

# SOCIAL MEDIA AS A DRIVER FOR SOCIETAL VALUE DEGRADATION: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Social Media facilitates the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests to virtual communities and networks using interactive technologies. The benefits of such seamless communication are immense and critical to national growth and development. However national growth and development cannot be achieved without a sound value and moral system guiding the conducts of its people. This article investigates the role social media plays in eroding the value system of Nigerian youths. It highlights problematic areas and concludes by making suggestions for the regulation of social media content through content filtering based on generally acceptable cultural values.

## KEY WORDS

social media, value, Nigerian

## CLASSIFICATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media has come to stay whether we like it or not, and it has become a critical part of daily life, and of recent in business life. It has gone beyond being a means of entertainment and exposure to a critical aspect of brand building for both individuals and corporate bodies alike. Globally it is estimated that in 2021, there are 7,8 billion people existing on earth at 56,4 % urbanization, 5,22 billion unique mobile phone users comprising 66,6 % of the population, 4,66 billion internet users comprising 59,5 % of the population, and 4,20 billion social media users comprising of 53,6 % of the population [1]. This implies that half of the world's population lives in urban areas with nearly all of that population being unique mobile phone users, internet users, and social media users. Tylor [2] defined culture as an umbrella term that encompasses the social behavior and norms found in human societies as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws and customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups. Culture as a critical facet of human living has been the yardstick via which morality has been measured in many communal societies. The metrics that define the yardstick are generally agreed-upon rules, conducts and methodologies of action, thought, and living which might be existing formally or informally, written or in oral form. This important metric is otherwise called values. Where values as defined in [3] denote the degree of importance of something or action, with the aim of determining what actions are best to do, or what way is best to live as described by the significance of different actions. The importance or significance placed on an action is collectively agreed upon in society either formally or informally and this guides the behavior of individuals in that society. Societal values are critical to the sustenance of moral standards and what classifies a societal value is dependent on the homogeneity of populations within a geographical area who share the same or similar cultures. Cultural values in the western world are a lot different than cultural values in African societies albeit with some similarities. Diverse studies such as [4-7] have demonstrated the impact of western cultures in African societies, whereas [7] suggests that well before the advent of colonialism, a pattern of homegrown political systems, governance processes and generally acceptable institutional rule making arrangement existed, he further suggested that Africa would have exhibited the same sustained level of development, evolution, and civilization without the retrogressive contact with imperial forces. The existence of laid down processes and procedures prior to western contact further highlights the earlier suggestion that culture and values exist amongst homogenous people within a geographical location.

Societal values as defined by [8] are standards, that individuals and social groups employ to define personal goals and essentially shape the nature and form of social order in a collective, by virtue of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, what ought to be and what not ought to be, what is desirable and what isn't desirable. Societal values are critical metrics for acceptable moral conduct in cultural studies, whether being investigated under the lens of cultural ethnocentrism or cultural relativism. Cultural ethnocentrism and relativism are different from each other as defined by [9], where ethnocentrism involves looking at another culture from the perspective of one's own culture, and relativism is looking at another culture from its own perspective rather than another culture. Societal values in a cultural study could be similar in an ethnocentric perspective as within a relativist perspective, and other times could be dissimilar. It is a generally accepted standard irrespective of culture, that it is wrong to commit an act of murder no matter the reason or justification for it, this will represent a situation where societal values are similar irrespective of culture. Abortion has been made legal in countries such as Ireland, Iceland, Cuba, Cyprus, etc., and is illegal in countries such as El Salvador, Madagascar, Malta, etc. [10]). This represents a scenario where societal values are dissimilar. The similarity or dissimilarity between societal values amongst cultures is an expanding continuum, where values can change as new information is passed across cultures,

thus resulting in a change in beliefs and ideals. A lot of societal value changes have been observed in Africa due to western cultural impact as discussed in [7], which holistically looked at changes in the African perspective due to neocolonialism, neoliberalism, liberal democracy, and missionaries. Chulu [11] describes changing perspectives in relation to imported economic development models in the African space, with suggestions that no culture is superior to another culture development wise, and that what matters should be the ability of people of any nation or culture to trigger off development in order to meet their immediate and future needs. Onwuachi [4] describes the impacts on African culture due to western education, the role of detribalization, paradoxical primitivism and the integrated learned behavior patterns on cultural change was explored. The results of each of the previous studies implies that even in situations of transference of societal values across cultural divides, it is of importance that the aim of morality entrenched in good societal values are maintained.

