

# SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA: A REFLECTION ON RECENT EVENTS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Social media cannot be said to be good or bad, the way we use them and what we use them for determines what we get from them. Social responsibility represents the moral principle that guides any action, whether in the media or any other organization and puts an obligation towards the environment, society, culture, economy and even the media. This article attempts to explain how social media can be used to diffuse information, philosophies and sentiments, and to mobilize and demobilize people towards certain actions, as well as, create platforms for interactions that can spring up new and waning ideas, symbols, rituals and identities. The researchers analysed recent incidences in Nigeria and how social media helped to escalate and deescalate them.

**Keywords:** *social responsibility, social media, Nigeria.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social responsibility is the moral principle that guides any action, whether in the media or any other organization and puts an obligation on the environment, society, culture, economy and the media. It should not harm, but rather promote environmental and socio-cultural aspects in relation to the economy of the place (BAJRACHRAYA, 2018). Social responsibility implies allowing the free flow of information, but the substance of such information should be brought to the public attention and the media which carries it should accept any responsibility arising from public interference or professional self-regulations or both. Social responsibility gives media freedom on the one hand, while allowing for external controls on the other hand. These moral principles go beyond the simple objective reporting to interpretative reporting and help create professionalism in the media by setting up a high level of accuracy, truth, and information. The media are supposed to be responsible for the people and for the society, as

the data provided by them are usually analysed and interpreted in ways that make people get true positions and coherent reports of various issues, events and circumstances. Social responsibility helps to maintain social harmony by revealing social ills like corruption, bad governance or insurgence and discourages other bad conducts. The media provide platforms for such issues to be brought to the fore, stimulate public opinion and guarantee that each and every person has the right to speak, express and publish.

Social media have been proven to be very potent tools for the diffusion of information, philosophies and sentiments. Inyang & Edem view social media as powerful channels for mobilizing and demobilizing people. They argue that social media provide podia for interactions that can spring up new and waning ideas, symbols, rituals and identities (INYANG & EDEM, 2020). Salaudeen & Lawal add that the popularity and acceptability of social media, especially among youths, has gone beyond both imagination and control. What this implies is that young people have grown to rely on these media for their daily living and can hardly function without them (SALAUDEEN & LAWAL, 2019). Belal asserts that people can now access important information and the trendy online culture to learn about things that were unknown to them before, as well as new values and symbols for communication developed for learning in an online environment that gives rise to new cultural cues (BELAL, 2014). Kietzmann & Kristopher argue that social media, as interactive computer-mediated technologies, facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks (KIETZMANN &

KRISTOPHER, 2011). As users interact with computerized systems and services, they create highly interactive platforms through which individuals, communities, and organizations can share, co-create, discuss, participate and modify user-generated content or self-curated content posted online. Some social media sites have the potential for the content posted there to spread virally over social networks. In a social media context, content or websites that are "viral" (or which "go viral") are those with a greater likelihood that users will re-share the posted content (by another user) to their social network, leading to further sharing. In some cases, posts containing popular content or fast-breaking news have been rapidly shared and re-shared by a huge number of users. This article focuses on one of the conceptions of social media which reflects that one cannot completely control his/her message on social media but rather, can simply begin to participate in the "conversation", expecting that he/she can achieve a significant influence in that conversation. The crux of this research article lies in the analysis of selected situations and events in Nigeria that have been presented on the social media and how social responsibility had been reflected in them, being the peoples' media.

### Objectives of the Study

This article is guided by the following objectives:

1. To find out the effects of social responsibility laxity on social media
2. To establish a relationship between social responsibility and social media
3. To define the approaches towards enhancing social responsibility in social media.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is pertinent to examine this article using the **social network** and the **social responsibility theories**. These theories provide the theoretical insights on social media and social responsibility.

**The Social Network Theory:** a social network is a structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals or organizations),

sets of dyadic ties, and other social interactions between actors. The social network perspective provides a set of methods for analysing the structure of the whole social entities as well as a variety of theories explaining the patterns observed in these structures (WASSERMAN & FAUST, 1994). The social network is a theoretical construct useful in this article in order to present the relationships between individuals, groups, organization or even entire societies. The term 'social network' is used to describe a social structure determined by such interactions. The ties through which any given social unit connects represent the convergence of the various social contacts of that unit. This theoretical approach is, necessarily, relational.

The Social network theory is significant to this article because it points to the synergy and dyadic ties that should exist between social responsibility and social media. It creates a sense of relationship that cannot be ignored between the two distinct concepts thereby portraying their interdependency. Social responsibility encompasses the 'operators' which provide the platform for the 'subscribers' to work on; social media on the other hand encompasses both the platform that enables this operators-subscribers interaction as well as the subscribers who feed such platforms - and these result in social network.

