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## **Insecurities and Social Media: Sociodrama as a Socio-Therapeutic Alternative**

*by*

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### **Abstract**

In the last one and a half decade, there has been a massive proliferation of social media use as well as an astronomical surge in the numbers of people with access to handheld and tabletop gadgets. While a dramatic reporting of news bordering on insecurity has become commonplace as shown in the information disseminated through these media, the reality is no doubt, as frightful as these social spaces convey. How much of a haven can citizens pretend to have when physical assaults, cannibalism, extrajudicial killings, and terrorism are the order of the day? This paper shall explore commonplace social media dramatic reports that border on societal insecurities, insurgencies, and inhuman behaviours replete in every social media platforms. The paper argues that attendant humanistic tendencies that drive people to share and comment on these recurrent social vices, vis-à-vis corresponding responses by concerned individuals, NGOs and government agencies have driven the multiplier effect of communal and socio-therapeutic gains. This paper, therefore, proposes a systematic virtual therapy, based on Moreno's theory of sociodrama to discuss and evaluate spontaneous traumatic news of insecurities in clustered groups within societies.

**Keywords:** Media, Dramatic, Insecurities, Trauma, and Therapy.

### **Introduction**

The trend of human relationship and interaction is dynamic and continuously changing. This change is synonymous with a lot of industrialization and technological innovation. A social community in the past relies on various forms of interactions to survive. But in this survival, the individual entity contributes verbally and with actions to support their intentions for a greater coexistence. In today's world, communication exceeds verbal, visual, written, physical movements, and traditional mediums to include virtual space communications found in the world of the Internet which is now "an environmental factor that almost the entirety of industrialized nations has been exposed to in recent years" (Mills, 4). The internet is now becoming an alternative to traditional habit of interpersonal relationships and for disseminating news daily. As innovation improves in today's world, with gadgets that connect to the Internet, newer Social Media Platforms

(SMPs) are being created by the minutes, making it almost impossible to re-establish traditional methods of interactions and news reporting. As virtual reality and communication increased, so have various SMPs emerged and expanded beyond person-to-person interactions and intergroup communications to large-scale information dissemination platforms. In recent times, SMP, which "are a collection of Internet websites, services, and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation, and sharing" (Reynol Junco, G. Heibergert and E. Loken, 1) has come to replace a lot of person-to-person and intergroup spaces for interactions. Social media websites "such as Facebook, Tweeter, LinkedIn, My Space, Wikipedia, Flickr, and YouTube are the number one activity on the web. In their statistical analysis on social media users, Hoosuited and We are social, (2020) reports that the global statistics of social media users as at April 2020 "has reached approximately 3.81 billion users or about 49% of world population". The increase in use is no doubt as a result of the proliferation of small accessible handheld and tabletop devices used to access the Internet. Because of their availability, social media use is now the "most widely accepted technological invention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century..." (Joshua Chukwuere and Chijioke Onyebukwa, 50). Daniel Miller, observes, that SMPs have moved away from the virtual space, and now belong to "another place in which people live, alongside their office life, home, and community life" (7). This new space that is lived by millions of people cutting across gender, status, age, and race is gradually setting the pace of how people think and behave to each other in real time. Besides, SMPs have emerged as media for discussing and sharing personal issues and getting real-time responses from other users and have been accepted for some time now as natural ways of socializing.

The continuous dependence on SMPs for news, political entertainment, commentary, health advice and remedies is alarming considering the number of people with access to devices that use them. The habit of patronage to these platforms is becoming second nature. As it were, the dynamicity of the world concerning technological advancement has continuously met religious oppositions and cultural pluralism. While the "concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns ... we seem to have entered the post-human predicament. (Rosi Braidotti, 1) Consequently, researches have attributed communicating with new technologies as "posthuman" attributes, which in itself has rendered humanity less human. (Millier, 2016). Fenn Griffin, *at el* (2014) as cited by Milles stated that due to "the high level of information trafficked through the Internet, there have been concerns that exposure to inaccurate information through SMPs could encourage false memory formation" (6). Popular SM (Social Media) handlers like Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and all sorts of micro-blogging sites rank highest in patronage and have a penchant for carrying instant news whether founded, false, real or amazingly accurate. In a recent report, Statistia, published that "in 2020, an estimated 3.6 billion people were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to almost 4.41 billion in 2025". With this astronomical numbers of people on SMP, a lot of messages and information is

circulating from one space of the globe to the other and thus making social media reporting an important tool in getting news/information to the people. According to Anita Howarth, (2017), "flows of publically available information across national borders have increased exponentially with the proliferation of social media sites." (32)

