

Social Media Abuse and its Implications for Public Administration in Nigeria

Ibukunoluwa Bose

Olojede

*Department of Public
Administration,
Lagos State University*

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Abstract

Nigeria's public administration has been under the siege of incessant crises and these crises are a culmination of the country's successive years of corruption, human rights violation and in recent times the misuse of social media (through the use of propaganda, cyber bullying and cyber harassment) that heats up the polity and generates bitter politics, hate and bigotry. The implication of this is that it creates a rife environment for continuous electoral violence and ethnic strife that consequently undermines an effective public administration. In the light of this, the objectives of this paper seek to identify how the wrong use of social media can be a threat to the efficiency of public administration in Nigeria. Qualitative method based on document investigation was adopted and the findings from this paper revealed that some of the causes of social media abuse is the culture of administrative impunity and the lack of effective regulation of social media by governmental institutions. It therefore concludes and recommends that effective policies must be enforced to end the culture of impunity and abuse of social media in order to put an end to ethnic cynicism, ethnic conflicts and hateful politics that breeds sycophants, political violence and the consequent destruction of public administration in Nigeria.

Corresponding Author:

Ibukunoluwa Bose Olojede

Orcid Number: 0000-0002-7667-4015

Background to the Study

Social media abuse has emerged as a result of globalization and a societal shift from face-to-face contact towards technology-based interactions. Thus, social media abuse has risen as a new form of strategy for intimidating and provoking victims especially for politically motivated intents. Hence, social media abuse is a new form of grassroots political participation involving online violence, harassment and stereotyping in order to establish some form of political relevance and dominance and so the globe has become more interconnected than ever before as a result of digital technology (Ologundudu,2022). Thus, technology continues to advance continuously and swiftly and is therefore changing local governance, administrative ecology, public administrative systems, policy making processes and ways of operating in modern society (Olojede,2021). However, despite the sophistication, advancement and interconnectedness social media has brought in facilitating efficiency in public administration, it does not come without its dark sides. Some of which include cyber bullying, sarcasm, innuendos, ridiculing, manipulation and falsification of electoral results, propaganda, political trolling, satire, malicious and inciteful messages, misinformation, slander as well as the circulation of phony news (Mohammed,2021). Thus, in this context, social media abuse is the use of computers, iPhones, iPads, cell phones and other electronic devices for making demeaning or politically provocative utterances against individuals, groups or a state that heat up the polity. Essentially, social media abuse focuses on the use of information communication technology as a means through which individuals or groups express their hate, contempt and bigotry towards their known or perceived political enemies or rivals via sending messages that embarrass or harass their opponents. Other forms of social media abuse include sending gross, misrepresenting and spurious messages to blogs, interactive web journals, websites, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, twitter and WhatsApp platforms via mobile devices to arouse hate, prejudice and bias against a political group that spirals into political violence and genocide. Hence, social media abuse is not only a perilous social media behavior, it is detrimental and antithetical to the survival of public administration in Nigeria. Unfortunately, social media abuse involving taunting, mocking, negative labelling, intimidation, gaslighting, name calling, issuance of threats, rumour spreading, ethnic, religious or gender based stereotyping, misogynistic or sexually debasing comments and libel triggers and leads to the spread of sectional and political strife and conflicts all of which pose a threat to public administration in Nigeria (Olojede,2021).

