

Chapter 17

Selfie–Objectification as a Facet of the Social Media Craze Among Youths in Nigeria: A Socio–Cultural Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the social media in Nigeria has given rise to a plurality of information technology syndromes as well as multiple forms of social leprosies. One of these social leprosies has been selfie-objectification manifested by naked and highly sexualized selfies. As a form of social pathology, selfie-objectification has particularly engulfed the youths, corrupting the latter's innocence and affecting the positive relationship culture among them. Using observations and secondary sources, this chapter explores two opposing perspectives on selfie-objectification in Nigeria namely conservative and liberal. It criticizes the conservative reading of the self-objectification paradigm, arguing that any interpretation of selfie-objectification by Nigerian youths solely as a culturally insensitive act and a western cultural import is myopic and objectionable. The phenomenon should rather be read along the line of Nigerian youths' visible embrace of a liberal and postmodern philosophy of life.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the social media in Nigeria has introduced a plurality of striking popular cultures thereby attracting the attention of critics from a variety of fields. Critics actually have various and sometimes concurrent appraisals or readings of the phenomenon. While some of them equate the ubiquity of the social media with a blessing, others describe it as a curse and a factor enabling a host of socio-cultural pathologies. Actors involved in the debate on the phenomenon are sometimes so dogmatic that it may seem futile to harmonize positions from both camps (Ajike & Nwakoby 2016; Ecomas & Ecomas 2015; Olawepo & Oyedepo, 2008; Uduma 2013). The positive appraisals mostly take into account the

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fact that the social media have remarkably facilitated innovative forms of both inter personal and mass communication; they have equally been acting as an empowering tool for most segments of the Nigerian populace, particularly the youths. These digital media have for instance permitted young Nigerians with business acumen to initiate and maintain genuine online projects (for instance e-transactions, e-commerce and the like), which have been lucrative to them and have seriously empowered them to the bank. Furthermore, critics laud the social media on ground that, they have provided a forum for some unemployed Nigerians to be aware of international job opportunities and to even find permanent and well remunerated jobs abroad.

Other positive appraisals of the social networks are rooted in the fact that these media have the potential to facilitate digital (socio-political) activism and increase the populace's involvement in the governance of the country. Added to this is importance is the fact that they (the social media) may be very helpful instruments for research. In tandem with this, a number of recent studies have highlighted that the Nigerian youths increasingly resort to the social networking sites to gather data for educational or research assignments, as well as to blog, share, criticize and get engaged in various forms of political and social activism (Ajike & Nwakoby 2016; Edogor, Aladi & Idowu, 2015; Odu 2015). A case in point is the University of Lagos students' use of the social media in early 2016 to firmly resist the authority's intention to change the name of their school from University of Lagos to Mushu Abiola's University (Balarabe, 2015; Odu 2015). Another good example of social media driven activism is the one done by human rights advocates and (pro-)gay activists – such as Bisi Alimi, Olajide Marculay, Bisi Alimi and Yemisi among others through Facebook, Twitter, internet site, youtube and the like (Endong 2017; Endong & Vareba 2015). This digitally driven advocacy has been serious alternatives to street protests. It has even saved activists the danger of incurring the eventual brutality of government forces, for instance assaults by anti-protest police swords.

Despite the enormous positive dividends they have yielded in the Nigerian economy, the social media, have, according to skeptical observers, been representing an arsenal for the perpetration of multiple forms of economic frauds and socio-cultural abuses. Besides facilitating various typologies of cyber-criminality, these media are increasingly viewed by a considerable section of the Nigerian intelligentsia as some of the factors enabling what is often called “social media craze” among the Nigerian youths (Ajike & Nwakoby 2016; Edogor, Aladi & Idowu 2015). One of the manifestations of this “craze” has been the use of social networking sites by the youths, particularly the “wanna-be stars” and liberal/libertine Nigerian youths to share highly objectified or sexualized selfies. By definition, these types of selfies are unclad, offensive, sexually abusive or “pleasing” pictures. The tradition among youths of sharing unclad and controversial selfies has been labeled “selfie-objectification” by some psychologists, feminists and anthropologists (Gorman 2015; Kite & Kite 2014). Many conservative critics have “hastily” associated this phenomenon with westernization and have thus equated it to a bane of Nigerian cultural values. However, the dynamic and complex nature of the phenomenon calls for more nuanced observations and analyses.

Using critical observations and secondary sources, this chapter seeks to explore how selfie-objectification is a facet of the social-media craze in the Nigerian socio-cultural context. It begins with an exploration of the “social media craze” debate in Nigeria and proceeds by reviewing social interpretations of the selfie-objectification in Nigeria. It illustrates the fact that, in spite of its apparent incompatibility with the conservative and doctrinaire religious paradigms (which continues to govern the Nigerian society), the selfie-objectification is an index of the Nigerian youths' increasing fascination by foreign – mostly western – cultures and models of self-imaging. The book chapter is divided into four main sections.

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