SOCIAL MEDIA AND SUICIDAL COMMUNICATION AMONG NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the utilization of social media for suicidal communication. Adopting the Survey method with a sample size of two hundred and eight (208) respondents from the Kaduna Polytechnic, the study finds out that depression and broken relation are the primary causes of suicide among undergraduate students; respondents utilize social media for expressing and seeking information on academic difficulties and other challenges to a very great extent. That attitude toward suspicious ideation and communication or behaviour on social media is serious, but their response to such a message is slow. The study recommends that training on recognizing suicidal symptoms, more access to community interaction, research, and social media surveillance, education on suicidal symptoms and behaviours on social media, access to social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist services with anonymity are ways in which social media can be used to curtail suicide among undergraduate students.

Keywords: Social Media, Suicidal Communication, Suicidal Ideation, Students.

INTRODUCTION

The frequency of recurrence of Suicide in Nigerian society calls for strict intellectual attention. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) 's statistical report on suicide for 2018, Nigeria was ranked fifth after South Korea, Russia, India, and Japan, with a worrisome figure of 15,000 suicides every 100,000 suicides (Ohai, 2018). Likewise, according to Mac-Leva, Ibrahim& Usman's report in the Daily Trust Newspaper of June 23, 2019, they submitted that among the 42 Nigerians who had committed suicide within the past 6 months, undergraduate students comprise 11 of them.

Numerically, there are above a hundred Nigerian youths being admitted into tertiary institutions every year. There is a growing enrollment rate in the various institutions in the country on a regular annual basis. Among the worries of these institutions and parents is no longer the fear of cultism, examination malpractices, campus prostitution, sex abuse, and armed robbery, alcoholism, among other vices but the taking of one's own life (Suicide), which is by no measure growing less by the day. Suicide ideation has become a severe social cum psychological problem, creating a tense atmosphere in the country's educational environment.

According to Oginyi, Ofoke, Nwonyi, Ekwo & Nwoba (2018), it is discovered that the most difficult psychological problem with a significant increase of recent is the rate of death, especially by suicide among undergraduate's students in Nigeria. They (Oginyi et al., 2018) added that those diagnosed with anxiety, stress, depression, and personality problems were more liable to commit suicide, submitting that about 50% of those who died through suicidal acts were not clinically sampled or have personality or stress disorder. Therefore, the uncertainty of an increase in the risk of committing suicide among undergraduates or youths cannot be taken lightly.

According to Alabi, Ayinde & Abdulmalik (2017), one of the social factors responsible for suicide in the absence of meaningful family ties and social interactions is egoistic Suicide or anomic Suicide resulting from break-in relationships between an individual and the society. A Study by Bruno et al. (2015) on suicidal ideation among Brazilian students disclosed that stress and breakdown in communication between students and the society leading to isolation was the primary social cause of suicidal ideation among the youths. However, today's world is filled with communication gyps, especially computer sets, telecommunication gyps, and internet devices, especially social media. The world of communication is yet to experience something more phenomenal than social media, which virtually all students possess in Nigerian institutions. According to Onah & Nche (2014), social media has taken center stage in communication among/between students and society. Through these media, users meet friends, exchange ideas, images, audio, videos, and most importantly, stay connected.

Before the invention of social media, one-to-one and one-to-many communication over a distance were comparatively expensive and challenging. However, its advent has made it more comfortable as one can conveniently communicate with anyone, anytime, anywhere. However, one can only imagine why a society in time like this so blessed with such velocity and volume of communication artifacts, with the simplicity of usage, would record such a high level of suicide amongst its youths. On the other hand, there are currently more than 100,000 websites that deal with methods of committing suicide, which some scholars have blamed for teaching youths how to execute such evil. A recent study of the top 10 sites retrieved when searching about 'suicide' revealed that the three most frequently occurring sites were pro-suicide (Dunlop, More & Romer, 2011).

