Voices from the other Side: Reclaiming Africa's Story through Social Media

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Abstract

With the meteoric advancements in science and technology, the world has increasingly evolved into a global village: bringing in diverse nationalities together at the global table. In this new tapestry of cultures and identities, Africa, with its torturous past history of racism, slavery and colonization, which adversely eroded her cultures and identity, often struggles to extricate itself and stand out in this heavy cauldron of misresented narratives and global influences that threaten to drown out her distinctive voice. This study, cognizant of the current global tilt of young people away from a formal classroom setting towards the more hybrid social media platforms, coupled with the democratization of information dissemination and interactions that these platforms bring, poses a critical research question: Can social media serve as a newmedium for reclaiming Africa's story? To answer this, the study employing a method of criticalanslysis and relying heavily on secondary sources such as books, research articles and archives to carry out the discourse, discovers that misrepresentation of Africa overtime by Western media has led to identity crisis for Africans, especially young Africans of the contemporary age, who do not know Africa beyond the Western narrative. It notes that given the common placeof social media in the contemporary world, it can serve as a veritable instrument for reclaiming Africa's story: creating abalance inpast narratives told by the West and currently by globalization, which robs Africa of its distinctive identity.

Keywords: *African Identity, Social Media, Global Village.*

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Stories are important. Not just stories but how they are told and who tells them. It is when the latter is compromised that we have single stories. This fact was aptly captured by Chimamanda Adichie in her groundbreaking 2009 TED talk, when she noted that a single story about a people is created when people are shown as one thing, and nothing else, repeatedly. In this way, they become nothing else than they are. She buttressed this point by quoting the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti who opined that to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and start with "secondly" (Adichie, 2009).

> Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state and you have an entirely different story(Adichie, 2009, min 10:40).

The above assertions findexpression in Africa, whose stories have been hijacked by the West over the years. Its torturous history of slavery and colonization and their justifications are a testament that her story as a people started with the infamous prelude, "secondly". This has over the years and even in contemporary times birthed stereotypes and misrepresentations of Africa, that go the extreme stretch of often shielding the African identity and even eroding it.

With the meteoric advancements in science and technology, the world has increasingly evolved into a global village: bringing diverse nationalities together at the global table. In this new tapestry of cultures and identities, Africa, with its torturous history of slavery and colonization, often struggles to extricate itself and stand out in this heavy cauldron of global influences, which often drowns out its voice. As a new generation of Africans emerges coupled with their massive tilt towards social media, which relegates the traditional print and classroom settings, they tend to rely primarily on social media for most information and interactions. With the mainstream media harbouring a substantial amount of age-long misrepresentations of Africa, and with the global village quickly eroding African culture and values that mark their distinctive identity. These young Africans are forced to grapple with the issues of identity. Sadly, they might only make sense of their African origin and identity solely based on information construed in the Western framework.

It is on this premise that the use of social media in reclaiming the story of Africans gains its relevance. Chinua Achebe in his Things Fall Apart adroitly utilized the Igboproverb, which says until lions have their histories,the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. With this, he calls for Africans to tell their own stories. In the past, African stories have been told by the West who had the power of the media and all print literature. And power plays a great role in telling the right stories. Like our political and economic worlds, stories too are dependent on power: how they are told, who

tells them, when they're told and how many stories are told (Adichie, 2009). But with the advent of social media, there is a democratization of this power, as everyone can now share their story and it disseminates to millions of people all over the world in seconds.

Social media has its negative sides (Bhanye et al.,, 2023)such as creating an anti-social generation, negatively influencing African culture, promoting cyberbullying, criminal activities, the spread of sensationalism, hate speech, xenophobia, threats to national security, and false information among others,overall, social media has become a "valuable repository of information," a "hyperspace," a "new world," and a "form of currency" in its own right(Bhanye et al.,, 2023).Social media has transformed communication and social interactions across Africa. People now create, share, exchange, and modify their ideas in virtual communities. Social media has bridged geographical distances, fostered user-generated and interpersonal communication, enabled rapid and efficient interaction, empowered society with unrestricted information flow, and supported online learning and professional activities.Social media also promotes decentralized democracy and enhances mass political engagement.It has also become a platform for Africans to demystify the "dark continent" narrative(Bhanye et al2023).