Aside that (Tsegyu and Kelvin, 2021) has observed in recent times social media has been identified as platforms that aid terrorism and encourage insecurity and it is also used as channels for recruiting malicious individuals for propaganda especially among politically deviant users. For example, in Nigeria, Boko haram is actively involved in the use of social media platforms in distribution of propaganda contents and the reach is unimaginably wide and so beyond the division and dissension social media abuse creates, it has also been observed that this repugnant and unpleasant pandemic has gained normalcy among many internet users across the globe as many in a bid to engage in the political activities become involved in using social media for threats, viciousness, terror and bigotry against the perceived supporters of their opponents. However, threats, viciousness, terror and harassment should be unlikely occurrences in the Nigerian cyber space because of the communal culture

Nigerians are known for yet the issue of social media abuse has persisted which has now snowballed into making the administrative environment tensed, heated, volatile and unsafe and thus turned electoral activities into an opportunity for electoral violence, ethnic strife and unnecessary blood bath (Olojede,2021).In the light of this, the study seeks to examine the negative impact of social media abuse and its implications for the survival of public administration in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the causes of social media abuse in Nigeria
2. To identify the implications of social media abuse for public administration in Nigeria
3. To proffer policy solutions to the menace of social media abuse in Nigeria

Conceptual Clarification

Social Media Abuse

Social media is an invaluable means of disseminating information to the citizenry. Hence, it has become a powerful tool for propaganda, maliciousness, terrorism, electoral violence and insurgencies. In lieu of the Nigerian situation, it acts as a two-edged sword wherein it allows citizens unlimited access to information without limitations at the same time, it has been used as a tool to circulate unverifiable and deceptive information to citizens (Ani, Anikwenze and Isiani,2020).

Thus, with all the socio-political, economic, technological and educational benefits social media has brought to man, it has not come without a costly price. Oluwagbohunmi (2017) noted that many internet users particularly in Nigeria have misused social media by disseminating provocative and misleading information that has generated ethnic conflicts and has also caused administrative, economic and security threats in which has created a rife environment for constant political violence, electoral rigging, administrative violence, bigotry, corruption, sycophancy, injustice, mudslinging, prejudice, rage and political polarization .Unfortunately, these social media vices paralyzes the effectiveness of public administration and creates political apathy that leads to the destruction of Nigeria's public administration. Therefore, Social media abuse can be seen as any activity involving harassment, altercations or mistreatment carried out by an offender against a victim through the use of internet before, during and after electoral campaigns. This suggests that social media abuse is any reprehensible social media activity in which computers or internet networks are used as a tool for intimidation, cruelty, inflammatory statements and blackmail particularly for political motives (Olojede,2021). Similarly, some desperate politicians employ some deviant internet users to engage in smear campaigns in order to defame their opposing political candidates and damage their public image as well as their reputations during various elections. Thus, they do this by employing different manipulative tactics such as the production and dissemination of hate speeches to engineer violence in some particular regions and create disharmony, hate and dissension against their perceived political opponents or ethnic groups in order to slothfully and craftily get the electorates on their side so they can win elections (Ekwueme and Ugwuta.2017).Therefore, social media abuse is the unconventional and contemporary form of perverted political participation in which perpetrators intentionally

offend their targeted victims using e-mails, Facebook, Instagram, websites, twitter and WhatsApp platforms to endanger their perceived political opponents in order to encourage hostile political attitudes. Sadly, all of this volatile administrative violence often riles the electorates up into political rage, intra and inter party conflicts, ethnic and communal clashes and violent hatred which undermines elections and consequently sabotages Nigeria's public administration (Olojede,2022).

Concept of Public Administration

Public administration is a prominent structure of all nations irrespective of their system of government (Fatile,2007) and so generally speaking, public administration is concerned with managing change in pursuit of publicly defined societal values. Basically, public administration is the cooperation among people using available resources to achieve public policy and governmental objectives. This means that public administration is government-oriented administration and largely bureaucratic based on laws and rules and it is subject to legislation and public opinion. In simple terms, the primary objective of public administration is the efficient utilization of men and other essential resources to promote the general good, to serve the public interest and to attain the general will be represented and contained under the fundamental objectives and directive principles of the state policy (Opaluwa and Akanni,2014).