Therefore, amidst these sociological bearings of social media on communication and social interaction, several investigations in western countries showed that 48-54% of people who committed suicide repetitively communicated their suicidal intentions to their significant others on their social media posts. However, many significant others' responses to the suicidal communications of distressed, suicidal persons and lack of support impact the course of the suicidal process (Wolk-Wasserman, 2016). Significant others often fail to recognize suicidal communication, owing to their lack of knowledge. Their uncertain attitudes and behaviours towards self-destructive persons come to the fore when confronted with suicidal touch. Therefore, this study calls attention to social media's role in suicidal communication among undergraduate students in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

A look at the recurring suicide cases among Nigerian undergraduate students is indeed worrisome. According to the Guardian Newspaper of June 12, 2018, Nigeria lost about 80 persons, mostly undergraduates, to suicide in a year, and Daily Trust of 23rd, June 2019 about forty-two including undergraduates. It has been a longstanding claim that social isolation elicits suicidal behavior (Masuda, 2013, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, CDCP, 2007). However, social media can decrease the depressed state, especially when there is a lack of social support from family, friends, school (Hudgens, 2003). There have been studies on suicidal behaviours of adolescents and youths in civilized countries of the world (Reynolds & Mazza, 2000; Shaffer & Hicks, 2004; Roberts, 2002). However, there is a lack of studies on online suicidal behavior among youths in Nigeria, mostly undergraduate students. Therefore,

due to the high usage pattern of social media among students, there is a need to have good insight into social media and suicidal communication among undergraduate students.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine social media and suicidal communication among Nigerian undergraduates. This aim is broken into the following objectives:

1. To find out the students' perception of the causes of suicide among undergraduate students.
2. To ascertain students' social media utilization to express and seek information on academic difficulties and other challenges.
3. To find out students' attitudes towards suspicious suicidal ideation, communication, or behavior on social media.
4. To establish ways, social media platforms can be employed for anti-suicidal communication among Nigerian undergraduate students.

Scope of the Study

This study investigates social media and suicidal communication among undergraduate students in Umaru Ali Shinkafi Polytechnic, Sokoto State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Media Equation Theory propounded by Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass (Griffin, 2000). The theory submits that media experience is equal to real life and online media have human attributes. According to Asemah & Edegoh (2012), Reeves and Nass's theory suggests that people respond to communication media as if they were alive. The theorist asserts that media users or members tend to engage the media as they do with human beings. The relevance of the theory to this paper holds that people treat the media as human beings, so whenever they feel like expressing themselves or talking to someone (to be heard or spoken to), they turn to the new media, the way they will turn to human beings. By extension, the theory also explains that online relationship development might require more time to develop than face-to-face relationships. Still, when extended, it has the same influence as face-to-face communication. This means the more students use social media, the more they are influenced, and such shapes their disposition towards their life, its challenges, demands, and issues as they find a means to express themselves and desire to be heard, thereby establishing an online relationship which is similar to some as a social relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Social Media

Kaplan (2010) defined social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the web's ideological and technological foundations that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." In the same vein, Adaja & Ayodele (2013:65) observed that "one of the breakthroughs in information and communication technology in the 21stcentury is the discovery and emergence of the new media which have facilitated the creation of the different platforms for social interaction." These new media include internet-based social websites like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc., which allow users to communicate with one another interactively.

Different studies (Verster, 2010; Moon, 2011; Oye, 2012; Umekachikelu, 2013) have examined social media relations by users. They posit that the more people use social media, the more they depend on it for their information and expression of ideas and feelings, especially life experiences. Since the invention of social media, they have made social interaction familiar, especially among the youths who, amazingly, with a click one shares information with thousands of people in a second. Social media's power not only lies in those above but in the fact that they are cheap, user-friendly, and accessible with mobile smartphones, anywhere and at any time. Also, Ekeli & Enobakhare (2013A) submit that social media's uniqueness lies in openness, user-centeredness, conversation, immediacy, reach, ease of use, not bound by geography, interactivity, participation, and variety of content format.

According to the Global State of Digital in 2019 report for June 2018 to June 2019, it is discovered that there are 98.39 million online users in Nigeria. Of the 98.39 million, 54% access the internet daily while only 12% (24 million) have active social media accounts, which are equivalent to 3 hours 17 minutes at the average amount of time using social media, and higher than the global average, which is 3 hours 14 minutes. It was also reported that WhatsApp is the most active social media platform in the country with 85% of users, followed by Facebook at 78%, Instagram at 57%, F. B. Messenger at 54%, and YouTube at 53% (pulse. ng, 2019). This thus brings the need for elucidation on the significant role of social media in the nation's communication and social interaction, especially among the youths who are more in terms of usage and population.

Suicidal Communication

The word 'suicide' was coined from the Latin words "sui" (of oneself) and "caedere" (to kill) in the 17th century. It was first used by Sir Thomas Brownean, an English physician and philosopher, in 1642 in his book"Religio Medici." It is defined as an act of intentionally terminating one's own life. Shneidman (2005) defines (Suicide) as an intentional death, a self-inflicted death in which one makes a deliberate, direct, and conscious effort to end one's life.