The primary argument of this paper is that social media can serve as a veritable channel for the education of the contemporary generation of young Africans by reclaiming African stories through the creationof a balanced narrative that will shed light on the true African identity.It argues that there is more to Africa than the negative narratives. It argues that in the global village, Africa's only chances of survival are through telling her stories through their art and their life. This paper does this byexploring the concept of African Identityand Africa's historical past and the misrepresentation of Africa over the years. It then proceed to examine the concept of a global village and the impact of Africa's historical past and globalization oncontemporary Africa. Then it proceeds to explore the concept of social media, its use in Africa and critically examines, how Africans can leverage social media to reclaim their stories as a people. Finally, it concludes on a strong note that social media, if properly used, is an essential tool for reclaiming African stories. To do this, the paper relies heavily on secondary sources such as books, research articles, archives and internet sources to carry out its investigation.

Conceptualizing African Identity

The emergence of the quest for an African identity within the realm of historical and intellectual discourse can be traced to the nexus of racial discrimination, slavery, and colonialism (Baldwin, 1965). This quest represents a concerted effort to reaffirm African heritage and individuality in the face of pervasive Western biases. Africans sought to acknowledge and delineate their role in assessing the richness and potential of their cultural heritage, while also fostering dialogue with Western perspectives (Baldwin, 1965).

The delineation of African identity engenders diverse perspectives, although this study does not delve deeply into the intricacies of these perspectives. Instead, it aligns with the conceptual framework articulated by Ndubuisi (2013) and Oko & Ogbodo (2022), particularly within the contemporary context of globalization, which tends to homogenize cultures and obscure existing distinctions.

Ndubuisi (2013) conceives African identity as encompassing the fundamental attributes that allow for the appropriate and comfortable identification of any African individual, along with an inherent unity underlying the diversity of African peoples. This identity transcends mere geographic or circumstantial affiliations, emphasizing substantive elements of being. In contrast, Oko & Ogbodo (2022) assert that African identity encompasses the distinctive characteristics and beliefs that enable the recognition and appreciation of African individuals or societies, including their cultural practices, traditions, and values. They caution against the misconception that African identity is monolithic, highlighting instead the nuanced variations across the continent.

However, the historical narratives shaped by Western perspectives, coupled with the contemporary forces of globalization, have sought to obscure this distinct African identity. Consequently, many young Africans find themselves grappling with questions of identity amidst this cultural flux, perpetuating the Western notion that Africa lacks a cohesive cultural identity. It is imperative to recognize that the conceptualization of African identity does not imply universal acclaim for all African cultures; rather, it underscores the importance of promoting the positive aspects of these cultures, often marginalized in narratives that portray Africa in a negative light. Thus, a deeper exploration of Africa's historical past is warranted to elucidate the origins and implications of the quest for African identity.

African Historical Past and the Quest for Identity

A comprehensive examination of Africa's historical trajectory necessitates an exploration of three pivotal phases: racism, slavery, and colonization. These epochs represent systematicattempts to deprive African peoples of their fundamental human rights, including the rights to self-determination and self-identity, spanning across centuries. The emergence of the "Black Consciousness Movement" across Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, South America, and the broader Pan-African world can be understood as a response to these historical injustices, aimed at reaffirming African identity (Benjamin, 2010).

As observed by Kanu (2013), a critical analysis of Africa's historical evolution reveals three primary catalysts for the quest for African identity: ideological race classification, the trasnsatlantic slave trade and the attendant dehumanization of Africans, and the era of colonialism and exploitation. It is upon this tripartite framework that our examination of Africa's historical past and the quest for identity will be predicated, as delineated by Kanu (2013).

Ideological Race Classification

The 19th century heralded an era marked by pervasive manifestations of racism, characterized by a confluence of diverse theories and conceptualizations regarding the essence of the human condition. It was during this period that Charles Darwin formulated his seminal theory of "origin of species by natural selection," positing that within the myriad variations of life, nature selects certain traits for survival while consigning others to extinction. Berge (1973), as cited in Kanu (2013), contends that evolutionary thought served as the purported justification for numerous pernicious practices and ideologies spanning both the 19th and 20th centuries.

This evolutionary discourse permeated various regions, exerting profound influence and engendering some of the most egregious manifestations of racism in human history. In Germany, for instance, it precipitated the propagation of virulent racial ideologies, culminating in the abhorrent atrocities of the 1940s, epitomized by the crematoria of death camps. Similarly, in Africa, evolutionary thought catalyzed the emergence of enduring and pervasive forms of racism, representing a profound and far-reaching legacy that continues to reverberate.