The social network perspective provides a set of methods for analysing the structure of the entire social entities and these methods are propelled by operators in a bid to define the social paths to be adopted by the subscribers. Also, this theoretical concept is equally instrumental here because it defines the dyadic ties that exist between the social media and the society.

**The Social Responsibility Theory:** Mass media is a two-sided sword which, if used for good can uplift a whole nation and form a strong support for its development and pride and if it comes to deterioration, it has the capacity to cause chaos and disorder in the socio-economic era of today. The Social responsibility theory was initiated and promulgated in the American set up and the initiative was taken in the late forties. The concept of public interest, inexplicitly,

lies at the heart of the definition of the social responsibility theory. This highlights the crucial role of the communications sector in shaping societal processes: the formation of public opinion and civil society movements, social and political development patterns, including more tangible processes such as the unfurling of elections campaigns and their outcome. Instrumental to this study, this theory points to the role of the communication media, and a component of such media are the social media. The social media have become trending platforms especially in this century where vital information is disseminated to the scattered audience. This information of course, has driven public opinion and has steered a course of action in the local and global scenes. Notably, social responsibility and the social media are an inseparable pair because the former is a function of the latter though played with adverse-to-admirable effects. This theory definitely defines this article and equally establishes the social network theory (as earlier presented) by vindicating the fact that social responsibility itself is the basis for social networking with regards to the social media. This theory has its major premise that freedom (as enabled in the social media) carries allied obligations. The press has an obligation to be responsible to the public and this defines social responsibility.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

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This article employs the positivist paradigm of content analysis to analyse the effects of social media on the society. Being a reverse of the semiotic approach of research design that deals extensively with the life of 'signs' in the society, the positivist paradigm rather deals with the 'effects' of social responsibility on the social media. This paradigm provides the conceptual framework and methods for the selection of the incidences in the society that reflect the research topic at hand. It allows for the discussion of these incidences respectively and independently towards driving the collective/appropriate message. Social media can be said to be veritable platforms from which various societal incidences are propagated and the positivist paradigm is

used to select key incidences from the innumerable for analyses. This approach is of essence here because social responsibility is channelled towards regulating the effects and impacts of every incident on societal values as presented in the social media.

### **4. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA**

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Given the volume of incidences that occur daily, and the countless number of ways to describe them, why do certain news reports spread like wildfire while others are left untold? To understand this, one of the most important factors is to understand the people, organizations, and institutions that control the most far and wide-reaching social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter. The actors that control these channels can be characterized as gatekeepers, who are socially responsible for deciding which messages may or may not pass through their channels.

With the rising popularity of social media as platforms for social cohesion, someone or a news organization can post a news item or a link to a news item on a platform like Facebook and another person who has a direct social network tie to the original poster can see this post and can interact with the post (e.g. liking, commenting, sharing). Other people connected to this person can equally see these interactions, and the content can diffuse further throughout the network. Essentially, this makes every actor who is exposed to the content a potential gatekeeper and of course, saddled with a social responsibility although with different levels of influence (SHOEMAKER & VOS, 2009). Williams & Carpini argue that there is no need for emphasis on social responsibility and gatekeeping in the digital age because the detachment of social media channels undermines the idea that there are discrete gates through which information passes: if there are no gates, there can be no gatekeepers and of course no one can be held socially responsible for any content. Notably, the social media buttons contribute immensely to the collapse or laxity in the process of gatekeeping and social responsibility (WILLIAMS & CARPINI, 2000).

Such buttons include: the 'Like', 'Share', 'Comment'. These buttons which are provided on social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and the rest of them tend to prove as the very factors why social media influencers cannot totally control what people do to their posts, analyse and control responses and shares. Social responsibility entails a situation whereby the media should not invade, nor intrude the individuals' privacies even while presenting a particular issue or situation, but this is totally ignored by the social media buttons which throw the 'gates' of a poster's online contents ajar for unnecessary and most times, unwanted interference and intrusion.

Meanwhile, social responsibility is not in any way against the interactivity potential as enabled on the social media through these buttons but it emphasizes on the fact that the buttons in view have rather introduced a dimension of media contents reaction that is obstructing actual social media responsibility.

## **5. AN OVERVIEW OF SELECT INCIDENTS IN NIGERIA COVERED BY SOCIAL MEDIA**

**COVID19** in Nigeria was first confirmed in Lagos, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2020 by the virology laboratory of the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, part of the laboratory network of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), since the beginning of the outbreak in China in January 2020. The case was that of an Italian citizen, who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 2020. Thenceforth, the condition had culminated to the rapid spread of the virus in Nigeria which led to the three phases of lockdown instituted by the Federal Government of Nigeria as a measure towards tackling the spread of the virus.