These definitions identify suicide as an individual's attempt to end his or her own life. However, when such a shot does not result in death, it is considered attempted suicide. The rates of suicide have significantly increased among youth, and youth are now the group at highest risk, estimated at one-third of the population in developed and developing countries. However, an emerging phenomenon of "cyber-suicide" in the Internet era is a further cause for concern because of the use of new methods of Suicide (Rajagopal, 2004). There have been theories that seek to assert the causes of suicide, which covers social, biological, psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral and developmental etiologies.

A study by Kim, Park & Yoo (2015) on suicidal ideation among undergraduates revealed that it is traceable to relationships between poor school connectedness and psychological distress. Ha (2015) also found socioeconomic status to be a significant moderator of the association between school connectedness and psychological distress, but not between school connectedness and suicidal ideation or attempts. Suicidal ideation is thoughts or plans of killing oneself while expressing such an opinion is suicidal communication. Suicidal communication can be viewed from two different perspectives, verbal and nonverbal.

From a verbal perspective, there is direct verbal and indirect verbal communication. Direct verbal suicidal communication refers to clearly expressing suicidal intentions. In

contrast, the indirect verbal suicidal communication means the expression, in various ways, of the feeling that one's situation is hopeless, that life has no meaning, that there is no solution to one's current problems and that it would be better to disappear or die. The non-verbal signifies gestures, attitudes that express the loss of hope and interest in life such as withdrawal, deliberate self-isolation, weakening or rupturing ties with family and friends.

However, suicidal communication can be digital, which is referred to as "digital suicidal communication." This could be at the individual level of exhibiting the above types of suicidal behaviours or at the mass level of sharing information generally on suicide on online platforms such as social media. But in respect to this study, it examines how social media can be used to detect and curtail suicidal ideation both at the individual or collective level as Westerlund, Hadlaczky & Wasserman (2015) observed that there had been several cases in recent years where people have displayed their suicidal ideation or intention in online forums, post, blogs or chat rooms. According to Perez (2016), youths express their suicidal intentions through behavior changes such as being isolated, despaired, irritable or complaining of loss of appetite or insomnia. They may show interest in the topic of death or die or express overtly their intentions to kill themselves like "I want to kill myself,"; "I will hang myself," and other suicidal threats online. Suicidal threats, which wish to die by the individual's hand, are often chosen by young persons to communicate their suicidal intentions on available social media to them than face-to-face.

According to Okebukola (2017), social media serve as a means of social integration to have more excellent proximity between users to detect and curtail suicidal ideas and, in other cases, encourage some in overcoming the feeling. He added that online or social media could help relieve the depressed state of the individual, especially when there is a lack of social support from family, friends and school. However, some scholars have argued that some social media users even encourage suicidal practice, including teaching means to achieve its success and warn that social media is a virtual space where there is no possibility of establishing borders to control users' activity, which can facilitate or encourage suicide.

Suicidal Cases Among Undergraduates Students in Nigeria

Ohai (2018) expressed his wariness on Nigerian undergraduates committing suicide, especially the several cases of suicide recorded between 2017 and 2018. Okebukola (2019) blamed the trend on a host of factors, which can be aggregated as frustration with life. To him, "these factors can be internal or external to the university such as poor academic performance which leads to the university's withdrawal, peer bullying by cult groups or abject poverty and economic/financial difficulties."

On May 28, a student of Ado Bayero University Kano took his life on November 29, 2016, a University of Nigeria Nnsuka (UNN) student. According to a publication of Today's Newspaper (2017), "in 2017, many suicides were recorded". A record released on March 26, 2017, showed that 10 percent of Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) were attempted suicides. On March 14, the same year, a 30-year-old student of the Nigerian Law School, Abuja, Auwal Haruna, also committed suicide by hanging himself on the hotel room's ceiling fan. More so, in October 2017, an a16-year old 100-level student of Microbiology at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Mercy Afolaranmi, took her own life by taking rat poison mixed with battery extracts due to emotional pressure. There was also the record of the

death of a 300-level Physics/Astronomy under-graduate of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Onyebuchi Okonkwo, by suicide.

Coming to 2018, in February, a student of Abia State University, Wilson Chukwudi, committed suicide due to failure to graduate after two academic sessions in a row. In March 2018, a final-year Computer Engineering student at the University of Benin, Adams, committed suicide. There was also the same Suicide case in Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island in Bayelsa State, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in Osun State (Ohai, 2018).