Masolo (1994) contends that the perpetuation of racial hierarchies stemmed from cultural biases, which found expression and reinforcement within the works of Western scholars. Linnaeus (1758), as referenced in Kanu (2013), articulated a hierarchical arrangement of creatures ordained by God, with humanity occupying the pinnacle. Within this hierarchy, Linnaeus delineated further distinctions, positioning the black race closest to the lower orders of animals, while elevating the European race to a superior status. Linnaeus categorized races based on perceived traits, characterizing the Ameraicanus as tenacious and governed by tradition, the Europeans as inventive and governed by ritual, the Asiaticus as stern and governed by convention, and Africans as cunning and governed by caprice.

Echoing Linnaeus's sentiments, Gobineau (cited in Kanu, 2013) formulated a similarly biased anthropology, positioning Africa at the nadir of human civilization. Gobineau asserted the primacy of European civilization while denigrating other civilizations as inferior and undeveloped.In alignment with this paradigm, Hume (cited by Chukwudi, 1998) advanced similar ideas, further perpetuating the notion of racial hierarchy. He noted:

> I am apt to suspect that the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of neither that complexion, nor even an individual eminent in action or speculation(p. 214).

Hegel(1956), also had a biased perception of the Negro. In his words:

> In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained to the realisation of any substantial existence.... Thus distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained. (p. 93).

According to the perspective presented, the characterization of the Negro by Western scholars as being confined to instinctual behaviour, and lacking the capacity to recognize beings beyond oneself, persists as a prevailing narrative. This sentiment is echoed by Levy-Bruhl (as cited in Njoku, 1993), who raised doubts regarding the ability of uneducated Africans to comprehend the concept of God.

Central to the discourse surrounding the African identity is the notion of reason, as elucidated by Masolo (1994). Reason is portrayed as a fundamental determinant that demarcates the boundary between civilization and primitiveness, logic and mysticism. This dichotomous perception of the Negro, perpetuated by Western scholarship, imposed a burden upon individuals of African descent, leading many to renounce their identity while others grapple with a sense of regret for their racial heritage.

Slave Trade and the Dehumanization of Africa

The categorization of Africans as inferior, primitive, and inherently unequal to the white race by Western societies facilitated their exploitation for economic gain. Concurrently, the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the Western hemisphere created a demand for labour in burgeoning European empires, particularly for the cultivation of crops such as sugar cane, coffee, cocoa, rice, indigo, tobacco, and cotton, as delineated by Kanu (2013). Unlike indigenous populations such as Native Americans, Africans possessed qualities deemed advantageous for labour, including agricultural expertise, familiarity with tropical climates, and resistance to tropical diseases. Consequently, the Atlantic slave trade emerged as a pivotal component of an international economic system, fortified by legal frameworks.

This epoch of exploitation endured for approximately five centuries, during which an estimated 12 million Africans were forcibly removed from their homelands and transported across the Atlantic, as documented by Kanu (2013). Kanu (2008) further delineates the destinations of these enslaved individuals, with the majority being directed to regions such as Brazil, the Caribbean, and Spanish-speaking territories of South and Central America. Smaller cohorts were dispersed to Atlantic islands, continental Europe, and English-speaking regions of North America, as observed by Gimba (2006) as cited by Kanu (2008).

Portugal assumed a prominent role in the early stages of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, commencing around 1440, followed by subsequent involvement from Spain, France, the Netherlands, and eventually England after 1560, with merchants from Liverpool prominently participating, as indicated by Kanu (2008). Portugal's contribution to

the slave trade is estimated to have transported over 4.5 million Africans, constituting approximately 40% of the total, during the five-century duration, as asserted by Kanu (2008). However, the 18th century witnessed Britain's ascendancy as the preeminent perpetrator, responsible for the transportation of nearly 2.5 million Africans during this period of intensified trade, as noted by Kanu (2008).

The trans-Atlantic slave trade epitomized a deplorable manifestation of human depravity, characterized by the manipulation and commodification of fellow beings across myriad contexts, as succinctly articulated by Kanu (2008).

