

YOUTH ACTIVISM, SOCIAL MEDIA AND NATION BUILDING

BY

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Abstract

Youth is the major assets or human capital (resource) of a nation, hence the need to channel their energies accordingly and dissipate it appropriately for the benefits of their nations and humanity as a whole. Information is crucial in human economic, social and political interactions which are also vital in any effort towards building a virile nation. Social media has now become indispensable in our societies. Most of the major social media are predominated by the youth, exploiting it for one purpose or the other. What role could therefore be played by youth in their respective countries towards building a better societies using social media to disseminate their ideas and reaching out to their colleagues around the world? Using a simple analytical survey, this paper tries to examine how youth could constructively use social media in an attempt to build their nations and achieve a promising future not only for themselves but equally for the upcoming generations. All these are done taking into consideration the active role played by

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youth in the recent Arab spring with the use of social media and the implications not only for and on Muslim societies but the entire humanity.

Keywords: Youth activism, social media, nation building, resources, human capital.

1.0 Introduction

Youth particularly those who are under 18 years of age are said to be 46 percent of the total global population. In the United States of America youths below age 18 constitute 26 percent of her total population (Youth Activism retrieved from Wikipedia on 11-04-2011). Youths are endowed with certain features and gifts that should be properly harness or tapped for the betterment of their immediate societies in particular and the entire human race in general. It should be clear that while some of these gifts and features are latent others are very active. This, therefore suggests two things: (1) the need for proper, sound and quality education of youths in order to activate the latent potentials in them and also to channel them for appropriate and munificent use; and (2) youths generally lack enabling experience to match their energy, ambition and emotions as they are too emotional and passionate owing particularly to their youthful exuberance. This is going to be discussed further in the forthcoming paragraphs. Since as the saying goes that ‘One who works without knowledge is just like one who walks in darkness without lamp (Hassan Al-Basri in quoted in Ibn Al-Qayyum’Dirasa Vol. 1:83)’. The education as mentioned above should not only be effective but equally affective. By it being effective, we mean that it should cater for the needs of youths in particular and that of the society as well-both immediate and future. Being affective as used here means that, it should impact positively not only on the youths themselves but the entire society and humanity as a whole. Since youth are as emotional as we have observed, there is need not to just educate them but for proper guidance, mentoring and modelling in order that they could learn or tap from experience of their elders so as to dissipate their energy and talents gainfully and meritoriously. The interaction between the older generation and their youth counterpart should be cordial or symbiotic, after all, ‘the youngsters’ hands cannot reach shelves while those of the elders too cannot enter gourd’. There should therefore be mutual understanding and reciprocative assistance between them.

2.0 Conceptual Background

Attempt is made under this sub-heading to clarify or define certain relevant terms or concepts used in this study. It is hoped that by so doing, the main focus of the study would be discerned while the road map for reaching the goal of the study would equally be designed, hence, both the objectives and the method and methodology³ used are discussed.

³ Jonathan Grix (2004), *The Foundation of Research*, Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan pp. 30-33 clarifies these terms and state categorically the differences between the two. He opines that method signifies the

2.1 Definition/Clarification of Terms

The following terms and or concepts are clarified or given both literary and working definition in relation to the current work.

2.1.1 *Who are the Youth?*

Youth, according to lexicographers (Oxford, 6th edition), means the period of being young, especially the period between being a child and being fully grown or young men and women considered as a group. To economists (Adeyemo, 2009:57), ‘a youth is a person who is still in his productive years’. However, for our purpose, a youth can be defined as a person who is still in his/her formative years, undergoing character modelling, personality development and sometimes receiving training that has to do with human capital development. As he further observed, he is therefore influenced for good or bad, by whatever transpires in and around his environment since he/she learns through observation and experience. Youth as Adeyemo concludes could be between age bracket of 15 and 60 from whence the old age begins. *Youth is the only time to think and decide on a great course. Manhood with action follows. But it is dreary to have to alter one’s whole life in age...., the time past, the strength gone* (Brown). A young man... determined and willing, will find a way or make one, (Sidney N. Bremer).

