

Social Vices, Hate Speech and Cyberbullying in Nigeria: Impacts on Nigerian Youths

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Abstract

As electronic technology continues to penetrate all aspects of human lives and transforms the social order, it has impacted on human beings significantly. Positively, internet facility has made human communication a lot easier. Unfortunately, the use of internet facility has been abused and has facilitated the rise of social vices such as hate speech and cyberbullying on humanity, especially the youths. For the purpose of this paper, we focused more on the negative effects of internet facility as an instrument for social vices to humanity, with special attention to the Nigerian youths. The data for this study is from secondary source which consists of observations by different authors in different spheres of life. We observed that cyberbullying and hate speech are inter-related as both are social vices which involve harassments and hate utterances which can trigger war. Hence, same remedy may be applicable to fight against both. To the best of our knowledge, there were no legal laws on hate speech. Therefore, we recommend that the government and all concerned authorities should enforce internet security to monitor, as well as pass a bill that will take care of haters, bring to book and penalize cyber offenders. Parents/guardians should take responsibilities towards checkmating their children's activities both online and offline. Awareness should be created in schools, churches, mosques and in communities to educate people on what constitutes hate speech. In conclusion, awareness should be created on the consequences of hate speech and cyberbullying to the future of the youths and the society.

Keywords: *Social vices, Cyberbullying, Hate Speech, Internet, Nigerian Youths.*

Introduction

The use of internet facilities in recent times has transformed our society in different and interesting ways as well as facilitates the rapid flow of

information in the way we communicate and interact with one another. The emergence of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria in 2020, brought to the fur, the importance of ICTs and

the Internet and the vital role it is playing in our lives. When the whole world was forced to sit at home as well as work from the home. All businesses, offices, teaching and learning etc. were carried out through electronic mediums. As electronic technology continues to penetrate all aspects of human lives and transform the social order, it has impacted on human beings significantly, both positively and negatively. Positively, internet facility has made human communication a lot easier, people can interact and communicate from their comfort zones (living rooms, work places, business areas etc.) and get feedbacks immediately. In fact, you can do all manner of business transactions via internet. All you need is to have a phone and internet access which is relatively at a very cheap cost. Unfortunately, the use of internet facility has been abused and has created some negative effects on humanity. Most of the inhuman behaviours our youths get into today is being perpetuated through the use of internet and electronic technology. Humanity should embrace the positive values of the electronic technology and ignore the negative. Hence for the purpose of this paper, we will focus more on the negative effects of internet facility to humanity, with special attention to the Nigerian youths.

Social Vices

According to (Kanipus et al, 2004), social vices are bad traits, unhealthy and negative behaviors that are against

the morality of a society and frowned at by members of the society. They are actions that do not conform to the ethical values of a people. They violate societal norms and values. According to Elujekwute (2019), social vices are acts of indiscipline and they are those acts and conditions that violate the societal norms and values. They are habits or behaviors of immoral activities such as cultism, robbery, ritual killing, kidnapping, smoking, drug peddling, hate speech, cyberbullying etc. The lack of discipline which interfere with the teaching and learning process, manifest itself in various ways including bullying, vandalism, alcoholic and abuse, inability or unwillingness to do home works.

Social vices affect the society as a whole and individual in particular. The mental, physical, academic, moral aspects of an individual are negatively affected. Students divert their time to these vices instead of being serious with academic works. There wastage of time leads to poor academic performance. The deadly diseases that can lead to the termination of lives and career can be contacted. Examples of social vices include robbery, thuggery, rape, kidnapping, prostitution, cultism, indecent dress, pre-marital sexual activities, gambling, hate speech, cyberbullying, drug abuse etc. and they are common among Nigerian youths. Most youths focus their time to these negativities instead of being serious with their personal lives and engage in more meaningful

activities/businesses. Just a casual look at Nigerian universities these days, will suffice to realize that so many social vices have become the order of the day. Cultism, bullying, indecent dressing etc. have become the order of the day. These vices have no developmental impact on the nation. Instead, the nation spends a huge amount of money on security systems to protect the citizen's lives and properties. Most of the time, the country lacks strong security network and personnel to track and handle issues/crimes related to the social ills. In Nigeria, exposure of children to ICTs has been instrumental to the raising wave of social vices and this problem is a major issue of concern in the country, where complex vices are alien to its culture (Omonijo *et al.*, 2012). It is against this background that, the researcher examined the impacts of social vices (hate speech and cyberbullying) among Nigerian youths.