### **Material, Methods and Theory**

In this study, several social media reporting bordering on societal insecurities, insurgencies, and inhuman treatment were harvested systematical from popular social media platforms. These reporting were selected in relation to their common attributes of not just having traumatic inhuman contents, but because of the way the narratives of social media reporting have affected the perception and use thereof of social media devices in reporting such actions. The theory deployed in this study is sociodrama made popular by world-renowned psychologist Joseph Moreno. Citing Moreno, Peter Felix Kellermann (2007) describes sociodrama in terms of group therapy in which "common experiences are shared in action". (15)

### **Insecurities and Dramatic News on Social Media**

The instant and the extemporal influx of news that borders on dangers in the form of warnings, caution, and information is gradually dictating the emotional and psychological wellbeing of SMP users. So that, any attempt to even define the capacity and form of social media may prove abortive as agreed by Daniel Miller et al. 2016 that "to define social media based only on those that presently exists is limiting" (2).

There is a consistent reporting, however, of news coming not only from the immediate local of a social media user but, of an influx of news rushes (in forms of text messages, voice notes, video, and voice-to-voice communications, etc.) co-occurring at different parts of the world. This news is always available to users in real time without retractions or censoring in this part of the black continent. The gory or acceptable nature of communication, notwithstanding its impact on the mental and social health of readers, does not prepare users of its attendant trauma. Unfortunately, restrictions or warnings do not come with all forms of social media messages and reporting, even though Tim Markham suggests that people who view or read about other people's sufferings or emotions through other media are not likely to feel the kinds of feelings the victims themselves face. Because, emotional "recognition is enacted about particular stimuli, but in isolation, some practices {of emotional empathy} will appear stunted and partial or just ill-informed." (26) This view as it were, contravenes the actuality and instate-ness that has made community journalism through SMPs to thrive and replace reliable source of news reporting rampant even on international broadcasting news platforms. This is seen in all sorts of communication such as news on kidnapping, extortions, ritual killings, and terrorist attacks being reported in real time as they happen all over the world. The flip side of this kind of reporting is that, even though the information is reported per-time, and everyone plays the journalist, the urgency to relay instant news leaves self reporters no

time to edit such news. No matter how horrific a piece of news appears, it "can result in graphic images being relayed into global audiences' living rooms, with the same potential for vicarious trauma" (Brookes, Gwen, Julie Ann Pooley, and Jaya Earnest. 150)

Incidentally, the reality of outright horror that results in the consumption of unplanned but shocking news can result in psychological shock, trauma, and discomfort not only on one person but to as many people who view, read or hear these traumatic new. The experience on a larger scale is noting but a collective tragedy capable of destabilizing not just one user, but also the generality of users, which in itself is communal damage to the total wellbeing of the SMP community. Such news in themselves are alarming, and considering the number of people with access to devices that use them, the habit of patronage to these platforms is becoming second nature. This may be why some researches have attributed communicating with new technologies as "post human" attributes, which in themselves have rendered humanity less human. (Millier *et al.*) Meanwhile, Milles cites Fenn Griffin *at el* (2014) as stating that due to "the high level of information trafficked through the internet, there have been concerns that exposure to inaccurate information through social media could encourage false memory formation" (6). Popular social media handlers like Twitter, Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, and all sorts of microblogging sites rank highest in patronage and have a penchant for carrying news instantly both founded, false, real or amazingly accurate. As of 2018, Hafiz Muhammad Alli, the CEO of Omnicore Digital Marketing Agency, reported that the number of Facebook users alone had reached an astronomical "2.23 billion active monthly users"