This article thus investigates the value creation system within Nigerian societies with a view of estimating how the degradation of societal values due to social media adoption and usage within the Nigerian context plays a role in poor youth education and cultural immersion. It is understood that societal values can change when cultures meet and social media offers a platform for cultural immersion. An investigation of societal values in Nigeria's pre-social media area will be examined as also post the social media era, in order to determine if the degradation of social values is prevalent and by what yardstick can a social value be adjudged to have degraded.

## **NIGERIA CULTURE AND VALUES EVALUATION**

Nigeria as seen in Figure 1, is officially recognized as the federal republic of Nigeria, and is also the most populous nation in Africa with an estimated population of over 208 million people [1].



**Figure 1.** Nigerian Map [12].

Nigeria has a rich culture of diverse people united together under a single geographical entity. It is estimated that 250 ethnic groups exist, with each group inhabiting a territory that it assumes to be its own by right of inheritance and first occupancy. Three major religions of Islam, Christianity and Traditional belief are predominantly followed, with majority in the northern part dominated by the Hausa/Fulani being Muslims, the majority of the southern part dominated by the Yoruba, and Igbos being mainly Christians and traditionalists. Nigerian culture derives from the mixture of its ethnic groups with Arabic and western European influences [12] with diverse customs relating to marriage, funerals, birth, rites of passage into manhood, and womanhood. Whether in a rural or urban setting, the family unit is a central institution and is integral in every culture or tribe, this centralized family unit goes beyond the nuclear setting, but also to the extended family. It isn't unheard of for a child to be disciplined by an extended family member and to the approval of members of the nuclear family unit.

Nigeria's core values as identified by [13] respect for elders, honesty and accountability, cooperation, industry, discipline, self-confidence, and moral courage. [14] identified that there are core moral values that every nation must teach its citizens such as respect for constituted authority, the sanctity of human life, responsibility, the value of honesty, fairness, tolerance, prudence, self-discipline, helpfulness, compassion, cooperation, and courage, respect of rule of law, respect to equal opportunity, respect of due process, representative government, etc. The list of values encouraged in Nigeria is in-exhaustive and ever-changing to meet changes in society. The societal values are in-line with the teachings of all cultures and religions represented in Nigeria. Religion is of great importance in Nigeria and plays a key role in setting standards relating to societal values. [15] opines that man cannot exist without religion and that religion cannot be extricated from life situations. Thus, religion promotes a disciplined and purified life aimed at the betterment of the soul, which is synonymous with the needs and values of a moral society. Despite the clearly stated values ascribed to the Nigerian state and its citizens, [16] summarized that Nigeria is a country with a decayed value system. From a political point of view, the author described the failure of the government over 40 years to address the issues relating to huge infrastructure deficits, insecurity of lives and property, and poor educational and agricultural capacity. Since it is believed that good values and moral education promote critical thinking and moral development [14] it is expected that people of diverse cultures within Nigeria make concise efforts to address the ever-decaying value system. The negative effects of a poor value system as stated in [17] is exemplified by the huge quest for money, age cheating as applicable in sports, patriotism, ethnic-tribal sentiments, examination malpractice, time unconsciousness or "Nigerian Time", mediocrity syndrome, etc. The level of economic decadence that permeates all sectors of Nigeria, starting from government officials to civil servants and even to the common man on the street can be ascribed to poor moral education, and fueled by a decayed value system. In order to make any change as promoted in [14], there must be a systemic address of the value system and the factors which promote its current decay.

## **NIGERIA, INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

As of 2021, Nigeria has 187,9 million active mobile connections, representing 90 % of the population, 104,4 million internet users, representing 50 % of its population and 33,3 million social media users, representing 15,8 % of its population [1]. Annual digital growth between active mobile connections, mobile internet users and social media users is estimated to grow at 10 %, 22,1 % and 22,2 % respectively [1]. Key metrics relating to age distribution of users of three (3) popular internet and social media applications are represented in figure 2, 3 and 4, respectively.