Colonialism and the Exploitation of Africa

Colonialism in Africa was underpinned by a prevailing perception of Africans as sub-human, as articulated by Njoku (2002). This ideological framework facilitated colonialism activities which were ostensibly framed as a mission towards the redemption and elevation of the black populace to a semblance of human status. Before 1830, as observed by Mountjoy and Embleton (1966) as cited by Kanu (2013), European presence in Africa was predominantly confined to modest coastal trading outposts. The limited expansion was attributed to a confluence of physical and economic deterrents. However, the mid-19th century marked a significant turning point as European explorers commenced substantial incursions into tropical Africa. Consequently, the longstanding geographic mysteries of the African continent for Europeans, including the trajectories of major rivers such as the Nile, Niger, Congo, and Zambezi, were progressively elucidated within a span of fifty years.

In tandem with exploration, missionary activities burgeoned, serving to extend European interests, with resultant implications for trade. It became evident that sustainable commercial activities necessitated the maintenance of peace, a condition unattainable without administrative oversight and control in the hinterlands, as articulated by Hodder (1976) as referenced in Kanu (2013). Kanu (2012) contends that the multiplicity of European exploratory activities, originating from diverse nations including Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, Belgium, and Germany, precipitated Africa's transformation into a theatre for the intersecting ambitions of major colonial powers. By the early 1880s, these aspirations began manifesting territorially, as sections of the coast were progressively claimed by representatives of various European powers, fostering expansion across missionary, commercial, military, and administrative spheres.

The culmination of these dynamics, as argued by Hodder (1978) as cited in Kanu (2012), laid the groundwork for the European scramble for Africa, formalized by the Conference and Treaty of Berlin in 1884-5. Walter (1982) underscores the profound impact of colonialism, highlighting the erosion of self-determination and the resultant imposition of underdevelopment upon colonized societies.

This historical trajectory illuminates fundamental themes underlying Africa's quest for identity. It underscores the enduring legacy of colonialism, framed by negative perceptions of the continent, and elucidates Africa's ongoing struggle to redefine itself beyond historical misrepresentations. This quest for identity persists into contemporary times, accentuated by the challenges posed by globalization, as noted by Obijekwu et al. (2019), which threatens to erode indigenous African cultures and values. Consequently, the quest for identity remains salient, particularly among the youth in Africa, manifesting as an ongoing identity crisis in the face of globalization and the emergence of a global village.

Conceptualizing Globalization/ Global Village and Africa

Globalization embodies the conceptualization of a unified global community, akin to a "global village," signifying a state of global integration across societies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) plays a pivotal role in fostering this integration, particularly through the facilitation of trade and financial transactions, labour mobility, and the dissemination of knowledge and technology across international borders, thereby effectively transforming the world into a closely interconnected entity (Oko & Ogbodo, 2022).

Dukor (2008), as referenced by Oko & Ogbodo (2022), delineates five distinct phases in the historical progression of globalization. The ancient phase also referred to as the animistic phase, represents the nascent and rudimentary stage of globalization. Subsequent phases, such as the era of empires and slavery, witnessed Africa's identity crisis, characterized by the exploitation and suppression of indigenous religious and cultural practices, as well as the subjugation of human resources and developmental potential.

The colonization phase further entrenched Africa's marginalization within the global framework, as European powers partitioned and exerted influence over the continent through education and religion, under the guise of civilizing missions. The subsequent phase witnessed the influx of Western technology and scientific knowledge into Africa, perpetuating a form of cultural subjugation, as Africans were perceived as lacking contributions to the global scientific heritage. The contemporary phase, epitomized by the United Nations era, embodies a dual process of social and economic integration, facilitated by advancements in information, communication, science, and human rights (Oko & Ogbodo, 2022).

In light of these historical developments, the analysis of globalization extends beyond its fundamental principles to encompass its potential implications for Africa. The homogenizing tendencies inherent in globalization pose a significant threat to African identity, akin to the historical impacts of slavery, racism, and colonialism, which have historically shaped and contested the African quest for identity and self-determination (Oko & Ogbodo, 2022).

Impacts of Africa's Historical Pastand Globalization in Contemporary Africa.

