Impact of Information and Communication Technology in Curbing Secret Cult Activities in Nigeria Universities

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Abstract

This study is concerned with investigating the perceptions of school administrators on the impact of information and communication technologies in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. A questionnaire Impact of ICT in curbing cult activities' (ICTCCA) was used to collect data which was analyzed using the percentage method. The respondents were randomly selected from six universities in Nigeria. The result shows that ICT has helped to demystify cultism on campus, cult members can easily be monitored and the information flow between the staff and students has become quite easy and fast. The various campuses now enjoy relative peace as non members now read more about the various groups via the internet and membership is now done willingly unlike when cult groups scramble for new-intakes. So conflict is remarkably reduced. Various useful suggestions were made.

Introduction

Historically, in 1952, Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka and six others known as the magnificent seven, formed the pyrate confraternity at the then university college, Ibadan which today is believed to be the genesis of campus secret cults in Nigeria. Although, the organization then was formed to raise the social life on campus and to establish a system whereby discipline, orderliness and orientation to laudable national objectives can be achieved but with time, there was an unfortunate disorientation of this pristine pure cult spirit. The several break-away made the earlier objectives to be tracked and violence took over.

Ogulana (2013) stated that secret cult activities are threatening academic, social life and above all the health of the people living in the university community and environs. Armed gang stalk the hostels, classrooms and lecturers quarters inflicting pains and injuries at will and often with a savagery more appropriate to jungle warfare. Innocent students and lecturers live in great dread of these desperate ruffians. The university community in Nigeria is gradually becoming a training ground for practitioners of the various ills of the society: petty thieves, criminality, rape, female prostitution, drug addiction, examination misconduct and so on. The entire university community has fast become a battlefield where young people are killed maimed and introduced to lethal weapons.

Since members are shrouded in obscurity. It is often difficult to identify members so, discussions concerning cultists are done in low tones, with fear. The administrators, lecturers and other students live in great danger among these various cult groups on campus. Several management strategies were adopted to curb cult activities but there strategies have not yielded the desired outcome (Oladunjoye 2011).

The information and communication technologies (ICT) was embraced in Nigeria and the use of the mobile phones have become popular especially among the youth. Osoba(2011) stated that ICT has impacted so much in curbing cult activities in the various tertiary institutions. Before the advent of ICT, cult members operated manually. Bizarree and grosteque pasted at strategic areas, notices of meeting were done with signs and special symbols that can be interpreted only by initiated members. Recruitment drive were done crudely with all forms of intimidation, and deceit, conflict of venues which often lead to cult clashes. Sailing nights are often dreaded by non-members who may not have any information concerning the proposed arena for such unwholesome assembly.

The most commonly used ICT facilities by staff and students in Nigeria tertiary institutions are the mobile phones and the internet services supported by the computers. Studies have revealed that 88.9% of students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria use the mobile phones (Oladunjoye 2012, Adeola 2011).

Through the mobile phones, the activities of cult members have been put under serious check. Aguoda (2004) noted that since the mobile phones can be used to send and receive quick messages/information, cult members have become apprehensive of the fact that their activities can be unanimously reported to the school authorities or security agencies at short notice. Before the advent of mobile phones cult members terrorize or intimidate non-members with impunity. The greatest mode of recruitment is PUSH: Pally or Punish Until Something Happen. Today if is student is unduly intimidated or cult members decide to 'pally' either by organizing a pseudo party to entice non-members, such information could be brought to the notice of the school administrators immediately.

The modern mobile phones have series of applications they can record sight and sound. Anah (2011) stated that if cult activities can be recorded and played before the school authorities, suspected cult members have

no room for denials. Since cult members are aware of this technology, they tend to play safe. During the 'dark ages' the college security men would often lay ambush for cult members and in most cases such information would often leak to the cult groups who may then decide to embrace a safe track. Musa (2003) recorded the great "Equare battle" where cult members were apprehended by members of the vigilante group at Ekpoma during an initiation ceremony in Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria and this led to the cult members to unleash mayhem on innocent citizens at the Eguare market. This ambush could have been avoid by a mere phone call to the relevant security operatives.

Onah (2013 stated that with the use of the mobile telephone, cult members can easily disseminate information to their members either for an emergency meeting or for members to 'fly safely'. Before the advent of mobile phones in Nigeria, cult meetings are often scheduled at a particular time of the week or month at the 'empires' but when there are emergency meetings, the information can only be communicated to members by signs and symbols. Most signs and symbols are often new to non-initiated members and are often found to be frightening. In most cases students can be scared off the classrooms to give way for an emergency meeting. The mobile phones has made it so for information dissemination.

Threat to life was done by writing letters or dropping notes to a targeted lecturer or student. Most often the writers of such notes are easily discovered and punished. Onifade (2011) noted that with the mobile ICT, warning and threat are done electronically using the phone either as a comment on any of the social media or a direct call. Physical efforts are sparingly used nowadays.