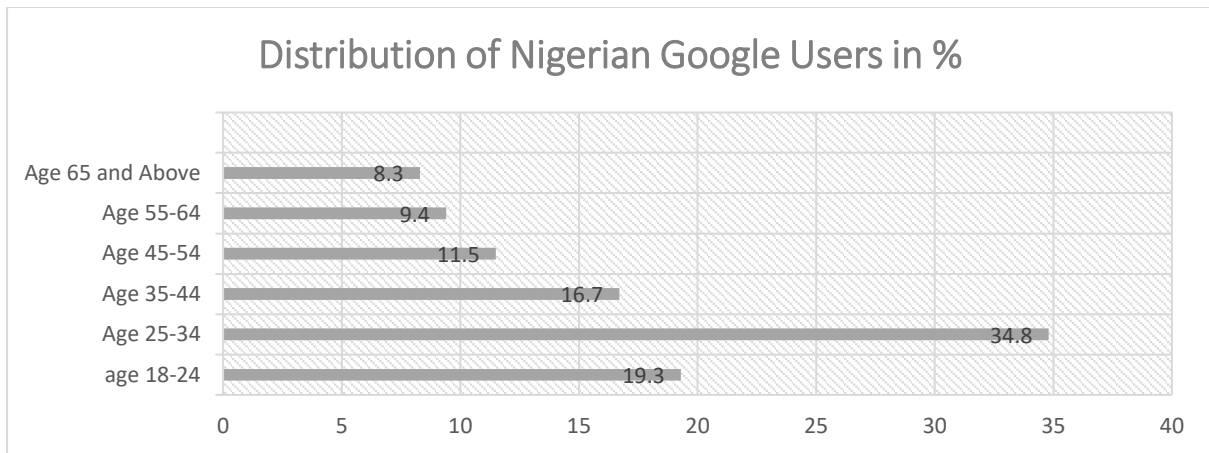


Figure 2. Age Distributions of Google Users in Nigeria [1].

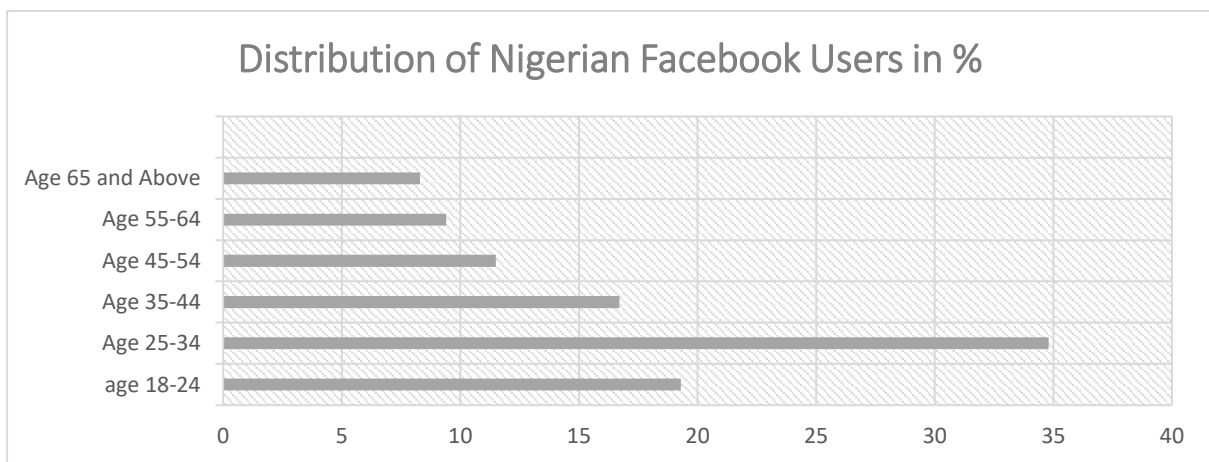


Figure 3. Age Distribution of Facebook Users in Nigeria [1].