The historical narrative of African-European interactions, shaped by phenomena such as the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and subsequent post-colonial dynamics influenced by globalization, has perpetuated a hierarchical power dynamic wherein European powers are positioned as dominant agents within the global community, while Africa is relegated to a status of conquered inferiority (Obijewu et al., 2019). The enduring impact of the slave trade, in particular, has left an enduring imprint of an inferiority complex upon the psyche of Africans, perpetuating a narrative wherein Africa is portrayed as reliant upon Europe for notions of civilization (Obijewu et al., 2019). Nwonye and Nweke (2016) assert that this entrenched inferiority complex has led Africans to largely abandon their indigenous cultural values in favour of adopting Western ideologies wholesale.

The advent of modern education further entrenched this paradigm, as the curriculum predominantly emphasized Eurocentric perspectives. Historical studies centred on European history, while geography focused primarily on Europe and North America. Additionally, language instruction predominantly featured European languages such as English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese (Obijewu et al., 2019). This educational framework engendered a new African identity moulded by acculturation, which not only neglected but also disparaged indigenous culture, as the adoption of Western values and languages became synonymous with intellectual superiority (Obijewu et al., 2019). Oguejiofor (2001) notes that proficiency in colonial languages became a hallmark of educational attainment, often at the expense of native languages, further eroding indigenous cultural heritage.

Africa, characterized by unparalleled linguistic and ethnic diversity, possesses a rich tapestry of cultural values that serve as a unifying force. However, Western incursions sought to marginalize African cultural heritage, perpetuating a narrative of cultural superiority rooted in Western ideologies (Kwame, 2009).

According to Obijekwu (2019), the trajectory of colonial development policies implied a deliberate suppression of indigenous history, a repudiation of cultural heritage, and an enforced adoption of Western cultural norms and practices among colonized populations. Colonization wielded significant influence in reshaping African culture and the collective perceptions of its inhabitants, resulting in widespread emulation of borrowed and artificial lifestyles that hindered Africa's ability to independently articulate its history, culture, and identity. Maduagwu (1999) asserts that Western colonial education played a pivotal role in fostering this cultural disorientation and the subsequent disintegration of African societies.

A comparative analysis between African traditional education and Western education illuminates fundamental disparities in educational philosophies and outcomes. African education, rooted in communal values, emphasizes moral instruction, character development, and mutual respect within cohesive social units. Both formal and informal, traditional education fosters unity and harmony, with individuals contributing to community life across various domains, including agriculture. Conversely, Western education imposes foreign cultural values at the expense of indigenous norms, designed to sever African ties to their cultural heritage (Obijekwu et al., 2019). Kwame (2009) contends that the neglect of traditional educational values has contributed to the decline of agricultural productivity, as educated Africans increasingly eschew farming activities, deeming them undignified.

Akindele (2002) characterizes globalization as a form of cultural imperialism that subjugates the African psyche, resulting in a loss of cultural identity and autonomy. Eberinwa and Ewuim (2010) assert that globalization engenders cultural domination, leading African nations to relinquish their distinctive cultural identities in favour of homogenized global standards. The proliferation of internet connectivity further exacerbates this phenomenon, with fears expressed that nations like Nigeria, despite their substantial internet usage, risk diluting their cultural heritage in the face of Western cultural dominance (Obijekwu et al., 2019).In essence, globalization perpetuates cultural hegemony, elevating Western norms as the benchmark for cultural relevance, thereby marginalizing and devaluing indigenous cultures (Obijekwu et al., 2019).

In the realm of commerce, Africans exhibit a preference for foreign-made goods over domestically produced items, as evidenced by the derogatory connotations associated with terms like "Igbo-made" and "Aba-made" when referring to homemade products (Obijekwu et al., 2019). This phenomenon reflects a loss of confidence in the quality of African-made goods across various consumer sectors, including food, clothing, and footwear, with foreign brands such as rice, Indomie noodles, and imported apparel garnering greater patronage.

Historically, Africa boasted a diverse array of high-quality products, including gold, animal skins, traditional medicinal herbs, cassava-based foodstuffs, honey, and wine. However, contemporary trade dynamics between Africa and its global partners are characterized by unequal exchange and exploitation, perpetuating a cycle of economic imbalance and dependency (Obijekwu et al., 2019). Achebe's (2008) lamentation over the erosion of African identity amidst the widening scope of globalization encapsulates the profound impact of external forces on African socio-economic and cultural landscapes. As globalization dissolves ethnic barriers and undermines national identities, Africa grapples with the construction of a new identity amid the disintegration of traditional norms and values.