Therefore, public administration is the detailed and systematic application of law. This suggests that public administration consists of all functionalities aimed at fulfilling or enforcing public policy. Hence, public administration is the organization and direction of all human and material resources to achieve the desired result. Thus, the common denominator in all of these is that public administration is the machinery for implementing government policies and programmes at all levels of government and so this means that public administration operates in the political context (Eneanya,2009). Fundamentally, public administration refers to the mechanics and structures through which government policies are implemented. It means the institution of public bureaucracy in a state and at the heart of public administration in modern society is the civil service and includes all the institutions at the national, state and local levels. As an academic discipline, it refers to the mechanisms through which government plans and implements its programmes. Therefore, the main thrust of public administration is that it is the harnessing of both human and material resources in pursuit of the implementation of government policies, goals and objectives (Afegbua,2021). In otherworld's is the total utilization of all inputs of a system to bring out a productive output. This reveals that public administration deals with policy formulation which is essentially theoretical and policy implementation which is practical and so public administration is concerned with the institutional framework of government, its socio-economic and political milieu and the behaviour of individual human beings who operate bureaucratic machinery. Basically, Public administration has to do with the marshalling of human and material resources in order to achieve the objectives of public policy (Kolawole,2020).

Types of Social Media Abuse that Sabotages Public Administration in Nigeria

According to (Ologundudu,2022; Olojede,2021) there are various forms of social media

abuse which shall be addressed below:

1. **Flaming:** This is a type of abusive social media behaviour that involves sending politically upsetting, rude and obscene messages in order to trigger the victim's attention
2. **Cyber Harassment:** This is another type of unpleasant social media behaviour that involves the act of consistently sending a person or group of persons offensive or provocative messages with the intent of tempting or riling them up them to engage in political violence
3. **Cyber Stalking:** This is another aggressive form of social media abuse that involves the act of intimidation which includes threats of kidnap or assassination to an individual, ethnic group or community if they do not support or vote for a particular political candidate during elections
4. **Denigration:** This is a dangerous social media behaviour that involves sending or posting false, malicious or cruel statements about a person or group in order to tarnish their reputation and create political and ethnic animosity that leads to electoral violence or genocide
5. **Masquerading:** This is another volatile social media behaviour that involves pretending to represent a particular political party, or political candidate and sending or posting materials that portrays the victim in a controversial light in order for the electorates to cast aspersions on the integrity of the victim or to put the victim in potential danger.

Reasons for Social Media Abuse

According to (Nwufo and Nwoke,2018; Olojede,2022) they highlighted reasons for the prevalence of social media abuse amongst internet users which will be highlighted below:

1. **Poverty and Unemployment:** Poverty connotes inequality and social injustice and this traumatizes and angers the youths especially when they see the political class brazenly and disrespectfully flaunting their assets and celebrations on social media and using national resources that is meant to generate development and alleviate poverty engage in ostentatious living and reckless waste while majority of the youths languish in abject poverty. Thus, they see social media as a convenient and accessible avenue to engage in trolling, cyber bullying and harassment in order to either attract the attention of the political class to their travails or vent out their frustration, anger and displeasure against poor governance, infrastructural decay, political impunity, poverty and unemployment.
2. **Codes of Conduct and Policies that address what constitutes social media social media abuse are not clearly articulated:** Policies and laws that address social media abuse especially as it relates to political participation are usually not stated expressly, explicitly and communicated to all internet users and members of the public. Similarly, effective penalties are often not clearly outlined, implemented or enforced on the consequences of hate speech and social media abuse particularly when it concerns politically relevant issues detrimental to democracy. Thus, the lack of holding social media abusers accountable for their anti-democratic activities constitutes one of the reasons why social media abuse is prevalent and has become a

threat to the survival of public administration.

- 3. Power of Anonymity:** In cyber space, social media abusers often take advantage of the relative power of anonymity social media provides to engage in anti-democratic activities that are malicious and inciteful for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred, ill-will or needless anxiety for politically motivated purposes.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employed the systems theory to explain the study.