Some Causes of Social Vices

i. Exposure to ICTs

Today, most people that indulge in social vices in the society suffer from high level of illiteracy, unemployment, abject poverty, prevalence of general indiscipline at all levels of the society etc. (Omonijo *et al.*, 2012). It is worth knowing that adults are also victims of social vices, but our concentration is more on the youths. Continuing, (Omonijo *et al.* 2012) observed that exposure of children to ICTs has been

instrumental to the raising wave of social vices such as examination misconduct, hate speech, criminal behaviours, etc.

ii. Lack of Parental Care

More so, lack of proper parental care and checks in many homes in Nigeria has contributed immensely as parents devote little or no time towards the training of their children. In fact, this is one of the major causes of social vices among the youths, the quest of parents to engage in white collar jobs, businesses and other economic activities (Nwosu, 2009). The consequence/s of this shortcoming on the part of parents is raising of children without bearing or proper home training and societal values. When parents ignore their responsibilities, training their children becomes difficult. When the family or home which is the bedrock of a larger society fail in their duties as the first point of learning, the children tend to derail from the correct values. Train up a child in the way he will grow and never depart from it. The get rich syndrome by most parents has left the children in the hands of complete strangers in the name of nanny or house helps. Hence, the children are vulnerable to all sorts of vices. They copy from those around them which most times are the bad habits. Some children fall back to watching all manner of videos on the television and computer via the use of internet (Aggarwal, 2010). Better still, now that mobile devices are rampant in our

society. In fact, some parents tend to keep their children away from disturbing them by providing electronic gadgets without putting a check on what their children watch. All these have done more harm than good to our children in particular and the society in general.

iii. Peer Pressure

Peer groups/pressure cannot be left out in the discussion of social vices. In fact, it is also one of the major causes of social vices. Most times, our youths tend to imitate or emulate or copy from their peers. Especially, when they lack love and care from the home. They seek succor among their peers. The peers are made up of people from different background. They learn to do certain things together. They learn how to consume drugs so as to be high and forget their loneliness, they engage in all manner of ills like yahoo-yahoo stuff, gambling, kidnapping, thuggery etc. most of these vices are done through the electronic technology (internet). Peer group causes more harm than good in the society.

Types of Social Vices

There are some social vices that are more common in our society Nigeria such as **Drug Abuse** which refers to the taking of drugs without the prescription of competent medical practitioners. Also, taking of substances that affect physical, social and psychological well-being of those concerned is termed drug abuse. **Cultism** is a ritual practice by a group

of people whose membership as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike. The youths indulge in cultism mostly for protection and identification. **Rape**- According to (Abubakar, 2011), rape is a forced sexual intercourse, including vaginal, anal, or oral penetration. Penetration may be by a body part or an object. **Indecent Dress** is like a cankerworm that have eaten deep into our youths especially the female folks. In fact, it has become part of the system as there is no rule or control over how people dress these days.