2.1.2 *What is Youth Activism?*

The above question is apposite and germane to our study as it would guide us in discerning how it could be tailored towards nation building and bettering the lots of youths in particular and humanity in general. The term has been variously defined. For instance, Wikipedia defines it as, ‘when youth voice is engaged in community organizing for social change’. This definition is particularly relevant to the present study. Youth activism therefore takes place according to the given definition, when young people are involved in planning, researching, teaching, evaluating, decision-making, social working, advocating and leading actions on environmental issues, social justice, human rights campaign, supporting or opposing issues like abortion, anti-racism, anti-homophobia, xenophobia, anti-homosexual, war or ethnic cleansing, etc, all with particular reference to bringing about a social change. Students, it has been observed by many researchers to be at the forefront of youth activism especially through student unionism. Youth activism is considered by many people to be negative, counter-productive and therefore conjure an odious impression. In this study however, the focus is on how to make the best out of their activism.

2.1.3 *What is Social Media?*

approach, technique, manner or system of conducting a research while on the other hand, methodology is the system used to arrive at the suitable method for a particular research endeavour.

Social media are said to be a general name for websites that permit users to share content, media, photographs etc. The common ones are the famous networking sites like Myspace, Friendster, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Photobucket, whatsapp, etc. They are therefore described as media for social interactions which employs highly accessible and large communication apparatus. It is a web based and mobile technology which allows communication to become active and interactive dialogue. According to Kaplan et al (2010), it is a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which as he says, allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Some of the advantages of social media or the characteristics that make it distinct from other media-traditional/industrial electronic and print are:

1. They are easily accessible and relatively cheaper even sometimes free.
2. It allows everyone, including individuals to publish and access information unlike the traditional industrial media for which vital resources are required for publishing information.
3. It is a decentralised media with minimum hierarchy which is distinguished by multiple points of production and uses.
4. It requires less specialised skill and technical training, once access is gained into it, it could be operated or used by anybody with less difficulty at any time and place.
5. It guarantees prompt and immediate response. However, since a good number of traditional/industrial media have begun to use similar facilities, this may not continue to be a distinctive feature of social media for a long time.
6. Social media unlike industrial/traditional one is ductile and malleable. Errors in information could be corrected with immediate effect by way of comments and editing.

2.1.4 *Nation Building*

Nation-building could be described as the process or the procedure of putting in place all it requires for a state or rather a nation state to stand on its own as an independent autonomous state. Such process includes training and retraining or at best human capital development aimed at harnessing or exploiting the available resources in the country. In most cases, the training is majorly focused on areas of critical needs of a nation at a particular time. For instances, a nation that has just been independent may focus on administrative, professional, defence, and economic training among others. In a nutshell, nation-building means conscious, deliberate and concerted efforts made by people to address the fundamental needs or issues of their nationhood. Youths should be trained to respect the law of their land and be law abiding. They should take cognizance of what Archridamus, the King of ancient Sparta says while exhorting his subjects:

‘We are wise because we are not so highly educated as to look down upon our laws and customs.’

Observes Emile Durkheim (the French Sociologist):

‘A nation can be maintained only if, between the state and the individual, there is intercollated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individual to attract them strongly in their sphere of actions and drag them in this way, into the general torrent of social life.’

Based therefore, on Durkheim argument, Youth activism could be tailored towards nation building.

2.1.5 Resources/Human Capital

Resources are defined as means of production. Four such means have been identified by economists. These are: land, labour, capital and entrepreneur. While labour and entrepreneur are human resources, land and capital cannot be productive without human capital. Land, it has to be stated, as used here does not only means an ordinary site for industries and related buildings but encompasses all natural resources that may be deposited in the earth crust, vegetation, rivers and its resources etc, all of which are going to be latent until when they are put to productive usage by men. The utility or usefulness of the resources are basically therefore, affected by the level of civilisation as well as technological advancement of a nation. Hence, what constitutes an obstruction somewhere may be a very good means of construction elsewhere. This account for why nations and corporation give priority attention to human capital development as nothing could be developed without developing the human capital or resources. There is no gainsaying the fact that nations that fail to do this, would rank among the developing or underdeveloped states of the world. According to *Advance Learner’s Dictionary* human resources are people’s skills and abilities, seen as something a company, an organisation, etc can make use of. Resources on the other hand are defined as a supply of something that a country, an organisation or a person has and can use, especially to increase their wealth. Suffice to say therefore, that nations should give priority attention to their youth development as they constitute the bulk of their active human resources.

