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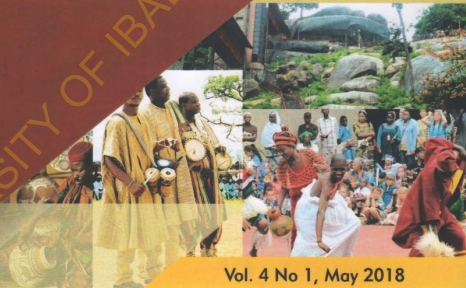
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THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPACT OF FACEBOOK ON MUSLIM YOUTHS IN EPE, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Facebook is the most frequently used social Media platform the world over. The platform is known for keeping in-touch with family members and friends irrespective of the distance. The medium is also utilized in the dissemination of information. One of the uses of Facebook is proselytization and the dissemination of socio-religious information. Studies have been carried out on the educational and social aspects of Facebook with little attention on its socio-religious impact in Nigeria. The study, therefore, investigates the socio-religious use of Facebook and the impact of such on Muslims youths in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria. One hundred copies of a questionnaire were randomly administered on Muslim youths in Epe, Lagos State and interviews were conducted with some Muslim youth leaders in the area. From the findings, Facebook has served as a platform for sharing of information about Islamic programmes and the education of Muslim youths in the study area. It has also enhanced Islamic understanding among the youths. However, youths were discovered to be addicted to Facebook, thereby spending time that could have been utilized on devotional activities on the platform. Facebook has had considerable impact on the Muslim youths in Epe, Lagos State. Parents and Islamic organizations have the role to educate youths on the proper use of Facebook.

Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has been the greatest technological innovation of the 21st century. It virtually permeates every aspect of known human endeavors, such as social services, cultural and religious education. Information and Communication Technology has the facilities of processing, storing, retrieving and transmitting data[1]. When ICT is used in social interactions, it is termed social networking, such as the popular and widely used Facebook web application.

The major functional advantages of the internet and its various branches are to explore information and share it with others, so that everyone might benefit[2]. The social medium is now considered as an important tool for communicating with people. One of such social networks is the Facebook, which is not only popular but also used globally. The Facebook is a powerful web platform that can connect everyone that registers on it and like other social networks, makes the world a global village where people can relate with each other easily and in real-time. The Facebook social medium is the most widely used social platform on the internet. It involves little time and stress, and as such be seen as a means of introducing religious instructions to people.

The world is said to consist of a number of people who interact with each other in multi dimensional ways, and by the day, people's relationships becomes more cemented and more cordial. In view of this, the contemporary world which is also the world of communications, the outreach of mass media has led to the expansion and diversity of social interactions. Thus, the advancement of technology in the 21st century gave birth to a world with no boundaries. Therefore, all information either in or outside a particular country can be accessed by a mere click on an item on a computer screen or smart phone. This is in no small measure seen as a sufficient instrument for introducing the pristine teachings of Islam.

However, media experts and notable researchers in this field of study have intensified effort at offering new ways of interaction based on media, particularly the Internet. The modern media experts have equally managed to create a new world, especially in the field of social relations. This is in order to ensure considerable changes in human communications[3]. It could be said that the latest type of human relations have been shaped in the 'social networks' such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, 2go, Whatsapp among others, which are accessed via the internet.

The word 'Facebook' had been described differently by experts across diverse fields of study. It is viewed as a social networking website that makes it easy for one to connect and share information with family members and friends online[4]. It is also seen as 'a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create account, upload photos, video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, families and colleagues'[5]. Similarly, Facebook is "a social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends and co-workers"[6]. Being a social networking website, users read, post, comment and listen to educative and informative religious articles. Hence, Muslim youths have adopted the Facebook as a tool for propagating and passing information about Islam.

Since the emergence of Facebook over a decade ago, investigations have been carried out on the possible relationship between Islam and media being the motherboard of all social networking facilities such as the moral implication of social media phenomenon in Nigeria. Efforts have equally been made on the use of social media in propagating Islamic ideals. But not much investigation has been carried out on the use of Facebook network platform as a tool for informing about the teachings of Islam, especially in the South-West region of Nigeria. In that light, the paper investigates the use and impact of Facebook on the life of the Muslim youths in Epe, Lagos state, Nigeria. In achieving that, five hundred copies of a questionnaire were administered on randomly selected Muslim youths in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria while Key-informant interviews were conducted with some Islamic scholars and Muslim youth leaders in the study area.