The mobile phone has significantly impacted on the activities of cultism in Nigeria campuses. Okido (2013) noted that the mobile phones has made the existence of cultism unnoticeable on campus. Drumming and sporadic gun shots often characterized meetings of cult members. The entire campus live in fear of these dreaded groups but with the mobile phones, their activities have been curtailed.

The internet has played a significant role in the activities of cult groups. In those days, information about the various groups are often based on stories retold. This is often subject to exaggerations and distortion of facts. Akinyinde (2011) stated that through the internet, information concerning the history and principles of most cult groups can be downloaded and read.

The would-be cultist will be adequately informed about the philosophy of the group before joining. There is also the room to compare and make decision on the cult group to belong. This information on the website of the cult group is open to all unlike the 'dark ages' when students or would-be members merely speculate. Adeoti (2013) lamented that he joined a cult group without knowing the philosophy of the group and he was later informed of the activities of the group after initiation.

Before the introduction of modern information and communication technology in Nigeria membership forms are collected or given out to would-be members in such a bizarre manner that it is held in utmost secrecy, but today registration could be done on-line. Cult feasts such as the 'dark night' 'feast of Barancuda' etc are often registered online for attendance. To a reasonable extent, mass movement of cult members can be avoided as members can now move individually and converge at designated places without much attention to the non members.

The popular slangs used by members are now within the understanding of non-members through the internet. The 'sailings' and 'Akutai' music can be downloaded on any mobile device through the internet. Non members can listen to the music and enjoy the lyrics. Before the introduction of ICT, cult music was reserved and can only be played by initiated members. The sound of the pot-drum or the metallic 'Agogo' – gong, send shivers to non-members especially at night during a popular 'sailing' or 'barking' of the sea dogs or sea lords.

Today, most ex-cultist have even modernized the cult music to commercial popular songs. This has demystified cult music to simple gyration songs of the 'kegites – palm-wine drunkards club'

Folarin (2013) noted that cult members often use signs and symbols as effective means of communication. A member of Black Axe or Neo Black Movement of Africa may simply inscribe "**as**" at a convenient corner of his room, door-post or office shelve. A non-members may not make out any meaning from such inscription except initiated member but with the internet, the language, slangs, signs and symbols of most members are explained at least to the extent they wish a 'jew' (non member) to know.

ICT has helped to demystify the existence of cultism in all Nigeria campuses. Members no longer have hiding places and cult activities can easily be exposed. To the cultist, it has also helped them in developing new strategies which has become of serious concern to school administrators. Lecturers can be easily blackmailed on social media as there are several reported cases of lecturers who were snapped nude by cult girls and placed on the social media for the world to view.

Threat and kidnapping have taken over the place of beating or killing by cult members. Staff and their family members are kidnapped at will and through the mobile phone, the family members are contacted for a ransom for the release of the kidnapped victim. In those days, since members of the family cannot be reached easily without suspecting the culprit, kidnapping was drastically reduced. The easiest and surest way cult members deal with their victims is often by shooting or beating the victim.

The impact of ICT in curbing surest cult activities in Nigerian universities cannot be underestimated by school administrators.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to find out:
1. The impact of the mobile phones in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities
2. The impact of the internet in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities

Research Questions
The study is guided by the following research questions.
1. What is the impact of the mobile phones in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities?
2. What is the impact of the internet in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities ?

Methods
The design of this study is a descriptive survey. One hundred and ninety seven (197) school administrators were randomly selected from six (6) universities covering the six geo-political zones in the federal republic of Nigeria. The instrument used is a structured questionnaire which is divided into two sections. Section A sought information about the demographic data of the respondent while the section B are items which elicited information concerning the perceptions of the school administrators on the impact of the ICT in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities.

The instrument was validated by experts in test and evaluation as well as seasoned university administrators in Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State. The instrument was further subjected to a reliability test using the test – re-test method. The data collected was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient statistics. It was established at 0.86 which shows that the instrument can measure what it intends to measure.

The instrument was personally administered by the researcher as well as some research assistants; hence the 100% rate of return. The data collected was analyzed using the percentage method.

Analysis of Data
The data collected was analyzed based on the two research question that guided the study.
Research Question 1: What is the impact of the mobile phones in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities.
This research question was answered with items 1-5 in the questionnaire.
Table 1: Impact of Mobile Phones in Curbing Secret Cult Activities

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1	Cult activities are promptly reported to the school authorities using mobile phones.	86 43.65%	61 30.96%	25 12.69%	25 12.68%
2	Cult activities are now easily monitored by non members	95 48.22%	65 32.99%	20 10.15%	17 8.62%
3	Nocturnal meetings with sporadic gun shots have drastically reduced for fear of easy report through the mobile phones	101 51.26%	50 25.38%	26 13.19%	20 10.15%
4	Coercing new students into joining secret cults have reduced for fear of quick security response using mobile phones	94 47.71%	70 35.53%	20 10.15%	13 6.69%
5	The university environment is experiencing relative calmness as a result of quick security reports and response using the mobile phones.	104 52.79%	50 25.38%	23 11.67%	20 10.15%