The major types of social vices discussed in this paper are **hate speech** and **cyberbullying** which is our main concern in this paper.

a) Hate Speech

Hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Usually, such speeches rob others of their dignity. (Nockleby, 2000) defines hate speech as that speech which attacks a person or group on the basis of attributes such as race, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability or gender. (Enahoro, 2017) sees hate speech as polluted statements, especially by Nigerians, attacking each other on the basis of ethnicity or religion. On the other hand, (Nadim *et al.* 2016) describe hate speech as any persecuting, degrading or

discriminating speech on ground of the recipient's minority group identity and that such speech that will be regarded as hate speech must be conveyed publicly or in the presence of others and be directed at a certain group or on individuals' assumed group identity. These researchers based their research on the nature and extent of hate speech and their findings show that ethnicity and sexual orientation constitute the comment ground for hate speech. According to (Cohen-Almagor, 2018), hate speech is defined as a bias-motivated, hostile, malicious speech aimed at a person or a group of people because of some of their actual or perceived innate characteristics. Hate speech expresses discriminatory, intimidating, disapproving, antagonistic and/or prejudicial attitudes toward these characteristics, which include sex, race, religion, ethnicity, colour, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation. Hate speech is intended to injure, dehumanize, harass, debase, degrade, and/or victimize the targeted groups, and to foment insensitivity and brutality towards them. The aim of the hater is to cause pain or harm on the victim.

Although many people in Nigeria know what constitutes hate speech, they are ignorant of the legal implication and consequence. Hence, it is pertinent for proper awareness to be carried out so that no offender will claim ignorant when caught. Also, internet owners should create monitoring mechanism that will

identify hate speech and delete such on their system.

According to (Ihebuzor, 2012), the influence of young Nigerians online by the so called influencers otherwise known as the 'overlords' who can influence the opinions and actions of their numerous followers on topical issues, has turned the social media into a very effective medium of hate speech, and the ability of users to remain anonymous makes it even more difficult to punish offenders.

Hate speech with respect to the internet is particularly troublesome because of the speaker's ability to immediately disseminate the speech to numerous recipients all over the world sometimes within a very short time. In Nigeria today, despite the benefits that came with social media on one hand, on the other hand it is also promoting disunity, igniting crisis and hatred among members of the society. (Luab, 2019), countering hate speech begins by a realization that while freedom of expression is a fundamental right, the emergence of social media has created multiple platforms for the production and dissemination of hate speeches.

According to (Onanuga, 2018), some social media platforms such as Facebook, Google and Twitter in 2016, jointly took up the obligation to remove illegal/hate speech posted on their services within 24 hours. This portrays the extent of concern the world has for hate communication. Usually, the hate speech users use derogatory adjectives to condemn the activities of their targets.

b) Cyberbullying

For clearer understanding of cyberbullying, we looked at what bullying is. According to (UNESCO, 2019), bullying is characterized as an “aggressive behaviour that involves unwanted, negative actions, which is repeated over time, and an imbalance of power or strength between the perpetrator or perpetrators and the victim. Its main aim is to hurt someone physically, psychologically or emotionally via physical assault, posting rumors about an individual, threatening message with someone’s private pictures, hate speeches, disclosing someone’s confidential information online, teasing, making threats, name calling etc. The harassment can have wide-reaching effects on the victim, as the content used to harass the victim can be assessed and shared easily among many people and often remains accessible. Hence, in our secondary schools and universities today, bullying has become a big concern. Senior students tend to harass junior students physically or otherwise. Cultists tend to bully fellow students and this is causing a lot of havoc in our society. To curb this, some schools have placed a ban on bullying. Once caught bullying, the result is immediate suspension of the student from school. Sometimes, the effect of bullying is life threatening. For instance, the case of the young Deeper life student by name Don Davis which went viral in November, 2020 over an alleged assaults he allegedly suffered

in the hands of some senior students of the school, who sexually assaulted him and starved him and threatened to kill him if he ever report to the school authorities. The victim at a point considered suicide. Although at the end, the perpetrators were adequately punished according to the law.

Cyberbullying on the other hand, is defined as the use of computer, cellphone, and other electronic devices to intimidate, threaten or humiliate another internet user, (Backe et al, 2018). Cyberbullying is a global issue as it affects people of different cultures and walks of life, (Smith, 2020). Cyberbullying is a form of bullying or harassment which is perpetuated via electronic means with the intention of harming the victims. Sometimes, the term “cyberbullying” is used interchangeably with “cyber harassment”. Nevertheless, cyberbullying has its distinct features and defining properties. Cyberbullying resembles hate speech in several important respects. Both involves dehumanizing of their victims. While cyberbullying involves the use of internet facility since it is usually carried out online, hate speech can be carried out online or off line.