The paper is divided into seven sections. This section introduces the paper while the second examines the spread of Islam to Epe. The third interrogates the Facebook as a social medium.

This is followed by the fourth section which examines positive and negative effects of Facebook. The fifth and sixth sections discuss the socio-religious significance of Facebook and the Muslim youth and Facebook respectively, while the sixth section concludes the paper.

Emergence of Islam in Epe

Epe constitute a local government which is one of the biggest in Lagos State. The town, situated on the bank of a lagoon, is about 32 km southwest of Ijebu-Ode in Ogun State. Epe is bounded in the east by Ijebu Water-Side of Ogun State along Obada/Ise village and Ijebu villages. In the west, it shares its boundary with Ikorodu Local Government where there is Ikorodu/Epe route. Along the route, there are some villages such as Odo-Temu, Shala, Ketu, Molajoye, Ikosi, Itokin, Orugbo, Agbowa among many others[7].

The history of Islam in Epe essentially revolves around the famous migration of Kosoko to the area in 1851. Hitherto, Epe was a small settlement of Ijebu farmers and fishermen. Kosoko and his party took refuge in the town because of the struggle between him and Akintoye for the throne of the king of Lagos. In 1853, Kosoko and his party of about 1,500 men from Lagos made futile attempt to take Lagos by storm but they were repulsed with heavy losses on their part. Kosoko was subsequently made King of Palma and Lekki in 1854 with a bid to improving the relations with Lagos, although the reconciliatory move met with failure. The Muslims were loyal to Kosoko and stood by him during the period of his travail and he in turn governed them using the policy of freedom of religion.

The emigrants who accompanied Kosoko, also known as Eko-Epe, were mostly Muslims. Among the emigrants were warriors like Balogun Ajeniya, Osodi Tapa, Balogun Agbaje, Disu Kujeniya, Braimoh Edu, Iyanda Oloko and Posu. At that time, African Traditional Religion (ATR) was endemic in Epe and common among the Ijebu people, some of whom were found in Epe. With the arrival of the Eko-Epe, African Traditional Religion began to dwindle and Islam received an unprecedented boost in the area. Some of the non-Muslim Lagos chiefs in the company of Kosoko to Epe such as Balogun Ajeniya converted to Islam. This trend continued until it got to a time when emigrants almost turned Epe into a Muslim settlement. Mosques were built at different locations in the area as building it had become a matter of healthy rivalry among the chiefs that followed Kosoko to Epe. Moreover,

the chiefs built mosques in their individual courts. This move, which accelerated the rapid spread of Islam in Epe, culminated in the establishment of the first central mosque in the town. This mosque was built in the year 1861/1862 and located close to the court of Chief Ajeniya, then Balogun of Epe Muslims at Oke-Balogun area of the town. Later the Muslims formed a community under the leadership Mallam Idris Salu Gana who later became Lagos Imām[8].

The nascent Muslim community was able to sustain itself through the co-operation and assistance of its members. Sule Folami, tutor to Chief Ajeniya and Shaykh Abu persuaded many individuals to join the community, which continued to grow until each of the Muslim villages was able to fend for itself and endowed with a mosque and an *Imām*[9].

Facebook as a Social Medium

Facebook is a social networking site that is used the world over. Facebook allows individuals to get in touch with their friends and family members irrespective of their location. Facebook was invented by a student of Harvard named Mark Zuckerberg and three of his classmates namely: Andrew   McCollum, Chris Hughes and Dustin Moskovitz[10]. To start with, Mark Elliot Zuckerberg was born at White Plains, New York in 1984 to Zuckerberg, a dentist and Karen, a psychiatrist Mark had three sisters: Randi, Donna and Arieller, all of whom were together with him, brought up in Dobbs Ferry, New York. Mark Zuckerberg, as a young intelligent boy, had special interest in computer programming with emphasis on communication. He therefore spent his spare time on this unusual hobby. Mark enrolled at Harvard University in September, 2002 and by that time, he was known as a programming prodigy. While at Harvard, Mark built some programmes ranging from "Coursemach", "Facemash" and "the Facebook.com". Coursemash afforded Harvard students the opportunity of knowing the course their friends at the university were offering[11].