The table shows the impact of the mobile phones in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities. 43.69% strongly Agreed that cult activities are promptly reported to the school authorities while 48.22% of the total respondents also strongly Agreed that cult activities are now easily monitored by non-members 51.26% strongly Agreed and 25.38% also Agreed that nocturnal meetings which are often occasioned with sporadic gun shots have drastically reduced for fear of quick response by security agents through the use of the mobile phones. 47.71% school administrators strongly Agreed that cases of coercing new students into joining secret cults have drastically reduced as intimidated students can now reach security agents and school administrators through their mobile phones. 52.79% are of the opinion that the university community is now experiencing a high degree of calmness as ICT has helped to reduce the excesses of cult members on campus.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of the internet in curbing secret cult activities in Nigeria universities?

This research question was answered with items 6 – 10 in the questionnaire.

Table 2: Impact of the Internet in Curbing Secret Cult Activities.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1	The internet has reduced the use of the PUSH method "Pally or push until something happens" during recruitment.	97 49.23%	50 25.38%	25 12.69%	25 12.69%
2	Students now have some level of information concerning the various cults before joining thereby reducing cases cult of clashes on campus	101 5.26%	50 25.38%	20 10.15%	26 13.19%
3	The internet has helped school administrators to monitor the activities of cultists especially during their popular annual feasts.	106 53.80%	50 25.38%	20 10.15%	21 10.65%
4	Students and school administrators are better informed about the mysteries surrounding the various cults so they are easy to deal with	104 52.79%	48 24.36%	25 12.69%	20 10.15%
5	Membership can be monitored by the school administrators by hacking into the sites of the various cults	111 56.34%	46 23.35%	20 10.15%	20 10.15%

The table above represents the impact of the internet in curbing cult activities in Nigerian universities. 49.23% Strongly Agreed that with the introduction of internet services, there are reduced cases of intimidation by cult members forcing new students to join.

51.26% of the school administrators now believe that a greater number of the new or intending cultists now have a high level of information on all they need to know about the various cult groups and this has reduced cult clashes among cult groups while scrambling to get new members.

53.80% administrators Strongly Agreed that the activities of cult groups can be monitored through the internet as they often publicize their major feasts.

The mysteries surrounding cult groups are demystified through the internet as much can be read about them, thereby helping the school administrators in designing better methods to manage them as 52.79%, Strongly Agreed. 56.34% school administers believe that membership of cultists can be monitored by hacking the registration sites of such groups.

Discussion

With the introduction of ICT, the ivory towers in Nigeria has experienced a high degree of calmness as cult activities can be promptly reported to the school authorities as supported by Onifade (2011). Suspicious movements, use of meeting slangs and whistle, mass movement to an obscure place or any other suspicious moves can be monitored and reported promptly as noted by Akinyinde (2011). Before the introduction of ICT, new students are often coerced to join secret cult even against their wish, but with the introduction of ICT, when a new student feels threatened, he can easily reach out to the security operatives or school authority through his mobile phone.

The internet has become a popular platform for all students they can easily assess information or clink to any social media. Information about the various groups are no longer shrouded so much in secrecy. Students can now assess relevant information concerning the various groups by logging in to their website. There is now a high degree of information now available to students before considering joining any of the cult group. The website often give near sufficient information to the students about cult groups thereby curbing the act of scrambling for intending members. The activities of the cult groups are easily monitored by school administrators through their exposure to the internet unlike those days when information was quite scanty about cultism. Memberships are now known by the school administrators. This will aid planning and monitoring according to Okido (2013).

The internet afford school administrators the opportunity to unravel the mysteries surrounding cultism and experts can also hack on the site to monitor sensitive information about them according to Ajoh (2013).

ICT has helped to the demystify cultism and has reduced very many radical behavior among members. Security is now tighter and information flow is now easier.

CONCLUSION

In the 'dark-ages' the cult members were even more respected than most school administrators. They threaten lives of innocent staff and students, they unleash terror to the academic community, they converge at will and can even disrupt major school activities. It was difficult to apprehend members coupled with the fact that there are several

gory stories of cultism like drinking of human blood using human skull to drink, exaggerated stories of initiation rites, the ritualistic aspects of the group and several other stories. This to a reasonable extent made school administrators to trend with caution all issues relating to cultism. With the introduction of ICT, enough confidence has been built among staff and students. Information flow is now easier and faster, the social media and other internet applications give enough information concerning the various cults such that the beauty of cultism which is the secrecy is now lost.

RECOMMENDATION
Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.
- Students should be encouraged to use their mobile phones appropriately and report suspected or detected cases of cult activities to school authorities.
- The phone numbers of the university security officers as well the school administrators should be made handy to students.
- Closed circuit televisions could be installed strategically in the school and connected to other mobile devices.
- Apart from the smart phones, students should be encouraged to visit the university cyber-café.
- School administrators must have up to date information concerning the use of certain applications on the mobile phones and must also visit the internet regularly.

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