In the recent past, we have witnessed the remarkable development of the Information Communication Technology (ICT), and the popularity of social media platforms in particular. Some persons grab the convenience and freedom of online communication, while some are

haunted by cyberbullying and hate speech. Like cyberbullying, hate speech is a global issue. Both forms of expression intend to harm the victims. Hence, there is urgent need to promote self awareness of the adverse consequences of bullying and bigotry. Hate speech and cyberbullying can actually lead to self-withdrawal, violence and death. Indeed, some instances of cyberbullying and hate speech had led to violent actions and hate crimes (Cohen-Almagor, 2016). This act is usually carried out using electronic technology that facilitates easy and quick dissemination of information to a large number of people at the same time.

Some forms of hate speech and cyberbullying

It is pertinent to note that for speech to qualify as hate speech, it must have occurred in the public, (Mrabure, 2016). So also, cyberbullying involves the use of internet facility and connecting the public. Instances of hate speech and cyberbullying is shown below:

- i. the recent trending news online tagging the Labour Party presidential candidate Mr. Peter Obi as a ‘stingy man’ (a.k.a aka gum) and other negative utterances by a popular religious pastor, Fr. Mbaka, (Premium Times, 2022). This issue if not properly harnessed by the churches’ authority could get to something more dramatic. The

implication here portrays Mr. Obi as a wrong candidate for a presidential position just because the hater is not comfortable with the victims’ inability to donate money to his ministry, hence, he tagged him ‘stingy’. This utterance coming from a respectable Pastor has gone viral through electronic media and the general public was meant to see Mr. Peter Obi as a wrong candidate for presidency as a stingy man.

- ii. Nnamdi Azikiwe’s policy was to corrode the self-respect of the Yoruba people as a group to build up the Igbos as a master race- Chief Obafemi Awolowo.
- iii. Most times, hate speech is being carried out by the unemployed youths who usually vent their frustration and anger against anyone or group of people who they feel are responsible for their misery. Take for instance, the divisive politics of Nigeria in 2015, where social media was used to portray the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan as ‘clueless’, ‘corrupt’ and an ‘ineffectual buffoon’. The implication of this is to place Goodluck Jonathan on a bad light before the youths. These youths were made to understand that anyone who voted Jonathan was an enemy of success. Also, some tweets on tweeter reflects hate. Ethnic hate is not good for any nation. For instance, Ayo

entrepreneurs cannot be overemphasized.

As stated earlier, the country is currently witnessing a resurgence of vile ethnic speech, with one ethnic pitched against the other (Egbunike et al, 2017). Awareness should be created for the Nigerian youth to know that Politicians will always use them as pawn to achieve their selfish ambition. This will enable them to be at alert when these selfish and self-centered politicians come to buy their consciences away. According to Aliyu Sabi Abdullahi, on (Vanguard News Nigeria, November 20, 2019), Nigeria may experience a severe crisis with its attendant effect unless the excesses of hate speech is nipped in the bud through legislation by the National Assembly. He further warned that if nothing is done by Nigerians to resist the manipulative tendencies of such groups or persons, who hide under the umbrella of freedom of speech, the country would record more victims of hate speech from gruesome killings associated with religious intolerance and ethnic bigotry.

Another major issue of cyberbullying is that some perpetrators take advantage of the anonymity option created by the internet to claim anonymous while bullying. Hence, it becomes difficult to trace and punish them. It is pertinent that the internet owners should also disable such anonymity option in the internet and facilitate means of catching perpetrators and bringing them to book.