This narrative underscores the enduring influence of Africa's tumultuous history on its contemporary realities, with globalization serving as a potent catalyst for ongoing

transformation and adaptation. The subsequent inquiry pertains to how Africa can harness the power of social media, an integral facet of globalization, to reclaim its narratives and reaffirm its identity. This necessitates a comprehensive understanding of social media, its prevalence in Africa, and its potential as a tool for empowerment and self-definition.

Understanding the Concept of Social Media

In contemporary discourse, social media has emerged as a potent force in communication, catalyzing the integration of a diverse global community into what has been conceptualized as a "global village." Within scholarly discourse, there exists a spectrum of definitions elucidating the multifaceted nature of social media. Leavey (2013) posits a nuanced interpretation, characterizing social media as a dynamic social structure comprised of interconnected nodes representing individuals or entities. These nodes are bound by various forms of interdependencies, including shared values, ideas, financial transactions, social affiliations such as friendship or kinship, as well as instances of discord or commercial exchange.

In contrast, the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (2008) provides a more focused delineation, defining social media, or social networking sites, as online platforms that facilitate diverse forms of interaction, communication, and collaboration among users. These digital spaces serve as virtual arenas wherein individuals converge to connect, exchange information, collaborate on endeavours, and engage in social interactions. In their words:

> on a basic technological level, combine social networking, a list of contacts and a profile. They are distinct from other applications in the way they support people's presentation of themselves, externalisation of data, new ways of community formation, and bottom-up activities. They are also distinguished by their ease of use and their reorganisation of Internet geography (p.35)

These definitional perspectives underscore the intricate nature of social media, portraying it as both a structural framework for interpersonal connections and a technological medium that fosters connectivity and interaction across global contexts.

Among various definitions of social media, the framework presented by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) resonates most significantly with the objectives of this study. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media encompasses a constellation of Internet-based applications that are built upon the ideological and technological underpinnings of Web 2.0, facilitating the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Crucially, social media is distinguished by its interactivity and inclusivity. Unlike traditional media characterized by one-way communication, social media engenders an interactive environment that fosters unlimited two-way exchange among users. Moreover, its inclusive nature transcends the rigid centralized gatekeeping

mechanisms prevalent in traditional media, welcoming participation from individuals across diverse demographics (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Central to the concept of social media, as expounded by Bhanye et al., (2023), is its diverse manifestations, spanning Internet forums, microblogging platforms, podcasts, social networking sites, bookmarking platforms, wikis, social curation sites, and weblogs. Examples of popular social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, MySpace, and other interactive websites (Bhanye et al.,, 2023). Notably, social media platforms exhibit a notable absence of stringent institutional gatekeeping mechanisms, granting users considerable freedom to publish content, which may not always align with societal norms or ethical standards (Bhanye et al.,, 2023). Furthermore, the majority of social media platforms operate on a non-commercial basis, thereby attracting a broad user base worldwide. The accessibility of these platforms, often free of charge, contributes to their widespread popularity, as users merely require internet connectivity and registration to engage with various social media channels (Bhanye et al.,, 2023).

In summary, social media represents a dynamic milieu for interaction and relationship-building, characterized by informality and accessibility. Its popularity stems from its ubiquity across multiple platforms, including laptops, netbooks, personal computers (PCs), tablet computers, and smartphones (Dominick, 2012, p. 94). Given the objectives of this study, it is imperative to garner an understanding of social media utilization patterns within the African context.

An Overview of Social Media and Africa

In the mid-1990s, the proliferation of mobile phone usage, initially predominant in developed regions, saw limited anticipation for expansion into African markets (Essoungou, 2010). However, Africa's contemporary internet landscape boasts a burgeoning market exceeding half a billion subscribers, surpassing the North American demographic (Bhanye et al.,, 2023). Essoungou (2010) underscores Africa's remarkable trajectory, characterized by swift and innovative adoption of mobile and internet technologies. Concurrently, the proliferation of social media platforms in Africa has experienced exponential growth, with Galal (2022) reporting a continuous rise in social media users across the continent, reaching over 384 million by 2022.