Today, we live in a post-human society, where culture has gradually deconstructed humans, in its entirety. Human behaviours and psychological stance are every day, being shaped by information that slowly deconstructs the very essence of humanity as experienced in the gradual shock, dismay, empathy, and horror that circulate on social media not just for our information, but for the gradual eradication of the minute humanity still born within the human race. Expressing this argument, Katherine Hayles (1999) insists that:

when the self is envisioned as grounded in presence, identified with... teleological trajectories, associated with solid foundations and logical coherence, the posthuman is likely to be seen as antihuman because it envisions the conscious mind as a small subsystem running its program of self-construction and self-assurance while remaining ignorant of the actual dynamics of complex systems. (286)

The antihuman that the world is gradually becoming is moving towards an era of self-destruct, a position that cannot be reversed by the same system that started it other than a whole new revolution against man himself. Daniel Chernilo (2017) cites Heidegger 's three-point position on the death of humanism that states that "Humanism has failed to

deliver on its most essential commitments of making human life dependent on the autonomy of the will." (40) Would the free license of the will chosen and given to man annihilate man from self-destruction? Man is supposed to be able to acquire the ability to choose between good and evil in his interpersonal relationship with humans in his environment, as he is groomed in the everyday culture of existence that begins at home.

Yochai Ataria (2017) "home is the culture (language, the set of perceptions and beliefs, and all the rest) that you grew up with and into. It is the society to which you belong. At the moment of trauma, society is revealed as what it truly is- rotten to the core. Society for its part cannot contain clear and sober observation. (85) Trauma gives us a sense of reality that jolts us to a state of fear where we wish for nothing but to be within the comfort of a familiar place. That familiar place to a lot of people is home. The distance between our emotional reactions to toxic traumatic posts that are shared on SMP is what makes us feel a sense of loose and despair and make us wish that insensitive and tragic news were far removed from our comfort zones. Tirrell Lynne (2017) finds that "toxic speech, like any toxin, is a threat to the well-being and even the very lives of those against whom it is displayed. The level of threat can fluctuate, its power can be acute or chronic, the damage can be local or systemic, but toxicity damages all it touches" (140) News and video clips with traumatic elements are toxic to the human mind, psychological wellbeing as well as speeches. Words in their powerful essence may be a means of acquiring healing since they are as therapeutic as they are toxic.

Going by these findings, we can infer that reportings on SMPs that incite any level of anxiety, tragedy, and fear can as well be responsible for causing trauma not just on one user but collectively to the vast number of people who have access to them.

## Case Studies: Common Place Dramatic Reports on Social Media

### Case Study A: The Chibok School Girls Kidnapping

On 14<sup>th</sup> April 2014, 276 schoolgirls were abducted from their school premises in the Northern part of the Country. (Ndlovu and Svodziwa, 2017) This case hit the virtual world faster than lightning and became the most tweeted and shared news on social media networks twenty-four hours after its occurrence was reported. All over the world, the "Bring Back Our Girls" slogan hit the Internet with a bang, and the feeling of insecurity in schools became a primary concern to parents, students and school owners.

### Case Study B: Custom Officer Shooting on Benin Shagamu Road

A scary video went viral on all social media platforms earlier this year showing live, a "trigger happy" custom officer who shot and killed a foreign traveler. A woman in the video was heard screaming: "They have killed him. We were coming from the airport together!" (WhatsApp video) This video got to hundreds of viewers who also shared it on their social media platforms within minutes to other people. Soon the Internet was trending with the video as people all over started reacting through comments reflecting their frustrations on how some disgruntled members of the police and the armed forces

have resorted to indiscriminate and extrajudicial killings of innocent citizens. The resultant effect of this news to the public was an immediate reaction from the boss of the Federal Road Safety Commission.