Fundamentally, systems theory which was propounded by David Easton in the 1940s stated that the administrative systems are systems of interconnection and exchanges that impacts on society. Essentially, administrative systems are structural systems that exist within an environment and directly affects the society through daily and continuous transactions (Enemuo,1999). Thus, when the constant interactions and nature of an administrative system which is connected with each other is innately filled with administrative impunity, derision and bureaucratic corruption, it reflects in the relationship and communication on the cyber space. In other words, if the administrative culture, institutional structure and socialization process of a particular administrative ecology is chaotic, violent, full of bigotry, prejudice, bias and civil unrest, it reveals itself on the cyber space. This basically means that the inclusivity, social justice, respect for the rule of law and democratic tenets a society has for one another in the administrative environment is reflected on the internet and the execrable contempt ethnic aversion, political disregard, resentment, inter and intra party animosity, and communal irascibility a society has for one another is also reflected in the society. Hence, the recurring menace of social media abuse in the cyber space is only a manifestation of the inherent state of disharmony, heated administrative environment, violent electoral administration, ethnic resentment, economic injustice, terrorism and administrative upheaval in Nigeria's administrative ecology. Thus, the appearance of disdain, hate, threats, intimidation, viciousness and other forms of social media abuse continuously posing as a threat to public administration only gives an insight or revelation into the level of pervasive violence in Nigeria's administrative ecology that sabotages the effectiveness of public administration.

Methodology

Documentary method was adopted for this study. Hence, data was sourced from local, national and international academic publications. These consisted of relevant text books and academic journals. The data gathered from the aforementioned method was analyzed using qualitative descriptive technique.

Social Media Abuse and its Implications for Public Administration in Nigeria

The desperation of political stalwarts in Nigeria to acquire, control and ensure that their political party captures power by all means has accounted for one of the fundamental reasons for social media abuse (Okolo and Atiye,2022). Thus, the recourse to win elections at all cost is not unconnected to the nature and character of a lot of Nigerian politicians. Hence, social media abuse has become brazen, audacious, brash and pervasive because of the winner takes all syndrome which has become deeply entrenched in the Nigerian political and

administrative system and also because once elections are won or lost, losers know the torrid time that awaits them. Again, electoral victory confers on the winners unrestricted access to state resources at all levels which are often administered not only as their personal estate, but also as an instrument of patronage to reward kinsmen, family members, party loyalists, bureaucrats and cronies while the electoral loser become disempowered politically and administratively. Thus, some of the desperate politician's sponsor and encourage all forms of social media vileness to harass, oppress, intimidate and frame-up their perceived opponents in a bid to desperately win election. Hence, they do this by using the internet to engage in ballot rigging, vote buying, disruptions of the result collation process, multiple registration, voting by proxy, outright disenfranchisement, encouraging the sponsorship of violence in opposition stronghold by state officials, party agents and political thugs and outright falsification of electoral results. Unfortunately, these acts of social media abuse do not come without its consequences. Some of which are corruption, institutionalization of an ineffective electoral administration and electoral violence which leads to the collapse of public administration. Hence, these types of frail democracy can be likened to authoritarian democracy, neopatrimonialism democracy, democracy without choice, illiberal democracy and pseudo democracy. Sadly, these has been the reality of Nigeria since 1999 (elections without democracy) (Omotola,2021) some of which creates legitimacy crisis, ineffectiveness of public administration and births the propensity of military invasion into governance as can be seen in recent times especially in countries where military coup has occurred such as Burkina Faso wherein Burkina Faso's army ousted President Roch Kabore in January,2022 for failing to contain violence by Islamic militants. Mali- group of Malian colnells led by Assimi Goita ousted President Ibrahim Boubcar Keita in August,2020 over deteriorating security, contested legislative elections and allegations of corruption (Bate,2023). Furthermore, social media abuse has also created a heated administrative environment that has sabotaged the survival of an effective public administration in Nigeria. This can be seen in the divisive politics, civil unrest, wide spread poverty and the compromised law enforcement agents and judicial systems. For example, state sponsored suppression, insurgencies, crisis of resource control, secessionist moves, ominous clamor for power shift to southern Nigeria, ethnic and communal clashes, genocide and terrorism have all contributed to the rape of an effective public administration in Nigeria which has now being made worse by the invasion of COVID19 pandemic, inflation, food insecurity, banditry as well as the vested instability in the Niger-Delta and other oil-producing areas which all culminate to the destruction of public administration in Nigeria (Olojede,2022).