As of 2022, internet penetration across Africa was projected to reach 47%, a stark ascent from the 9% recorded in 2010 (Galal, 2022). Regional disparities in social media utilization reveal varying degrees of adoption, with Northern Africa boasting a 56% usage rate, while Southern Africa registers at 45%, and Central Africa lags significantly behind at 8% (Galal, 2022). Notable platform preferences among African users include WhatsApp favoured in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, contrasting with the prevalence of Facebook among Egyptian and Moroccan users. Facebook, a

global social media behemoth, has witnessed monumental growth in Africa, amassing 271 million users in 2022, with projections indicating an escalation to over 377 million by 2025 (Galal, 2022). Additionally, YouTube and Twitter command substantial African user bases, with approximately 180 million and 24 million users, respectively, as of the same year.

Recent data from March 2024, as presented by Shewale (2024), delineates regional distributions of social media users across Africa, with North Africa comprising 166.18 million users, followed by West Africa with 105.91 million users, East Africa with 80.82 million users, Southern Africa with 44.71 million users, and Central Africa with 24.71 million users. Globally, social media usage encompasses 5.17 billion individuals, equating to 63% of the global population, with a notable 85% of the world's mobile phone users actively engaging with social media platforms (Shewale, 2024). The average social media user interacts with 6.6 platforms and dedicates approximately 2 hours and 24 minutes daily to social media engagement (Shewale, 2024).

These statistics substantiate the premise of this paper, affirming social media's efficacy as a potent instrument for reclaiming Africa's narratives. Given the widespread adoption of social media as a primary communication medium, coupled with the expansive user base in Africa and globally, Africans possess unprecedented avenues for disseminating their stories. Consequently, the subsequent section of this paper delineates strategies for leveraging social media to reclaim African narratives.

Reclaiming African Stories throughsocial Media

> One's personality or identity can never be given from outside. It must come from within the individual. It becomes a problem when the individual is not able to define his identity or personality but anchors on the one given to him from people other than himself. The root of colonization, social segregation, political disenfranchisement and cultural discrimination was clear to the Africans. Walter Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped African expressed the root of the African predicament, which he predicated on exploitation and domination to reduce the African man to nothing or non-existence (Obijekwu et. al., 2019, p.12).

The aforementioned assertion underscores the imperative to reclaim narratives regarding Africa, historically dominated by the West through lenses of racial discrimination, slavery, colonialism, and presently, globalization. The propagation of negative stereotypes and misrepresentations depicting Africa as a "dark continent" inhabited by sub-human entities laid the groundwork for the egregious experiences of racism, slavery, and colonial subjugation. These narratives were systematically wielded by Western powers to undermine the self-worth of Africans, ingraining a pervasive sense of inferiority within their collective consciousness. In effect,

such narratives not only stripped Africans of their dignity but also obscured their authentic identity, relegating them to a subordinate status.

These narratives served as the fundamental framework or perceptual filter through which many Africans came to perceive themselves. The dominance of Western media and literature facilitated the perpetuation of a narrative that portrayed Africa exclusively through a lens of negativity, ensuring its continuous portrayal in unfavourable terms. The conceptualization of Africa within the Western discourse, as elucidated by Hegel (1944) and referenced by Oko & Ogbodo (2022), delineates Africa as a historically stagnant entity devoid of developmental progress. Hegel's characterization of Africa as an "unhistorical" and "underdeveloped spirit," ensnared within the confines of primal existence, perpetuated a narrative of African insignificance within the realm of historical, cultural, and religious evolution. Similarly, Karl Marx, as cited by Onyelakin (2016), posited the exclusion of Africa from the purview of historical dialectics, further reinforcing the marginalization of African contributions to global historical narratives. These entrenched assumptions resonate throughout the trajectory of European-African relations, from the era of slavery and colonization to the contemporary processes of globalization. Consequently, it falls upon Africans to refute these fallacious notions and assert the significance of their historical legacies within the annals of world history.

Presently, the emergence of social media platforms has democratized the narrative discourse, providing a means for diverse voices to assert their perspectives. With the pervasive adoption of social media, encompassing over half of the global population as a primary mode of communication and interaction, it has become a potent tool for reshaping the portrayal of Africa's narratives. This transformative potential enables Africa to articulate its own stories authentically, countering prevailing Western representations and spotlighting the multifaceted aspects of the continent.

Despite the encroaching influence of globalization, which mirrors historical patterns of Western subjugation, social media, as a product of this phenomenon, offers a viable avenue for reconstituting African narratives. Boakye (2021) underscores this notion in her discourse on "Social Media Futures: How to Change The African Narrative," highlighting centuries of media portrayal depicting Africa through a singular, often pessimistic lens as a "dark continent." Social media platforms afford African individuals and entities, including governments, the agency to construct narratives that celebrate the normalcy and richness of African life and contributions, fostering an optimistic vision for Africa's future (Boakye, 2021).