Towards the end of the year 2018, according to the Guardian Newspaper of June 12, 2018, Nigeria lost about 80 persons, mostly undergraduates, to suicide in a year. These cases are the cause of lamentations and worries among Nigerians. And the increasing rates of suicide cases continue to pose a big socio-psychological problem to the nation and the international bodies (Nwachukwu, 2018). Cases of Suicide, however, are not limited to adolescent undergraduates. As stated initially, Mac-Leva, Ibrahim & Usman (2019) submitted that among 42 suicide cases record for the year 2019, 11 of them were students.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is the survey. Ohaja (2003:11) defines a study as the study of a sample's characteristics through questioning, enabling a researcher to make generalizations concerning his study population.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

To determine the sample size for the study, Taro Yamane formula for determining sample size was used. The sample size for this study will be determined by Taro Yamane formula.

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + n(e)^2}$$

$$n' = \frac{1380}{1 + 1380(0.07)^2}$$

$$n' = \frac{1380}{1 + 1380(0.004)}$$

$$n' = \frac{1380}{1 + 5.52}$$

$$n' = \frac{1380}{6.52}$$

$$n' = 211.65 = \underline{\mathbf{n' = 212}}$$

The sample size for the study is 212 students. The instrument of data collection for the study is the questionnaire. The area of research is Kaduna Polytechnic. The purposive sampling was used to select mass communication undergraduate students, while simple random sampling was used to determine the 212 students that form the study's sample size.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of 212 copies of a questionnaire administered, 208 copies of the questionnaire were valid for the study, which forms the basis for the following analysis.

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Table 1: Students' perception of the causes of suicide among undergraduate students.

Variables	Frequency	Percentages
Depression	31	14.9
Family disruption/ Bereavement	11	5.3
Academic failure	6	2.9
Broken relationship	33	15.9
Vulnerable Personality/ Negative affectivity	17	8.2
Bad economic situation	13	6.3
Suicide Communication influence	23	11.1
Sexual or physical abuse	12	5.8
Mental imbalance	4	1.9
Loss of loved one through death	9	4.3
The feeling of low esteem	7	3.4
Bulling or Maltreatment	12	5.8
Disappointment	8	3.8
Drug abuse/Substance intake/Alcohol	9	4.3
Family rejection	13	6.3
Total	**208**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The data in table 1 shows that the undergraduate students' perception of the causes of suicide is a Broken relationship (15.9%), followed by depression (14.9%), Suicide Communication influence (11.1%), Vulnerable Personality/ Negative affectivity (8.2%), family rejection (6.3%), Bad economic situation (6.3%), Bullying or maltreatment(5.8%), sexual or physical abuse (5.8%), Family disruption/Bereavement(5.3%), Loss of Loved one through death(4.3%), Drug abuse/Substance intake/Alcohol(4.3%), Disappointment (3.8), feeling of low self-esteem (3.4%) Academic failure (2.9%) and mental imbalance (1.9%). This, however, shows that depression and broken relationships are the primary causes of suicide among undergraduate students.

Table 2: Students' utilization of social media for expressing and seeking information on academic difficulties and other challenges

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Very Great Extent	112	53.8
Great Extent	52	25.0
Uncertain	7	3.4
Low Extent	21	10.1
Very Low Extent	16	7.7
Total	**208**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The result of the analysis shows that most of the respondents utilize social media to express and seek information on academic difficulties and other challenges to a great extent.

This is obtained with 112(53.8%) at a very significant time, 52(25.0%) at a great distance, 7(3.4%) with uncertainty, 21(10.1%) at a low extent and 16(7.7%) at a shallow area.

Table 3: Students' attitude towards suspicious suicidal ideation, communication or behaviour on social media.

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Serious and Respond quickly	49	23.6
Serious but Respond Slowly	58	27.9
Serious but don't Respond	26	12.5
Indifferent and Ignore	13	6.3
Uncertain	21	10.1
Unserious and Respond Slowly	19	9.1
Unserious and Don't Respond at all	22	10.6
Total	**208**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2019

In table 3, a large percentage of the respondents (27.9%) thought that their attitude toward suspicious creativity, communication or behaviour on social media is severe. Still, their response to such messages is slow.