In addition to that social media abuse creates an environment that makes the effectiveness of public administration that leads to sustainable development almost impossible. Thus the wrong use of social media has created misinformation, hate speech and impunity which has spiraled into divisive politics, prejudice and hatred that has destroyed public administration by increasing administrative instability, political violence, economic uncertainty, the quest for secession and insecurity and so this lawlessness caused by propaganda has encouraged the establishment of unnecessary and very violent militias like Odua People's Congress, Bakassi boys, Unknown gun men. Eastern Security Network, Egbesu Boys and book haram. Lastly, the bastardization of social media especially on political issues has destroyed the effectiveness

of public administration by introducing anarchy and impunity into the political system wherein the spread of falsehood, sycophancy and cover ups of incompetencies has given bureaucrats and administrators the impetus not to feel responsible or accountable to the people and this has created room for poverty, collapse of administrative institutions and failure of policy programmes (Itodo, Ayuba and Adeyi, 2022).

Social Media Abuse: Lessons from America

While social media apps like facebook, instagram etc present themselves as democratizing forces and a vehicle for the enhancement of participatory democracy, it does not come without its dark sides or abusive patterns particularly dangerous contents that are detrimental to the survival of public administration in America (Fernandez and Farkas, 2021). Thus, with the understanding of this anomaly, systems have been set in place where social media apps and structures have been created wherein dangerously inciting news and narratives capable of destabilizing the socio-political system or administrative structures are filtered, excluded or blocked from passing through certain public domains and political news feed. Again certain checks are put in place wherein guidelines are established to make internet users sign certain forms promising to verify news before circulating and taking responsibility for abusive social media usage as well as orientating users on the healthy and safe ways of social media usage before granting the users access to certain socio-political online platforms. The purpose is to ensure the protection of human rights, democratic values, protection of public institutions, fair, respectful, secure, open and fair usage of online platforms in ways that do not instigate fear, rage, violence, threat to life racism, sexual abuse, rage bait, doxy and institutional structures (Montag and Hegelich, 2020)

Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the reasons for the pervasive impunity in the use of social media especially at the detriment of public administration in Nigeria is the empowerment of some nefarious politicians who are desperate to have an enduring presence on the political power and influence of the nation. Thus, they recruit some malicious internet users to generate and circulate misleading and spurious information to cause dissension in such ways that is capable of threatening the stability of public institutions and administrative structures just in a bid to win elections. Therefore, it has become necessary for the government through its agencies like the Federal Ministry of Communications, Federal Ministry of Education and Youth Development and Federal Ministry of Information and Culture as well as media professionals, CT specialists, Public Administrators, the academia and local government leaders to work together collaboratively in ensuring enlightenment campaigns and workshops are done at the grassroots level on the damaging effects of the wrong use of social media on public institutions and its implication for not just our public administration but on nation building and our overall national life.

In addition, enforceable policies which carry weighty penalties should be enacted for those guilty of sponsoring the enablement and misuse of social media as well as the abusers of social media. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance that relevant agencies should be established to monitor the misuse of social media so that the abuse of social media will not lead to the

annihilation of public administration that brings about national development in Nigeria. Lastly, it is important for the academia and researchers to complement the efforts of the government in clamping down on the wrong use of social media by designing and setting up courses that expose what social media basterdization is and how dangerous social media can be when abused especially for the survival of democracy, national development and by extension public administration in Nigeria.

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