Furthermore, Bhanye et al., et al., (2023) corroborate this assertion, noting that the democratization of social media empowers Africa to counter prevailing negative perceptions with self-authored narratives. The proliferation of social media platforms has engendered an environment where

African celebrities, influencers, content creators, and ordinary citizens alike play pivotal roles in diversifying and amplifying narratives about the continent. Through the dissemination of content that showcases the everyday realities of African life, infused with indigenous themes, values, and cultural elements, a recalibration of the African narrative emerges, liberating it from the confines of historical misrepresentation.

In addition to grassroots efforts, influential figures within Africa's spheres of entertainment, academia, and politics wield considerable influence in reclaiming Africa's narrative. Leveraging their extensive reach, both domestically and internationally, these figures can harness social media platforms to transcend mainstream media narratives, championing a more nuanced and authentic portrayal of Africa. By incorporating African narratives into various forms of media content, including music, videos, and literature disseminated via social media channels, a reclamation of Africa's stories from the shackles of sensationalism and stereotypes ensues.

In effecting this paradigm shift in the perception of Africa, a multifaceted narrative emerges, challenging prevailing stereotypes and presenting a more comprehensive portrayal of the continent. This endeavour seeks to elucidate that Africa transcends the narrow confines of negative portrayals, offering elements worthy of admiration, attention, and interest. Given the predilection of contemporary youth for social media as a primary source of information consumption, content disseminated by their favoured celebrities holds significant sway. Through engaging with such content, individuals undergo a process of heightened appreciation and comprehension of their African identity, cultural heritage, and intrinsic values, fostering a sense of pride therein.

Thus, social media assumes a pivotal role as a conduit for amplifying alternative voices and perspectives, facilitating Africa's reclamation of its narratives in an unadulterated form. This responsibility is incumbent upon every African individual. Such a mandate finds resonance in the sentiments expressed by Blyden in "Race and Study" (as quoted in Obijekwu et al., 2019), wherein he advocates for a comprehensive return to African soil as the sole means of reinstating African rationality, culture, history, and individuality. His advocacy underscores the imperative for Africans to actively engage in reshaping their narrative landscape, thereby reclaiming agency over their own stories. In his words:

> For each one of you –for each one of you –there is a special duty to accomplish, a necessary and important job, a job for the race to which we belong. There is a responsibility that our personality, our belonging to this race, presupposes – the duty of every individual and every race is to struggle for its individuality, to maintain it and develop it. Therefore, honour and love your race for yourselves if you are for yourselves, for if you abdicate your personality, you will not have left anything to give to the world. Neither will you be happy nor of any use, and you will have nothing to attract and fascinate other people because, with the suppression of your individuality, you will also lose your distinctive character. You will also realize then that having abdicated your personality you will also have lost the special duty and glory to which you are called(p.12)

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this discourse is to underscore the potential efficacy of social media in reshaping perceptions of Africa beyond conventional narratives. This study seeks to advocate for the inclusion of diverse voices, distinct from the predominant Western media discourse. Central to our findings is the recognition of Africa's tumultuous history, which has significantly impacted self-perceptions among its populace. Such historical legacies have perpetuated a distorted self-image among Africans, largely constructed by Western representations that serve foreign interests. Of particular concern is the contemporary trend of global homogenization, wherein Western cultures predominate, posing a threat to Africa's distinct identity and cultural heritage.

This study contends that the democratization of social media has disrupted the hegemonic control of narrative dissemination previously held by Western powers, offering Africa an unprecedented opportunity to reclaim agency over its storytelling. Through strategic utilization of social media platforms, Africa can assert its multifaceted narrative beyond Western constraints. The integration of authentic African stories, daily experiences, and cultural values into various forms of media content—be it produced by content creators, musicians, or writers—presents a means to showcase Africa's richness and complexity beyond the prism of racism, slavery, colonization, and post-colonialism.

By amplifying diverse narratives through social media channels, young Africans are afforded a broader perspective of their identity, emancipating them from the shackles of historical trauma and contemporary cultural dominance. This paradigm shift enables a more nuanced understanding of African identity, empowering individuals to embrace their heritage amidst the evolving global landscape.

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