**#EndSARS Protest** started in 2017 as a Twitter campaign against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police, demanding the disbandment of the unit by the Nigerian government. Consequently, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020, a mass demonstration took place around the country and by that time 28 million tweets bearing the hash tag had accumulated on Twitter. The demonstration led to the dissolution of the

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020 and the subsequent creation of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit of the Police, which is massively criticized by the people. The climax of the protest was reached on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020, popularly referred to as the black Tuesday when about seventy-eight protesters were claimed to have been gunned down at the Lekki toll gate, Lagos at 7 p.m. by some soldiers of the Nigerian army. Public lootings, violence and vandalism skyrocketed throughout the country as a response to the Lekki massacre which led to the untold mayhem unleashed by some aggrieved citizens from the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2020 in a bid to vent their anger over the killing of protesters in Lagos. The persistence of violence and disorder in the country, especially with the hijacking of the situation by hoodlums, led to the declaration of curfew in some states of the federation (especially in locations where the reactions were tensed up) after many lives and properties were already lost.

**ASUU Strike:** The Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria embarked on a strike on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> of March, 2020 over the disagreement between the Union and the Federal Government thereby leading to the shutdown of academic activities in member Universities of the Union. The strike was to make the government become responsive and release funds for the revitalization of public universities, constitute visitation panels to universities, pay arrears of Earned Academic Allowances (EAAs) from 2012 to 2020, conclude the renegotiation of the ASUU/FGN 2009 Agreement that would give birth to a new salary and welfare package for lecturers in Nigerian universities, who are currently the least paid, when compared with their counterparts in Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, and to insist that ASUU members are paid using the University Transparency Account System (UTAS) instead of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) proposed by government.

## **6. SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE COVERAGE OF RECENT INCIDENTS IN NIGERIA**

Social media can be considered as 'loose media' with all their corners approachable and

accessible; and being a stream, both facts and fables flows through them unendingly.

**Covid-19** posts on social media were not limited to the Nigerian perspective, but also extended to the international scenes and such reports were products of different individual sources that fall within these categories:

- Those who had access to the right information (intuition)
- Those who relied on perceptions and assumptions (tenacity)

The intuition category covered those who worked with international and various national response teams to the pandemic in various capacities. They were most likely to present a more factual, credible and reliable information on Covid-19. Moreover, those who equally stuck to information from the conventional media and desired to replicate such on the social media could be classified here as well. Meanwhile, the category of Covid-19 social media content authors who neither depended on conventional media nor worked directly/indirectly with any Covid-19 rescue affiliation did present a different perspective of the situation. Such individual sources were based on assumptions. The juxtaposition of these information regarding Covid-19 on social media became both rewarding and misleading. Evident to this is the information regarding the daily affected cases and the affected locations (within the Nigerian perspective) which had different variables of information from different sources until the timely intervention of the National Centre for Disease Control who rather decided to handle the information regarding this on social media (Facebook specifically) in order to eliminate phobia and destructive tensions within the populace. With the variety of sources, social media contents have a dual effect on the society: the effect of spreading fake news and that of painting the true picture of the situation. Owing to these, most social media information consumers resorted to the use of mental discretions and 'filters' based on the conventional media information to glean their desired facts before final acceptance as being factual.

#EndSARS social media updates were built and structured on the element of hyperbole as a

result of the grief, anger and sense of dissatisfaction that engulfed the atmosphere. While some content authors maintained a singular stance in presenting information regarding the perceived poor Nigerian policing, others seized the ample opportunity to diversify their contents and as well extend their reach towards covering economic recession and perceived bad governance. Notably, some variables of information contents were self-generated and these were rather too dangerous for public consumption, yet, others presented some information that reflected a single experience being used to address a whole situation, thereby establishing imbalance. Exaggerations and assumptions are inseparable from social media especially in presenting a situation like this, which aims at inciting public reactions. Therefore, with these elements as part of content make up, true pictures were painted as well as false ones.

ASUU Strike social media feeds, most times appeared in the form of a press release with the Union's logo on it in order to establish the credibility of the transmitted information, but that was not a very sure way to eliminate the infiltrations of false information from external sources who made use of similar formats. Sources of information for the ASUU strike updates streamed both from the Union itself and from external bodies and while the former employed the social media purposefully to drive its desired aim, the latter did so in a bid to create 'confusion'. The feeds from the Union were sequential, especially on Twitter, showing the steps of measures/actions adopted but the feeds from the external sources were conclusive and summarizing, portraying a false reality. Obvious for the false social media publication is a November/17/2020 Press release that bore the statement of the resumption date of academic activities in the closed Nigerian universities to be on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2020. This among others equally opened a new phase for the Union to keenly lookout for such false and misleading information, and to debunk them.