2.2 Methodology

The methods adopted in this study include interview and focus group discussion which has been tested and trusted to be the best for this kind of phenomenological study. Besides, books and relevant journals as well as appropriate site on the web are also consulted.

2.3 Aims and Objectives of the study

This work aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. To study youth activism with a view to see how it could be tailored towards nation-building.
2. To explore how social media could facilitate tailoring youth activism towards nation-building.
3. To examine the shortcoming or demerits of social media vis a vis nation-building.
4. To identify the indices of nation-building in order to facilitate youths activists' readiness to achieve them.
5. To examine the role played by youths in recent Arab spring and determine the extent to which they employed the services of social media in the struggle.

3.0 Features of Youth and Youth Activism

Youth activism gained momentum in the United States between mid and late nineteenth century as young people began to organise strikes or industrial actions to press for better working conditions, wages and working hours. This attracts special attention in the media for the young people thereby popularising their efforts. It continues up till 1930s when the American Youth Congress presents a 'Bill of Youth Rights' to the American Congress. Student unionism was quite instrumental in the formation of youth activism. The influence of student unionism was quite conspicuous between 1920s and early 1940s. So, in 1950s the Student Non-Violent Committee succeeded in bringing young people to more organized, bigger and formidable movements for civil rights. It was actually these efforts that eventually led to youth activism in the 1960s (Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia). There are certain features or characteristics which are peculiar to youth or those in the age bracket. There are equally some features that stand out youth activism from those of advanced adults. Those features are considered one after the other.

3.1 Features or Characteristics of Youth

Youths exhibits certain features that are peculiar to their age bracket. These characteristics are paramount to this study in order to know why youths do certain things and behave in a particular way. Although, the ones given below are not exhaustive, however, they constitute an eye opener to their frame of mind or more appropriately their psychology.

3.1.1 *Youthful Exuberance*: Youths possess young heart, head and mind bubbling with ideas. They are ever thoughtful with the questions of how and why prompting into their mind. The negative part of this is their urge to put into reality whatever is thought and believed by them with immediate effect and automatic alacrity. They want immediate answers to questions troubling their mind. They are always ready to act their dreams and turn them to achievements.

3.1.2 ***Ambitious/Self Actualisation***: They crave for so many good things. They want to venture into so many careers and are always looking for role models. They are easily carried away by charismatic eloquent speakers and leaders much as they aspire to be like them. The ambitions unless guided by their elders, are in most cases inordinate and therefore dangerous not only for them but equally damaging to the public health.

3.1.3 ***Energy, Vigour and Agility***: Essentially, most youths are healthy, hale and agile. This vitality is always purging them to want to do one thing or the other at a given time thereby making them to be restless most of the time. This characteristic should therefore be gainfully employed by leaders for the purpose of nation building and do not allow it to be wasted away on frivolities. Youth are not be allowed to be idle, for an idle hand is a devil's workshop as the saying goes.

3.1.4 ***Commitment***: Youths are generally committed to whatever they believe to be worthwhile. This is a positive feature of youth that could be exploited by leaders for the betterment of their societies and channelled towards building a formidable nation.

3.1.5 ***Desire to be Recognised and be Popular***: Most, if not all youths always want to be seen and be heard. He/she tends to be egocentric, think so much and argues a lot. He cherishes that his opinion be respected. He/she want to be recognized.

3.1.6 ***Emotion***: Much as he thinks a lot, he is equally too emotional. So, in most cases he is oblivious of the consequences of his actions and utterances. He/she therefore needed to be guided, mentored and properly trained by his/her elders.

3.1.7 ***Less Social Responsibility***: Since most of them are bachelors and spinsters, students and sometimes apprentices, they are yet to be saddled with serious responsibilities in the society. Hence, they are free and are ready for whatever challenge is before them. This also has its negative implications and hence the need for proper guidance for youth.