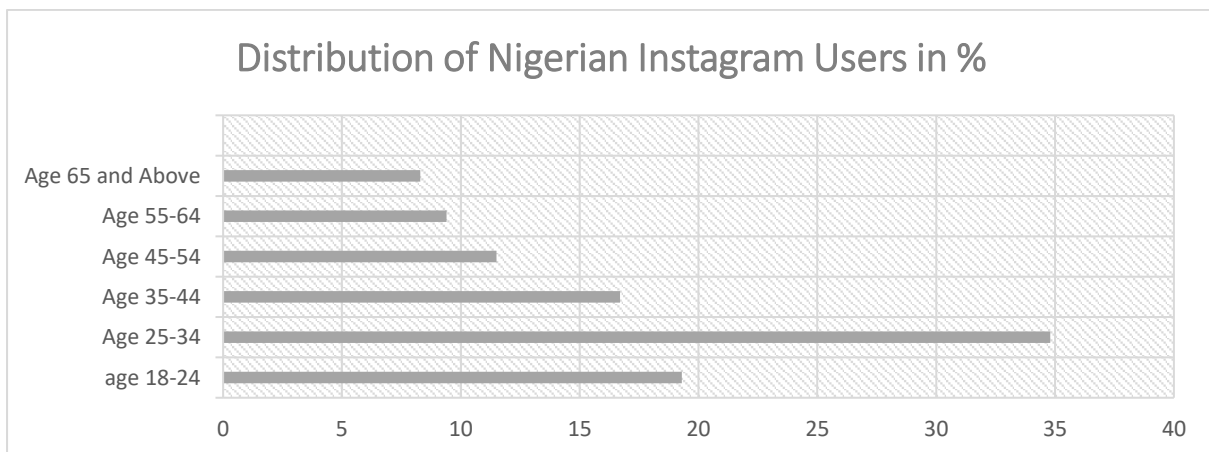
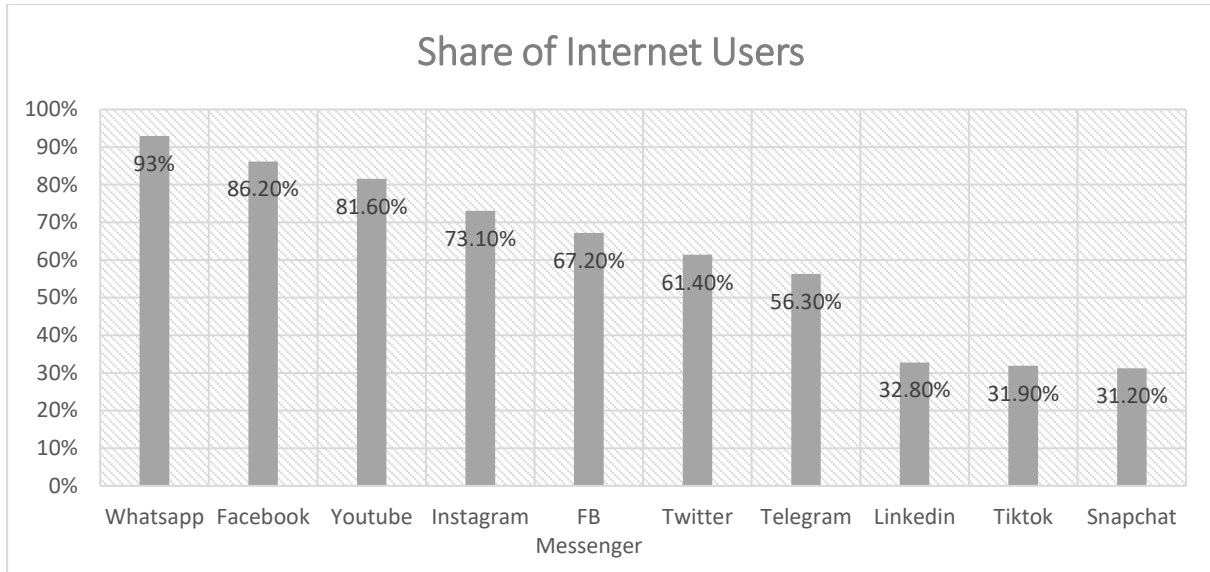


Figure 4. Age Distribution of Instagram Users in Nigeria [1]

Where it is observed that for the three social media and internet platforms, Nigerians aged between (25 -34) represented the highest consumers of internet content, followed closely by ages (18-24) and lastly (35-44) years of age. The three identify age groups represent the youth population of Nigeria, where it is estimated that 50 % of the general population can be classified within the youth age group [18]. The age ranges which represent the older part of the general population were consumers of social media content, but to a lower degree. Figure 5, depicts the user share of the ten most popular social media service in Nigeria.



**Figure 5.** Percentage User Share of Major Social Media Service by Nigerians [19].

Other popular websites used by Nigerians range from social dating websites, pornography websites, betting websites, online shopping websites, Gossip blogs and daily news websites.