The story began on October 23, 2003 when Mark Zuckerberg launched Facemash. Facemash was a network that allowed visitors (basically his Harvard classmates) to compare two student pictures side-by-side to let them decide who was "hot" and who was "not hot". Although Havard students were logging onto the internet to view pictures of their friends, outraged students demanded that Mark Zuckerberg shut down the site. There were insinuations that Mark

Zuckerberg was also working on another site called "Harvard connection" for Cameron Winklevoss, Tyler Winklevoss and Divya Narendra who later sued Mark Zuckerberg for allegedly stealing their idea with the creation of Facebook. The two parties were reported to have settled the lawsuit on undisclosed terms[12].

The website was quickly forwarded to several campus group list-servers before it was shut down by Harvard executives a few days after it opened. Mark Zuckerberg expanded on the initial project (Facemash) that semester by creating a social study tool. He uploaded 500 images to a website, with one image per page along with a comment section. He opened the site up to his classmates and people started sharing their notes[13]. Zuckerberg was quoted as saying that:"With Facebook, I wanted to make something that would make Harvard more open"[14].

In January 2004, Mark Zuckerberg began writing the code for a new website, known as 'the Facebook'. He said in an article that he was inspired to make Facebook from the incident of Facemash. Zuckerberg also stated that he wanted to create a website that can connect people around the University. He felt that it would take Harvard years to implement the system that he and his colleagues could put together in a week. Zuckeberg's new initiative enjoyed a lot of patronage from its inception. Zuckeberg's roommate, Dustin Moskovitz reported that within 24 hours they recorded between 12,000-15,000 registrants[15].

In April 24, 2014, Facebook and Storyful announced a new feature called FB Newswire. However, from the foregoing discussions, it appears that Facebook traffic on daily basis is on the increase. It thus became the top social network across the eight individual markets in the Asia, namely: Philippines, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, new Zealand, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Africa[16].

Positive and Negative Effects of Facebook

Facebook is utilized to keep with people and get to know them better. It is also instrumental to maintaining distant relationship since relations spatially located in different areas could communicate[17]. Moreover, Facebook is cost effective, precise in targeting its recipients and fast, ensuring quick sharing of information and effectiveness in mobilizing individuals[18]. The most popular social networking site in the world is the Facebook[19].

Facebook, like other social media platforms, can teach Islam to new reverts and Muslims in search of knowledge while located at the corner of their room. This is unlike the past when such people had to learn their religion at the mosque or school setting. Facebook has afforded Muslims the opportunity of attaching selves to Imams and shaykhs of their choice. It has also served as a means of sharing information among Muslims[20].

Studies have showed that there is a relationship between internet use and scourge in social problems such as illicit drug use, gambling, gangsterism, suicide and adultery[21]. Similarly, Facebook requests its users to fill out a profile containing a number of personal information and the addition of picture(s). Although a study of privacy and security options of Facebook by its users may do less of exposure to its clients, people may use the personal information of other individuals negatively, including exposure to life damaging risks[22].

Studies have also discovered that the internet habours thousands of problematic social networking groups. Moreover, Facebook and Youtube have huge proliferation of extremist utilization particularly from Europe and the Middle East. In addition, Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Hindus, women, gays and immigrants are often targeted by the extremists[23]. It has been observed that a number of Islamic clerics with radical opinions have turned their attention to Facebook and other social media platforms[24]

Facebook is a decentralised hub for information dissemination and a veritable means of displaying support. As such terrorists have become keyboard warriors just as they operate within dark web usually requiring membership, authentification and password. Young internet users are most likely to find themselves in fora where they would run the risk of encountering narratives by terrorists[25]. The terrorists have taken advantage of this window of opportunity in Facebook to set up their profiles. For instance, there are a number of Facebook groups soliciting for support for paramilitary and nationalist groups despite the fact that the United State government has declared them as terrorist groups. The groups include Hamas, Hezbollah Turkish Revolutionary People's Libration Army among others[26]. Furthermore, the Islamic State has a power social media campaign which has attracted thousands, of fighters in over 90 countries[27].

Since pictures are shared on Facebook are done by individuals of varying degrees of understanding of Islam, there are those who share pictures revealing their *awrah*. The exposed *awrah* is not only viewed by the people of same sex but also of the opposite sex. The dual acts of sharing picture of the *awrah* on Facebook or other platforms and viewing such constitutes sin according to the teachings of Islam (Q.24: 30-31).

Socio-religious significance of the Facebook

The emergence of modern communication technology has made the media to generally influence opinions and understanding in the world. Media technology has a powerful capacity to encourage global awareness thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding, tolerance and acceptance of ethnic, social and religious differences in communities across the globe[29].