### **Case Study C: Jungle Justice in the Killing of Four University of Port Harcourt students in Aluu**

In the early hours of the Sunday of October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012, a horrific and shocking video of the barbaric killings of four University of Port Harcourt students hit the Internet. The four boys who were said to have been set up by their friend who himself was owing to them money and refused to pay. The four boys Ugonna Obuzor, Toku Lloyd, Chiadika Biringa, and Tekena Elkanah met their end when an unverified false alarm was raised against them, and angry vigilante groups minted jungle justices on them. Saheed Owonikoko and Ifukor Uche report that the vigilante members of the Aluu community, "often carry out jungle justice on their victims without thorough investigation" (91) as they did to the four Aluu boys tragically murdered in cooled blood. The boys died, again and again, any time a user watched the shocking video. As it were, every user shared the video to other multiple users on various SMP until the government and well-meaning Nigerians were forced to speak on it.

### **Case Study D: The Self Electrocuted Young Man**

A young man is seen on the top of a roof, reclining towards the front of the house and standing close to a high-intensity tension wire flexing his muscles. At first glance, you see a man standing dangerously to jump for fun, and may have prompted onlookers to begin to record the scene, expecting a heroic jump from long practiced sporting activities. What hits the SMP next leaves an indelible mark of horror, toxic enough to cause traumatic damage on users. While the attention of onlookers gets drawn to this action, they started recording real-time, and before long and amidst a cry of no! Don't! The man jumped and held on to the live wire, and instantly, the young man was electrocuted and roasted to death. As with case studies B and C, every time the video is watched and shared, the man gets electrocuted over and over again. In the privacy of individual social media spaces on SPM or as a collective community partaking in a death that could have been occasioned by anything only the man who took his own life may have been able to say.

### **Case Studies and Discussion of Possible Trauma.**

The cases under study as it were, did not happen simultaneously at the same time, local or date. They took place at different times and under different circumstances. Case study A took place in 2014, case study B in 2019, case study C in 2012, and case study D in 2019. Denominators that necessitated their purposive selection are as follows:

- i. They all exhibit tragic similarities in visual, speech, and emotional toxicity.
- ii. They have a possibility of resulting in intense trauma on SMP users.

- iii. They all happened in real time and were covered on handheld devices and shared widely on various SMPs.
- iv. They all happened in the presence of people who first recorded and shared them on SMPs, as soon as they occurred.

Hundreds of such incidents have occurred, and have been reported exponentially on SMPs. But for this study, these cases shall suffice. Secondly, the feeling of disbelief, fear, and emotional trauma is possible on individual and collective level even though they are indirectly exposed to trauma through SMP. Key Chang (2017) points out that trauma "is not only observable amongst victims of traumatic experience," but also amongst "individuals who are indirectly exposed to a traumatic event" (2) like in this case through SMP. Therefore, these exposures are capable of eliciting painful emotional, cathartic feelings on SMP users.

In case study A, everyone saw and watched in horror as the news of the Chibok kidnapping unfolded, with the story still trending till date since the government has not succeeded in realising all of the girls from their abductors. This year, 2019 made it five years since the girls remained abducted, and a lot of statement and promises have been made by the government, concerned individuals and philanthropies both in Nigeria and all over the world to the parents and relatives of the girls in relations to bringing them safely home. Yes, rumor has it that a number of them have returned with psychological mantel and emotional bruises capable of traumatizing the returned Chibok girls following their experience of rape, slavery, and mascara. Up till now, whenever the story is told or shared, the feeling that is invoked in parents and concerned users become a collective feeling and communal tragedy

For case study B, The viewers saw in a split second as a customs officer cocked his gun, aimed and fired straight at a young man standing some distance away trying to settle a misunderstanding. As if in a horror movie, the peace-making young man collapse simultaneously as the gun fired. The man died instantly with a shot to the head. As the video of the killing spread, empathizing viewers kept sharing the story on social media until relevant authorities commented on it. The comments that heralded the shares of the videos by users, commonly addressed the feelings of dread and horror, as users who commented feared gravely for the family of the diseased.

In case study C, The four Allu boys were recorded live in their last dying moment begging for their lives to deft and irrational vigilante groups who inhumanly snuff life out of them. As usual, it was recorded and shared on various SMPs.