## DISCUSSION

It is no surprise that new technologies and features appeal more to the youth than to older members of the population. Social media platforms such as those represented in figure 5 are mainly used for communication and content sharing. The question then is who controls the content that is shared on these platforms, how does the communication and content shared on this platform foster good values and overall moral education. Are there benefits to the adoption of social media as a communication platform in Nigeria? Many proponents of social media growth indicate that it helps people connect, encourages donations and charities, education of the populace [20], and encourages business growth and advertising [20, 21]. They also agree that its proliferation can cause cyberbullying, trolling, and false sense of connection [20]. Cybercrime, social media addiction are also other negative effects of its usage. Yet these all do not translate to a loss in values. Therefore, how does social media cause value degradation amongst Nigerian youths, who make up a large portion of users? We must first look at the global image of the typical Nigerian youth. The term “Nigerian Prince Scam” is a well-known alias for describing email scams and has been around for a long time, even predating the digital era [22], where an illegal user sends malicious emails to potential victims claiming to need help in accessing some amount of money, after which he steals money from his victims through unfounded stories and other social engineering methods. Dating back to the early 2000’s when the internet became mainstream in Nigeria, it was almost impossible for a parent to be comfortable with a child who has no source of verifiable income, and yet drives the latest cars and lives in the choice’s accommodations. People looked down on people identified to be involved in internet fraud otherwise called “yahoo yahoo” or “419”, however this was observed to change from 2010 upwards, when social media platforms became mainstream. It created an avenue for people who otherwise hid from the public for fear of criticism of their unexplained wealth to now flaunt it openly. This public display of wealth through social platforms especially Instagram to poor youths of a badly governed country like Nigeria, where the common man lacks access to basic amenities, began the process of value erosion. People began to see that internet fraud could be a way to wealth and survival as evidenced in the submission by a

Nigerian youth who stated that “cyber fraud is the reason people are able to feed their parents and sponsor their children in school” [23]. The same person further argued that those against cybercrime are only doing it because they are able to feed their own families. Another Nigerian Youth claimed that “Government and churches should encourage youths to get involved in cybercrime in order to generate foreign exchange for the government, since jobs and affordable quality education are lacking“ [24]. This value erosion has seen a situation where majority of youths in Nigeria are now enrolled in cybercrime schools [25, 26], where youths as young as ten (10) years old are now enrolled and taught the nitty gritty being cybercrime, what is most harrowing about this is that a lot of these kids were enrolled by their own parents. It is extremely difficult to convince youths against opting for cybercrime as a path out of poverty, because every day they get to consume social media content from successful fraudsters, who flaunt their ill-gotten wealth. To better understand the level of decadence of the value system with respect to economic wealth. Okhuevbie [27], Clifton and Abumere [28] and Adepegba [29] described the notorious Instagram internet fraudster known as “Ramon Abass “or as his alias “Hushpuppy” as well as other notorious internet fraudsters serving jail sentences in the US, who lived the hard and fast life with their ill-gotten wealth and flaunted same on social media. He was known to have heavily influenced a lot of youths to take a career in cybercrime due to his success stories, even his arrest and subsequent indictment did nothing to change the mindset of youths as evidenced in [30, 31], where many took sides with the criminal and justified his actions, which speaks of a society with decayed values. Cybercrime, as bad as it might appear isn’t even the worst of it all, the rising trend of ritual killings has also shown that the sanctity of human life which all the major religions in Nigeria eschew has also taken a back seat. Social media has driven the culture of “fake it till you make it” and also that “the end justifies the means”. People openly sell human ritual services for free on Facebook, where people are encouraged to bring human parts in the exchange of unending wealth [32, 33]. Whatsapp has been used in the transmitting of fake news targeted for political, economic and personal gain [34], Telegram is popular for crypto-currency scams [35], Facebook has served as a platform for sexual violence against women and men etc.

The Value system degradation isn’t only limited to areas where people can get unmerited advantage economically but to many other areas too numerous to mention, the education sector in Nigeria is also an area of grave concern as it has been a shadow of its former self as described in [14]. It has also suffered a value erosion thanks to social media. Platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp have been used to facilitate mass exam malpractices [36] and this is causing a general degradation of the human capital potential of the nation [37].

## **CONCLUSION**

The value system of any nation or people provides the standards by which actions and inactions are adjudged to be right or wrong. Social media offers immense benefits with respect to its ability to connect people globally and encourage branding initiatives, it cannot be allowed to serve as a medium for cultural value erosion. Without sound cultural values, crime, laziness and bad practice will be pervasive and thus this is undesirable. The rights of every human to freedom of expression must not be trampled upon through repression, in the guise of social media regulation. However social media providers should be encouraged to invest more into understanding the value system applicable to the areas their systems are utilized, this will aid the appropriate usage of efficient content filtering algorithms that can ensure negative vices and their subsequent narratives are not promoted. Social media should also be a proponent for value building by encouraging the dissemination of value building content to user feeds.

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