Although, Facebook critics decry a number of issues stemming from social networking in general, but then, it had equally been remarked to have provided a wealth of benefits for its users. Among these numerous significance of Facebook is communication. The critics of this social network platform claim that Facebook isolates people from one another by putting users behind a computer screen. Moreover, a psychologist, Larry Rosen has claimed that it makes shy teens become more comfortable and outgoing, just as it builds the spirit of empathy in individuals. He however cautioned that there was need to educate children on the proper use of social media from childhood[30]. For business users for instance, this open communication channel means that customers can ask questions that they may feel uncomfortable to ask in person or even over the phone. This is also applicable to the seekers of religious knowledge and information about Islam. In addition, the real-time communication facilities allow individual religious propagators to provide services to their faithful followers and answer questions directly through the social networking service.

American Evangelical Protestants had adopted communications technologies as a means of propagating their faith[31]. Similarly, it has been noted that cassette-recorded preaching of Islamic scholars had become widespread in Egypt[32]. It is expected cassette-recorded preaching of Islamic scholars would have now transformed into an advanced technology which includes storing and sharing such preaching on the Facebook and other social media to reach a wider audience.

Religious groups have developed their own versions of social network sites that are exclusive and religious-based. They have also used

facebook and other social networks to their advantage[33]. Individuals can identify themselves as adherents of a particular religion by including their religion on their home pages or simply liking a religious item or concept. Moreover, individual or organization could try to persuade others to join a particular religious group[34].

According to Ford (1997), youths who usually carry computer devises about, otherwise called 'digital natives' view the internet enabled digital devises as tools for spiritual interaction. Whenever they share their status on Facebook, they follow the threads of their followers. By so doing, they tune into the thoughts and feelings of several others and form a 'community of the heart' engendering feelings of imagination, recalling from memory, and joint thinking with a view to shaping the spiritual life of man[35].

Facebook and other social media platforms are critical for religious information in the Muslim world as they are utilized in Islamic proselytization. Some popular preachers such as Tariq Al-Suwaydan and Amr Khalid have an outreach of well over a million people on Facebook when their followers and likes are put into consideration. Furthermore, as Islamic scholars send the message of Islam to people the world over, other Muslims send out religious messages of Islam to their friends. The messages comprise direct quotation or adaptation of portions of the Qur'ān and Hadīth of the Prophet (S), especially during the month of Ramadan. They aforementioned is undertaken with the belief that Facebook and other social media platforms have the propensity of positively impacting on piety and righteousness of Muslims[36].
Whereas Facebook and other social media platforms are utilized for Islamic proselytization, few scholars have raised objection on their use. Among the scholars is Shaykh Abdul Azīz Al-Shaykh, a Grand Mufti (Chief juriconsult) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The dissenting position is based on the fact that Facebook and other social media platforms often spread lies and may end up destroying interpersonal relationships in the real world[37].

Muslim Youths' Utilization of Facebook

Youthfulness is viewed as the period of transition from dependence that emanates from childhood to independence which ensures as a result of adulthood. For statistical purposes, the United Nations had defined the youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 without prejudice to other definitions. However, the definition of youth is dependent of variables such as demography, economic and financial situation, and socio-cultural environment[38].

On the perception of Muslim youth toward the use of Facebook as a social medium network, 19% of the respondents view its use as excellent, 38% see it as very good while 28% maintained that it is simply good. Also, 10% view it as fair, 1% described it as bad while 4% of them are undecided. Further, 34% of the respondents opined that they were excellent in their individual personal devotion to faith, thirty-six (36) of them revealed that their personal devotion to faith was very good while twenty-four (24) see it as good. However, 5% of the respondents maintained that their personal devotion to faith is not good while 1% was undecided.

On the use of Facebook for receiving and gathering information, a total of 66% of the respondents postulate that they can do without Facebook in its entirety as it is not only the platform for gathering or disseminating information. Moreover, 29% of the respondents claimed that they cannot but use their Facebook account not only to disseminate information but also to receive such. Also, 5% of the respondents did not decide as to whether or not Facebook was to them a channel for either disseminating or receiving information.

The importance of the Facebook in information dissemination and clarification of religious ambiguities among Muslim youths in Epe and beyond cannot be underestimated. Facebook is a veritable means of rendering advice, correction of wrong notions, creation of awareness and enlightenment on Islamic teachings and legacies among Muslim youth leaders in Epe[39].