Table 4: Ways social media platforms can be employed for anti-suicidal communication among Nigerian undergraduate students

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	X	DECISION
1	The school should organize training for recognition of at-risk online behaviour among young persons	91	83	19	15	3.2	Accepted
2	There should be provision for information on treatment to suicidal attempted students via social Media	44	29	108	27	2.4	Rejected
3.	There should be social media platforms for increasing access to community linkages and more interaction	93	74	18	23	3.1	Accepted
4.	There should be improved reporting and portrayals of suicidal behaviours on social Media	37	34	118	19	2.4	Rejected
5	Further supporting research on suicide and suicide prevention on social Media	77	84	26	21	3.0	Accepted
6	Let there be social media surveillance of posts of students by concerned authorities	109	72	14	13	3.3	Accepted
7	There should be the creation of public information and education about Suicide on Social Media	51	42	87	28	2.5	Accepted
8	Students who attempt suicide should be made to access sessions with a social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist.	99	68	28	13	3.2	Accepted
9	Counselors should conduct a social media screening evaluation of students to identify those at risk	29	38	92	49	2.2	Rejected
10	There should be social media platforms where shy students can anonymously express their difficulties with their identity hidden	83	74	32	19	3.0	Accepted

11	Schools should educate students online about symptoms of anxiety and depression	88	68	41	11	3.1	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2019

With a Likert scale of 4 points and an average mean of above 2.5 for acceptance and below for rejection, the data above showed that organizing training for recognition of at-risk online behaviour, online platforms for increasing access to community interaction, supporting research on suicide, social media surveillance of students' posts, education on symptoms of anxiety and depression and other suicidal behaviours on social media, access sessions to a social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist with anonymous identity for shy students are ways in which social media can be used to curtail suicide among undergraduate students.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings show that depression and broken relation are the primary causes of suicide among undergraduate students. This finding agrees with Oginyi et al. (2018), who submit that those diagnosed with anxiety, stress, depression and personality problems were more liable to commit suicide. This is also in agreement with Alabi et al.'s (2017) 's argument that one of the social factors responsible for suicide in the absence of meaningful family ties and social interactions. This equally commemorates the position of Kim, Park & Yoo (2015), who argue that suicidal ideation among undergraduates is traceable to relationships between school connectedness and psychological distress.

Findings further show that respondents utilize social media to express and seek information on academic difficulties and other life challenges to a very great extent. This finding agrees with Solo-Anaeto (2017), who submits that youths and students highly utilize social media as channels for information, interaction and entertainment. Equally, Adebimpe, Adeyemi, Faremi, Ojo and Efuntoye (2015) initially revealed that social media is the first source of information for young people on any issue that concerns them. This explains why Nduka, Igwe-Omoke & Ogugua (2014) argue that social media is significant and utilized by young persons for health communication purposes and therefore admonished its utilization as means of reaching them by health professionals and organizations. The findings recognize the extensive use of social media for several campaigns in Nigeria by the World Health Organization, which acknowledged that social media plays a significant role in the successful containment of different public health challenges.

Findings also revealed that the students' attitude towards suspicious creativity, communication or behaviour on social media is severe, but their response to such messages is slow. This finding explains Wolk-Wasserman (2016) position that many people have inadequate responses or responding to suicidal communications of distressed and suicidal persons. It is also in agreement with Nwachukwu (2018) that significant others often fail to recognize suicidal touch due to ignorance, negligence, and uncertain attitudes and behaviour towards self-destructive persons.

Finally, the findings also show that training on recognition of suicidal symptoms, more access to community interaction, research, social media surveillance, education on suicidal symptoms and behaviours on social media, access to social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist services with anonymous are ways in which social media can be used to curtail suicide among undergraduate students. This view is equally shared by Okebukola (2017), who noted that

social networks serve as a means of social integration to have more excellent proximity between users to detect and curtail suicidal ideas and encourage overcoming suicidal feelings. Also, the position of Onah & Nche (2014) and Hudgens (2003)positing that social media currently take center stage in communication among/between students and the society and can enhance the depressed state of the individual, especially when there is a lack of social support from family, friends, and school is reaffirmed by this finding.

CONCLUSION

From the collected and analyzed data, it can be concluded that the exposure and utilization of social media by undergraduate students is high. Therefore, authorities should utilize social media to educate them on suicidal ideation and communication to detect and report any such communication or symptoms among students. This paper, therefore, recommends that students access to social media should be regulated, their online communication should be monitored, any suspicious suicidal symptom or expression should be reported to the authority promptly; then, government, schools and another well to do individuals should encourage hard work and resilient spirit among students and make them understand that life is precious and should be treated as such. Every challenge is surmountable by encouraging students to go through one form of challenge or the other on various social media platforms they have access to.

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