Finally, in case study D. The watching spontaneous journalist and the people with him watched in horror as an abled bodied Nigerian jumped to his death. The feelings of fear and anxiety are the attendant outcome of some news when shared for the consumption of users. Like the Aristotelian audience, the individual SMP user is caught up in a dramatic, but cathartic emotion each time alarming news hits their virtual spaces. And time and time again, moment-by-moment the addictive nature of social media platforms reveals yet another dramatic, but traumatic action the one person audience must

experience each time a sorry story is seen or read in this theatre of madness that is gradually replacing the real society. Do we now relate the spaces of SMP as a dramatic theatre of horror? When daily we read, see, hear, and share the following kinds of news:

- Ritual killings,
- Extra judicial killings by police,
- Terrorism, especially in the northern part of the country.
- The Fulani herdsmen
- Kidnapping in the Niger Delta, Lagos, and Abuja
- Children disappearance from schools, homes, streets, etc.
- And ridiculous statements and decisions made by politicians on behalf of the masses etc.

### **Humanistic Tendencies and News Shearing**

The tendency to share information that bothers on insecurities and treat to lives and properties is an innate act of mutual loyalty and neighborliness born out of survival in a cultural and traditional belief system. It is typical in communal societies to help safeguard the lives of others against impending danger as such practice have been used to increase the tendency of an SMP user to share the experience with friends neighbor and family member. As seen in the cases studied, and with speed, the incidents are spread instantly to multiple users of SMP, attention became drawn to them as concerned individuals and government agencies started responding almost immediately to the cases. Suffice it to say that the urgencies with which this news traveled to relevant but concerned authorities would not have been possible if users didn't break out of the privacy of these spaces to share. Thus, there is a possibility that resultant traumatic cases, both personal and collective can be reduced if this same medium is used to retell follow-up efforts made by the government and other concerns body to remedy these tragedies.

### **Intervention and Socio-therapeutic Gains Through Drama.**

Comments, responses, and shares of news reporting have recently been able to draw sympathies resulting in the intervention from government and relevant agencies ongoing in cases A, B, and C. For case D, nothing other than the dramatic but live suicide of a young man has been reported. The reason for his actions and the effect of his social media suicide on his family and loved ones has not been transmitted to the public. Such news, if it exists, will one day find its way to the same SMP that first exposed it because the spread of news and information on these SMP works continually in a clockwise manner. When the story exists, it gets shared, and because of this, it is possible to use the same SMP medium to remedy possible traumatic experience shared by users individually and collectively.

Thus possibilities exist that systematic therapy using socio-dramatic sessions in rebroadcasting news of possible outcomes from various interventions that we have seen, especially in cases like A, B, and C will help traumatized users.

Socio-dramatic sessions derived from Moreno's sociodrama experiments is an "experimental group-as-a-whole procedure for social exploration and intergroup conflict transformation" (Peter F. Kellermann, 15) that can be situated and used by experts especially drama therapist to re-assess traumatic incidents, evaluate them and rebroadcast same to help users. Citing Moreno as well, Carrine Mertz simplifies sociodrama as a:

Theatre of spontaneity ... where members went out into the world and brought back information from news events. From there, actors were assigned roles in the story and were then asked to act out the scenario on stage in front of an audience. This way of acting out stories shed light on the interpersonal workings and dynamics within the story, allowing the audience to see the story from a whole new perspective. (24-25)

### Recommendations and Conclusions

From the foregoing, we have been able to establish that both individual and collective trauma toxicity is possible with regular consumption of tragic news and reporting on SMP. If this continues, more SMP users are liable to be affected both psychologically and emotionally. This paper, therefore, recommends that drama therapist should deploy the method of sociodrama as proposed by Moreno using virtual spaces of the SMP to reconstruct positively some if not all, but some of the most traumatic experiences on social media and rebroadcast such to help improve their effect on users. In doing this, drama therapist can work in conjunction with government agencies, philanthropists, psychologist, and social media bloggers to retell traumatic experiences. Therefore, if social media has moved from its virtual space to our own living spaces, then the spat of terror and insecurities as reported in this real space of living can be transformed using therapy through dramatic to reduce the effects and shock of such news.

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