Facebook has made the process of disseminating information to youth members of Epe Muslim community and beyond not only fast and easy but also cost effective when compared to the conventional non-digitalized information dissemination means. Furthermore, utilizing Facebook in discussing issues relating to Islam and educating members of the community facilitate good interaction and Islamic value orientation that in turn curb the social vices flourish the society[40].

Concerning the extent to which Facebook was put into use, 6% of the respondents reported spending about six (6) hours on Facebook daily, 48% of them spend less than one hour on it daily. Also, 26% spend 1-2 hours, daily while 20% spend a minimum of 3-4 hours per daily on Facebook. Moreover, on the extent to which Muslim youths in Epe utilise Facebook as an avenue for social

interaction and the particular time of the day, 12% accessed their Facebook account every morning, 17% indicated afternoon while 13% of them accessed the Facebook in the evenings. Furthermore, 41% of the target population spent and accessed their Facebook account at night while 17% access Facebook at their leisure times with no particular specification.

However, it has been observed that as beneficial as Facebook could be, some negative effects could be recorded if not approached with a sense of discipline. For instance, it has been discovered that a good number of Muslim youths in the area spent a lot of time on the Facebook and by extension, other social media platforms which deprives them of having a healthy lifestyle and engaging in other valuable matters, devotional activities inclusive[41].

Regarding participation in Islamic discussion on Facebook, 36 % of the respondents maintained that they participate in Islamic discussions on Facebook occasionally, 25% admitted their participation on the issue through the medium as being done often, 18% rarely participated in such discussion on Facebook. Also, 11% of them revealed that their participation in Islamic discussion on Facebook is regular and not time bound while 4% concealed their opinion.

With regards to the use of the Facebook as a means of informing the public about the numerous Islamic activities, 88% of the entire respondents revealed that they engage in the use of the space to inform Muslim in the area and beyond with special emphasis on the Muslim youths on the impending Islamic programmes and activities. Also, individual's Islamic identity is expressed online Facebook with a view to reawakening the public on the numerous Islamic activities in the area. In the same vein, eight 8% of the respondents declined expressing such through the medium while 4% of them concealed their opinion.

Majority of the respondents display their Islamic identity and teachings of Islam on Facebook. The females among them display their Islamic dress code with the belief that is doing that is a form of *jihad* (striving in the cause of Allah) through technological advancement on social media[42]. Again, it is a way of calling people to the way of Allah (Islam) as directed in Allah in the Quran (Q24:30–31). In addition, activities of Islamic organizations were also disseminated to members and the public through the Facebook[43].

Furthermore, 80% of the sampled population believed that the Facebook as a social network forum could influence one's faith, 15% of them did not subscribe to the view while 5% of the respondents were undecided. About 74% of the respondents claimed membership of a Facebook platform that had the objective of fostering Islamic teachings while 22% of them did not belong to such a platform. That notwithstanding, 4% of the respondents were mute on this issue.

On the respondents' rationale for using Facebook as means of communicating with fellow Muslim friend and family members in the area and beyond, 70% of them were of the opinion that Facebook make online communications with family and friends easier while 30% insisted that their Facebook usage was limited to Islamic issue and does not extend to kith and kins. Also, 27% agreed to the assertion that Facebook had influence on their personal relationship with friends and family, 68% of the respondents were diametrically opposed to the view expressed while 5% remained undecided in their opinion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, majority of the Muslim youths view Facebook as a means of sharing information. The platform is also critical in the clarification of religious ambiguities, checking of wrong doings and creation of religious awareness with regards to Islamic programmes in Epe area and beyond. However, a good number of the youths spend substantial time on Facebook, a situation that impacts negatively on devotional activities with the potential of leading to addiction. The paper therefore recommends the following:

(i)   Parents and guardians need to provide the necessary guidance to their wards to prevent them from running into the hands of mischievous persons who recruit their members on the social media, Facebook inclusive.

(ii)   Muslim clerics and other Muslim leaders should counsel Muslim youths on the usage Facebook and other social media platforms with a bid to checkmating excessive use of it.

(iii)   Organized Islamic groups that are yet to create and Islamic group on Facebook should create such and dedicate it to the propagation of Islamic values.

(iv)   Seminar, symposia and workshops should be organized for Islamic scholars on the best manner to optimally utilize the Facebook and other social media platforms in a bid to maintaining standard.

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