3.2 Youth Activism-its Forms and Configurations

Scholars have identified three basic forms of youths' activism, these are: social activism, youth driven activism and youth-led community organisations.

3.2.1 ***Social Activism***

This is a form of youth activism that basically focus on social reforms that may affect them or any other segment of the society. Major examples are education reform, children's right and government reforms.

3.2.2 Youth Driven Activism

This is the situation whereby young people are the prime movers within an adult-led movement. This is generally common to organisations with both youth and adult membership including political parties, National Youth Associations, etc.

3.2.3 Youth-Led Community Based Organisations

This is a kind of youth activism which has to do with all efforts/actions that are initiated, planned or designed, executed, evaluated and controlled by young people. This kind of activism provides youth with opportunities to learn about leadership in a gradual process particularly through experience. Examples are the World Federation of Democratic Youth, an international movement with United Nations Non-Governmental Organisation status. Others include community based youth organisations, social clubs, clubs and societies in schools and colleges, etc.

3.3 Aims and Objectives of Youth Activism

There are varied objectives for youth activism. However, prominent among them are:

1. self actualisation and better future;
2. security of lives and properties;
3. freedom of expression;
4. equal opportunities and even distribution of the wealth of their nations;
5. good governance that guarantee peaceful co-existence, sustainable development and environmental protection;
6. qualitative education, job and job security;
7. justice, equity and equality before the laws of their lands.

3.4 Ways and Means Adopted by Youth Activists and their Effects on Society

Several means are adopted by youth in their activities. Sometimes they engage in community development project, they also in some instances conduct their programmes via registered Non-Governmental Organisations, Student Unions and such other social cum intellectual forums. A greater percentage of their activities are socially beneficial and are helpful in the direction of nation building. These kinds of projects and activities are highly encouraged by not only the people but even the government. However, there are occasions when they consider policies and programmes of government as not being in the interest of people thereby taking to street for peaceful demonstration or protest, seeking dialogue with government functionaries to air their

grievances, placing advertorial in newspapers and jingles on radio and televisions. Sometimes, they go as far as hunger strike, industrial actions etc. These extreme positions though in most cases always begin peacefully but usually end up in breaking down of law and order. Since no government would like to tolerate breakdown of law and order, this always lead to confrontation. Hence, dialogue is considered as best option so that misunderstandings could be resolved amicably. This is humane and civilised. It is certain that where the rule of law is being respected and meritocracy rather than idiosyncrasies is given priority, the problems of demonstrations are very remote. It is vital to state here no matter how brief, that all the reasons mentioned above are relevant to why we had recent “Arab Spring”.

5.0 Youths, Nation Building and Social Media

Having identified who is a youth and his/her characteristics and having defined what is meant by nation building and social media, suffice to say therefore that there is need to ensure proper and sound education or training of youth so as to be able to contribute meaningfully towards nation building. This is human capital development. Enabling environment to realise their full potential should be created so that they may become professionals, technocrats, technologists, accountants, intellectuals and university dons, entrepreneurs and business tycoon and magnates, engineers and so on and so forth. A man is himself a jewel when he possesses knowledge, thus he need little or no further ornaments for he is adorned by knowledge which is hoped or believed to have refined his character and make him a cultured or civilised personage to be looked up to for inspiration by those around him for he is refined from being rude and crude. The education to be given to them should not be devoid of morality. Morality without knowledge is weak, knowledge without morality is dangerous. Knowledge and morality are the twain aims of education. If education fails to achieve this, it could be said to be ineffective as well as *inaffective*. Nations lives so long as their morality lives. When their moral declines, they also decline. Much as their education must be catered for, so is employment or job opportunities should be created. Where this is done there would not be problem. However, where it is neglected, there is bound to be problem; for the ‘idle hand as they say, is the workshop of devil’. Youths should be made to realise, as says Sidney N. Bremer, that there is no such thing as becoming a first class person [or nation] by second or third class efforts.

5.1 Forms of Social Media

There are several forms of social media. The prominent ones are internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, photographs or pictures, video, rating, podcasts, social bookmarking, etc. According to Kaplan (2010), there are six different types of social media, these are: collaborative projects, blogs and micro-blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds.