To sum up, cyberbullying may exist in various forms, using hate speech or cyber harassment as common forms. Hate speech and cyberbullying are vile and should be resisted by all people of goodwill. This is because the effects of these expressions, whether online or offline, have the tendencies to result into confrontations or war. People who wish to sow the seed of discord can capitalize on such hate speech. Nigerian youths who have been unemployed can be easily influenced into spreading hate, which can heat up the political atmosphere.

Effects of hate speech and cyberbullying

- ***Mental illness:*** The implications of hate speech and cyberbullying can be harmful and deadly. In some of the reported cases, victims have resorted to self-withdrawal or even committed suicide as a result of fear or shame.
- ***Drug and alcohol abuse:*** Most times, people indulge in drugs and alcohol simply to manage their sorrows, depression etc. Victims of hate speech and cyberbullying are usually victims of drugs and alcohol abuse. Practically, when someone is being bullied in the family or by his peers, there is every tendency that the person will withdraw from all activities to avoid more bullying. He or she will be lonely and frustrated. The next thing is

to consider suicide since life seems lonely. Also, looking at cases of cyberbullying at school, an intelligent child who is a victim of bully may have problems attending classes hence his academic grades will drop. And if not handled on time, the victim might lose focus and become useless. Hence, most schools in Nigeria today do not take bullying for granted. It calls for immediate suspension of the perpetrators. When it comes to bullying at school, school authorities must include policies that will fight against such acts to be in compliance with current laws.

- ***Set back on the economy of the nation.*** Considering that hate speech and cyberbullying might result to war, this scares aware prospective investor from the society. Hence, no country succeeds without investors.

Summary and conclusion

Technology has done our country Nigeria well. Hence, we should embrace this positive feature of the electronic technology and ignore the negative aspects of it. Nigeria is a democratic society with a system of government which gives every citizen the right to speak freely. But we should be careful not to abuse this freedom.

Peer group is a factor which also lure the youths to engage or not engage in social vices and its activities

Nigeria. The finding of the study, in the first place, indicates that, peer group in particular have their own role to play in terms of child socialization. Psychologically, after home, peer group or age mate is the next agent of socialization of a child. This category of people makes a significant impact on the life of an individual morally, socially, educationally and it is very hard to change more especially at adolescence stage at which the individual is in critical stage. Awareness should be created to make the young people understand what constitutes hate speech. They should be made to understand that hate speech and cyberbullying threaten the country's peace and unity as well as affect nation building. This should be done in schools, churches, mosques and in communities. Ethnic hate speech is vile and evil and should be resisted by all people of goodwill. This is because the effects of (online and offline) hate speech have the potential to escalate into full-blown ethnic war. Although digital media has been a platform for good, people who wish to sow the seed of discord can also hijack it. Young Nigerians who have been rendered unemployed can be easily enticed into spreading hate, which can heat up the political space. Civic education and history will help to curtail hate speech as they will arm the youth with historical perspective of the evils of ethnic hate speech and cyberbullying in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. Therefore, with this kind of information to be given to our

youth, they will greatly change to a better life and avoid social vices in the society. Counsellors, Government and Parents have to put hands together, each contribute its own quota with a view to assisting this category of people (youth) to have the required information, knowledge and training that will make them useful members to themselves and society at large.

Recommendations

1. As the finding indicates, peer pressure is a factor in making an individual to engage or not engage in thuggery and its activities. Therefore, government at all levels can sensitize and educate parents on the techniques and skills of parenting via TV stations, Social Media against the menace of all thuggery activities. Let parents train up their children in a way they will grow and never depart from it.
2. Internet authorities should find a way to track down haters and cyberbullying offenders online. And offenders should be brought to book offline to face the appropriate punishment. This will aid to control the level of social vices via the internet. When others see that offenders are being punished severely, they will change their ways.
3. The legislative body should try and implement a bill to handle haters and cyber criminals. However, its regulation should be traded with caution. Such Bill

should avoid capital punishments such as death sentence as proposed in the pending Bill but should contain a deserving punishment like imprisonment or fine as it is done in other countries like the United States of America.

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