

Chapter 60

Today Is Your Birthday! Analysing Digital Celebration and Social Culture of Young People on Facebook

Doris Ngozi Morah

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7854-3238>

Madonna University, Nigeria

Chinwe Elizabeth Uzochukwu

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Facebook birthdays have become increasingly trendy among young people globally and in Africa since the arrival of smart technologies. The study investigates the idea of celebrating birthdays on Facebook among selected Nigerian university students and reactions to this new trend. Using the diffusion of innovations theory and mixed research methods, in-depth interviews were conducted on six respondents, and profile activities of 300 Facebook users' content was analysed to investigate the research objectives. Findings demonstrate that most users found it convenient and economical to celebrate birthdays on Facebook. Online celebrations offer more global online visibility than offline parties leading to the formation of digital cultures and connections. The result led to a proposal for the bicultural convergence model that explains user experiences to social media effect. Poor network and high-cost data tariff, among others, posed challenges. The study recommends the provision of cheap or free internet access in Nigeria and Africa to enable increased growth of the digital social culture.

INTRODUCTION

Social media use initiated a new culture in human sociology and communication ecology. Carr & Hayes as cited in Ajhabash & Ma (2017, p.1) defined social media as “Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content.” The interactivity and participatory features of social media draw the attraction of many people globally, particularly the younger generation called millen-

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nial, who exploit it for various purpose. Social media is also useful in many areas of human endeavour, including health, communication, development, economic, commerce, education, agriculture, political, socio-cultural rationale, among others. A subdomain of social media is known as social networking sites under which Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, among other categories.

Young people have broadly embraced the use of social media, especially in Africa and Nigeria, probably as an easy means of education, communication and socialisation. Globally, Facebook is the most popular social network (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Farahbakhsh, Han, Cuevas & Crespi, 2017) with a usage statistics of 74.58% as of September 2020 (<https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats>). Alhabash and Ma (2017, p.2) corroborate Duggan's findings that "about three-quarters of Internet users report having a Facebook account, and 7 in 10 users report accessing the site daily, highlighting the habitual and ritualised nature of Facebook use." Duggan's findings indicate that people mostly visit Facebook sites whenever they access the internet.

Presently, the role of social media has become diversified to such an extent that some human activities are now executed online on web communities. In the past, though celebrating one's birthday was fun provoking, tasking and involved excellent preparation whenever a person's birthday comes up. In Nigeria, birthdays are celebrated as a significant event depending on the financial status of the celebrant. It requires sending invitations to family and friends; organising musicals; and preparing foods and drinks. Young people usually celebrate birthday parties with their peers and friends at home or on campuses. Presently, in Nigeria, there seems to be a paradigm shift in social celebrations as social networking sites(SNS) such as Facebook, has become an attractive hub for birthdays parties in this age of smartphone pervasiveness.

Facebook is the most popular social media platform among youths in Nigeria (Morah, Udeze & Ekwenchi, 2019; Mbanaso, Dandaura, Ezeh & Iwuchukwu, 2015) and presently has a usage rate of 55.94% as of September 2019-September 2020 (<https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/nigeria>). The surge in usage is likely to contribute to increased interest in Facebook birthdays, especially among young people. Its potentialities of allowing people to bond with family members, friends and acquaintances; and its capacity to provide users with the opportunity to post and share contents such as photos and status updates (Stec as cited in Alhabash & Ma, 2017, p.2), makes Facebook ideal for birthday celebrations leading to cultural formation among young people.

The relevance of Facebook in social-cultural development and integration of society also help motivate young people to maintain such accounts. The individual's use of social media, however, is often based on perceived expectation and gratification and is often personalised by different motivational factors. Some research further highlighted some of those motivational factors as the ability: to gain social capital by initiating and maintaining friendships (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Lenhart, 2009; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009) and; to create and enhance a self-image (Utz, 2010; Zhang, 2010). Deuze (2015, p.1) succinctly surmises "all people use social media a lot, for all kinds of purposes—but mostly to be in touch with family and friends, to be present and seen in the lives of people they care about." Deuze's mindset underscores the position of Facebook in cultural formation and socialisation.

Expectedly, in the Nigerian Facebook sphere, celebrations of online birthday are also booming, especially among young people on campus who spend most of their time online (Pew Internet Research, 2018). Mbanaso, Dandaura, Ezeh & Iwuchukwu (2015) found that Facebook ranked highest as the most commonly used social media platform among young people with 91%, followed by WhatsApp (87%) in a study of five tertiary institutions in Central Nigeria. The widespread adoption of the Facebook sphere for birthdays is now synonymous to a cultural carnival arena where people from different backgrounds that are multiethnic, and multicultural gather, advertises and celebrates their birthdays; posting photographs,

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