The situations analysed here suggest that the social media system is a 'bi-facet' media of modern communication which has the capacity to paint reality and falsehood simultaneously as shown above.

## 7. PARADIGMATIC ANALYSIS

**Covid19** posts on social media suggested that the social media have a key responsibility of connecting the world through information. This is significant in the fact that China became a global concern including other Covid19 rapid spreading countries owing to the posts on social media platforms coupled with the information from the conventional media. It also suggests that the social media can serve as a chronicle of facts and data as visible in the daily information regarding the increasing cases in the country by the NCDC. More so, it points to the fact that social media reporting has another role of mass mobilization for a purposeful intention and the researchers' survey explains this better.

**#EndSARS Protest** posts suggested that the social media can be a starting point for any intended reaction or revolution as shown that the online protest initially started in 2017 on Twitter. It also suggests that a key way of attracting the masses lies in one's ability to draw attention and create needs, first on the social media. **#EndSARS** protest's social media posts also depicted that the social media can serve as a veritable complement for any reaction. This was visible in the fact that while the protesters demonstrated on the streets with placards and solidarity songs, the social media were also utilized for online protesting. And just as it was suggested using the Covid19 posts, of the media's ability to be useful for mass mobilization, the same equally applied here where the people were mobilized for the different phases of the protest using online posters.

**Public lootings, violence and vandalism** posts suggested that the social media can be used as a watcheye of the society. This is evident in the fact that live streaming of the destruction processes in 'almost' all locations of the country where these happened were made available to people at the comfort of their homes via the social media handles. With this, a non-eye witness could offer a credible account of the destructions that took place around the country. This also suggests the flexibility of the social media in campaigning – such that after the Lekki toll gate killings on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020, and

the perceived involvement of the government in the massacre, the hash tag campaign suddenly switched from **#EndSARS**, **#EndPoliceBrutality** –to- **#ImpeachBuhari**. Nevertheless, while the formers were still used in online campaign posts, the latter seemed to raise another wave of protest as was seen online as '**Revolution2020**'

**ASUU Strike** posts on social media suggest that the media can be used to create faction and a state of division in a given society. This is evident in the fact that while some persons supported the UTAS payment system of the union, others seemed to support the IPPIS payment system of the government, still another segment were neither in support of any, rather insisting on resumption, payment system disagreement notwithstanding. This happened because the same social media platforms were used to create posts that seemed to advocate for the federal government's payment system and the union's payment system, though by different person and at different times. With these, the masses were left with the choice of adopting either of the two which they perceived as more evident and factual.

## 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Posts on Covid19, **#EndSARS** Protest, Public looting, violence/vandalism and ASUU Strike made use of live video recordings of interviews and situations including photos as complements to the write-ups in order to establish the credibility of the posts. It was obvious that such videos and pictures were not edited in order not to infringe on the message of the posts.

The analysed incidents were selected based on certain shared features, because of the dyadic tie that exists between them and the society. Owing to the simultaneity in their occurrences (they all took place at the same time, though progressively).

**Covid19** dyadic tie with the society showed how it was able to cause global adjustments in health and social culture in the society. **#EndSARS** Protest's undeniable relationship with the society showed the possibility of the masses to be single-handedly recruited into a movement of change in the society. **Public lootings, violence/vandalism** had a nefarious tie with the society as seen in the destruction of

public and privately-owned facilities and infrastructures which were meant for societal utility. ASUU strike dyadic tie with the society was visible in the situation of the closedown of Nigerian Public Universities (which is a key component of the Nigerian society). Therefore, the selected incidents are connected to each other because of their significant 'effects' on the society as well as the time factor they share.

All the elements of reporting employed, which included the live videos and still photos among others, were portrayed just the way the incidents happened without any sophisticated editing to enhance image quality - this, which would have infringed on the credibility of the shown images to some extent. Significant to this are the images on the social media posts on #EndSARS Protest and Public lootings, violence/vandalism. Despite the low quality of some cameras used for the coverage as seen on the clips and rolls, such were never edited in order to establish the reality embedded in them.

The consistent use of the closed entrance of some Nigerian public universities in the posts regarding ASUU strike portrayed the reality of the strike's effect on the society, as well as other elements including the union's logo. Posts on Covid19 which equally made use of the images of affected persons or the burial processes of

dead victims were meant to establish the fact that the virus was real.

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