeria use social media. The most popular social media networks in Nigeria include Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry messaging, WhatsApp, 2go and Badoo. It is not inconceivable that the number of social media users have risen considerably in Nigeria between 2008 and now. A number of factors may account for this. One is the falling cost of internet access.

Especially with the introduction of internet facilities by mobile phone service providers, many phone users now browse.

Ojerinde (2003, p. 56) cites another reason for the increase in the usage of social media in Nigeria: "national examination bodies have forced many Nigerians to learn how to use the internet. This they did when they moved their operations including candidate registration and result collection online". Nearly all universities and polytechnics in

Nigeria have moved the admission processes and result checking processes online. All these account for the sharp rise in the number of internet users in Nigeria, and this has equally led to rise in the use of social media.

Akinfeleye (2013) observers that there is also a wind of change all over the world regarding the exodus from traditional media to the new media. The social media now prove to be alternative sources of information, aside the traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Nigeria has been blown by that wind of change.

There is also another factor: Nigerians are so receptive to change. Nigerians are quick to follow trend of events overseas. It was therefore not surprising when the growth of social media use in the western societies led to a spread in the social media use in Nigeria.

Narcotisation

According to Merton and Lazarsfeld (1948, 1957), narcotization means a situation where the media creates an apathy in which people are content to 'know' rather than 'do' something. In this context, media provide information about the events and the receivers demonstrate some superficial concern on media about the events while the importance of real action is neglected. The summary of the narcotization dysfunction is that the media lulls the audience to passivity.

Historically, research on understanding media effects have gone through three phases during the 20th century. From the 1920s to 1940s researchers believed the media had a powerful effect on their audience. This assumes the audience is passive and uncritical of the media's messages. This phase was characterized by the Hypodermic needle model or Bullet Theory. This theory was used to explain how World War II propaganda changed behavior - convincing men to join the service, housewives to change food habits, and improving the morale of new soldiers.

From the 1940s through the 1960s, researchers believed that people were more influenced by their friends and family than the media. The minimalist effects theory includes narcotizing dysfunction because the audience withdraws from real issues and becomes passive. In this phase instead of the media telling people what to think, it tells the audience what to think about (sets the agenda).

From the 1960s until now, researchers believe that the media can have both powerful and limited effects on society, depending on situational factors. The media may impact the development of attitudes, beliefs, and values, and it may be more influential on some personalities than others.

Theoretical Support

Social Cognitive Theory

The social-cognitive theory is a theoretical perspective in which learning by observing others is the focus of study. Social-cognitive theory is grounded by several basic assumptions. But the assumption that mostly concerns this paper is the second one which says that learning is an internal process that may or may not lead to behaviour. Learning may not occur immediately. The observer could process the new behaviour, but his/her learning may not be affected until a later point or never at all. We learn mostly by observation of our models, whether live models or symbolic models. The first one refers to individuals we can observe live; whereas the second one refers to real or fictional characters we observe and sometimes interact with on the media.

As it is relevant in this paper, the social cognitive learning theory is strongly of the opinion that we have the proclivity to observe and even consume offerings on the traditional and social media and the said observation and participation is an internal process that may or may not lead to behaviour; it only lulls the observer or participant to become passive. In other words, it mostly narcotises the participant.

Discussion of Findings

Our discussion of findings centers on the four major objectives of this paper: to examine the extent of usage of social media in Nigeria; understand the social-media platform that is mostly used in Nigeria; know the various ways social media narcotize us and examine the social consequences of social media narcotization.

The Extent of Social Media Usage in Nigeria

From the account of the World Development Indicators (2013), more than half of Nigerians use the social media. Oka (2015) in a study of social media use by students in the South-South found that 80% of the students use the social media, as has been observed earlier, it is not inconceivable that the number of social media users have risen considerably in Nigeria in the last couple years. It is without saying that the social media is vastly used in Nigeria.

Indications from the World Development Indicators (2013) and Oka (2015) also reveal that the most popular social media networks in Nigeria include Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry messaging, WhatsApp, 2go and Badoo. A number of factors which range from the falling cost of internet access; introduction of internet facilities by mobile phone service providers; the global wind of change regarding the exodus from traditional media to the new media; and Nigerians[1] receptiveness to change have led to a spread in the social media use in Nigeria. In terms of how the social media narcotize us in Nigeria, with the heavy dosage of negative news, including those of murders, rapes, and robberies on the social media platforms in Nigeria, it will over a period make media users immune to the shock of such deviant action by wrongdoers. The way terrorism and terrorist attacks are hugely discussed in the social media in Nigeria, Nigerian social media users are benumbed and insensitive in the long run to such aberrations.