5.2 Youths, Social Media and Nation Building

Youth can employ social media for their benefits and for the purpose of nation building if as we have observed earlier they are given proper education and well mentored. A youth that is an expert in his chosen field or carrier would invariably be a source of inspiration to his fellow compatriots. Since they are being trained properly by the society, it would then be their turn to give back to the society, after all, he to whom much is given much is equally expected. They are therefore expected to be the ‘think tank’ for the society. In fact, youths have to be thinkers for their society, I mean positive thinkers as they are sooner or later going to be leaders in one way or another in their society. This is imperative given the fact that those who fail to think today are going to sink tomorrow. No nation can develop beyond the level at which her people thinks. It has to be borne in mind that ‘the heights that great men [nations] reached and kept were not by sudden flights. But they while their companions were fast asleep kept on toiling upwards through the nights.’ So, in a nutshell, as professional who had received both academic and moral training and are cognizance of their social responsibilities would be reaching out to themselves via social media since it is cheaper and easily accessible, thereby sharing and exchanging notes and ideas and cross fertilizing them in order to move their nation forward. They may for instance, open blogs, group-mail, etc, to discuss issues concerning their nation with the aim of moving it forward.

5.3 Shortcomings of Social Media

As good, cheap, easily accessible and useful as social media may be, it is not without its shortcoming. It waste time and cause moral and cultural drift. Since youth are easily influenced by what they see and read, this may be a major problem. This may lead to isomorphism or mimicry, a situation whereby they want to practise and explore what they have read about other people in far away land which of course may be against the law, customs and traditions of their own state. Sometimes they are so much influenced by those things that they even prefer to leave their own nation for those of their accomplishes. Frauds are sometimes committed via these social media.

5.0 Summary, Conclusion & Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following are the summary, conclusion and recommendations generated.

5.1 Summary

In the foregoing paragraphs, attempt has been made to unravel how youth activism could be tailored towards a productive end-specifically that of nation building. While definition of some term and concept were given, the aims and objectives of the study were also enumerated. Forms of youth activism as well as methods or means adopted to achieve their set objectives are also

looked into. Since youth constitute a major resources and vital strength of a nation, there is need to invest in them; as investment in them signifies investment in the future of the nation. It is prudent therefore, that nations invest in their youths by way of quality education. Youth are the future hope of the world. They are thus required to strive to make our world a safe haven for all by dissipating their energy in meritorious activities rather than destructive ones. Youth are agile and emotional and are always looking for role models. It is therefore necessary that leaders give the necessary inspiration that is required by them so that they could be rightly guided towards building a virile nation. The findings availed by the study show that the situation in the Muslim world warranted the recent Arab Spring and so the following conclusion was reached and recommendations are given in order to avoid its reoccurrence.

5.2 Conclusion

Youth activism is useful in order to prepare them for leadership role in the future. In a situation whereby right education is given and enabling environment is provided for them to realise their full potentials; there is no possibility of their activism to be derailed into violence. Muslim nations need to borrow a leaf from Malaysia as it is perhaps one of, if not the only Muslim nation free from political, social and economic turmoil into which her counterparts are plunged. Youths want to be assured of secured and promising future and since government is able to provide such assurance and enabling environment there is peace, harmony and progress.

5.3 Recommendations

Based upon the findings availed by this study, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- ❖ Nations should invest in human capital of their society (especially the youth) by way of sound, qualitative and affordable education;
- ❖ Youths are vital resources of a nation, hence efforts should be geared towards tapping them in order to guard against it being used for destructive purpose;
- ❖ Nations should ensure that rules of laws are facilitated, respected and followed;
- ❖ Special attention should be paid to mentoring in the training of youth since they are always looking for role models;
- ❖ Youth activism that are meant for peaceful co-existence, moral and spiritual training, social integration, health and physical fitness as well as those geared towards leadership skills and nation building should not only be encouraged but equally facilitated;
- ❖ Youths should be properly engaged in order to dissipate their energy for the greater glory of their society and humanity as a whole;

- ❖ Parents, teachers and governments should provide avenues for youths to develop their latent potentials;
- ❖ They should be given civic education or training;
- ❖ The institution of family should be rejuvenated and repositioned to play its vital role in the society.

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