Again, there are avalanche of reactions to social, cultural and political events in Nigeria on the social media. The willingness of Nigerians to react to those events inundates them on those issues, they become apathetic to them, substituting knowledge for action. Discussions on socio-political issues in Nigeria on the social media may elicit only a superficial concern with the problems of the Nigerian society, while importance of real action is neglected, and this superficiality often cloaks mass apathy. Discussions on socio-political issues in Nigeria have made Nigerians politically apathetic and inert. With the advent of social media, comes the reduction in number of protests on the Nigerian streets. The social media users believe that just discussing those issues and hurling insults at leaders are enough and capable of solving the problems of Nigeria.

These individuals are assailed with information of issues and problems and they are knowledgeable about or discuss these issues, they believe they are helping in the solution. Society has confused knowing about an issue with doing something about it. Society's conscience is clear as they think they have done something to remediate the issue. However, being informed and concerned is not a replacement for action.

Even though there are increasing numbers of political messages, information, and advertisements, political participation continues to decline. People pay close attention to the media, but there is an overexposure of messages that can get confusing and contradictory so people don't get involved in the political process.

The social media have created an apathy in which people are content to 'know' rather than 'do' something. In this context, media provides information about the events and the receivers demonstrate some superficial concern on media about the events while the importance of real action is neglected. Consequently, the receivers are drugged into the inactivity like they are under the influence of narcotics. One of the main assumptions of this approach is that, increasing dosages of mass communications sometimes 'unpredictably' transform the energies of the receivers from 'active participation' into 'passive knowledge'.

It is exactly as Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld state: Exposure to this flood of information may serve to narcotize rather than to energize the average reader or listener. An increasing mead of time is devoted to reading and listening, a decreasing share is available for organized action. The individual reads accounts of issues and problems and may even discuss alternative lines of action. But this rather intellectualized, rather remote connection with organized social action is not activated. The interested and informed citizen can congratulate himself on his lofty state of interest and information and neglect to see that he has abstained from decision and action.... He comes to mistake knowing about problems of the day for doing something about them. His social conscience remains spotlessly clean. He is concerned. He is informed. And he has all sorts of ideas as to what should be done. But, after he has gotten through his dinner and after he has listened to his favored radio programs and after he has read his second newspaper of the day, it is really time for bed (1957, p. 464). This aptly describes the Nigerian situation. In Nigeria and the rest of the work, the social problem or consequence of the social media is that they disseminate huge amount of information to the individuals and information overconsumption may lead to information obesity (Esitti, 2015). Social media gives individuals the opportunity to express their ideas, feelings and dissatisfactions on the cyberspace. In this case, (if we apply the narcotising dysfunction approach to social media) expressing ideas, feelings and dissatisfactions on the cyberspace may cause the users to feel that they have done all the best they could do. More clearly, expressing feeling via sending e-mails, tweets or posts could serve to self-satisfaction.

What is the problem with social media and how do they narcotize us: knowing, concerning and expressing feelings on the cyberspace do not always gel followed by offline participation and physical actions. People are stronger when they are physically on the streets and participating in the decision making processes such as voting. In this context, posting some information, sharing images, commenting on Facebook or retweeting a post on Twitter, in short showing some seeming concern, as Lazarsfeld and Merton state, become the way of clearing people's conscience.

On social media, the users participate in the political and social arguments; they demonstrate their ideas, feelings and displeasure about issues or events but all from the safety of their couches. In short, online activism may cause apathy for people to get physically involved in the political and social actions and this may also cause people to act like 'keyboard warriors' or 'remote intellectuals.'

Apart from the issue of narcotisation as a social consequence of the social media in Nigeria, there are other social consequences of the social media that should be briefly highlighted: Backlash is one of them: When potentially offensive content is posted online, the amount of feedback can be excessive and is often brutal. This is particularly true with highly opinionated subjects like politics and religion. Also, the use of social networks may expose individuals to other forms of harassment or even inappropriate contact. More so, social media is a time waster. Social networking invites major corporations to invade your privacy and sell your personal information. Social media are making us less social and more aggressive. Comments on social media sites are often more blunt than the statements would be if they were made face-to-face.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted the negative sides of social media in terms of their propensity to lull the users into passivity; give them the impression that just by commenting on Facebook, twitter, Instagram, etc., they have solved social or political problems without taking any practical action. Social media creates apathy among people to take real and physical action. These media provide information about the events and the receivers demonstrate some superficial concern while importance of real action is neglected. Consequently, the receivers are drugged into the inactivity like they are under the influence of narcotic. The main social consequence is that the increasing social media

usage causes exposure of information overconsumption to its users. And showing some superficial concern on social media does not take the place of real action. How then do we solve this narcotisation problem? That is a suggestion for further review.

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