Perceived Challenges of Millennial Generations in On-Line Community Development Engagements in Imo State

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ABSTRACT
The study examined millennial generations and their online community development engagements in selected communities of Imo State, Nigeria. The study was conducted amongst 303 purposively selected respondents in which 288 focus group discussants and 15 interviewees were all drawn from three clustered communities of Amawom, Umuyoma, Emekuku, Umuguma, Ugwuaku, Umuololo, Arondizogu, Isinweke, Asa-Obile, Awara, Obosima, and Umuapu to represent the senatorial zones in Imo State. Data was obtained using the qualitative Focus Group Discussion and Key informant interview tools. Data was analyzed qualitatively based on the responses from the discussant which informed the thematic analysis of qualitative data. The study revealed that reasons motivating most millennial’s engagement with community development varies across purposes such as online social entrepreneurship activities like blogging, Facebook networking to source alternative income and for skills development. However, data revealed that millennial are relatively weaker in their bonds and unequally inaccessible to power and economic relations within their communities especially without their online solidarity. This scenario amongst many other factors were identified as perceived barriers to their development engagement in in the study area hence their resort to alternative social norms for in-group community development through online dating, cult group identities, electronic prostitution, and cyber criminality in order to accentuate their socioeconomic positions. Finally data revealed that millennial generations’ perceived barriers and willingness to take part in offline community development projects is constantly challenged by social and economic cost which results to negative shared identities otherwise tagged “Generation Social Capital Deficit” influencing individual and community norms of development. The study thus concludes that millennials must be resolute to change and challenge the institutional barriers to their development.

Keywords: Millennial Generation, Offline Community Development, Social Media,

INTRODUCTION
The mere fact of being connected doesn’t guarantee one will be able to innovate or able to freely share information and ideas: These abilities require an enabling Internet environment, one that is based on openness and without excessive restrictions on online activities (Seidler, 2013:3)
The above quote depicts the potentials of the internet to advance individual and community development and on the flipside the structural limitations that hinders such opportunities especially amongst millennial generation who are more technological savvy to harness the internet. Millennials are distinctively valued and their priorities as a generation stems from their digital savvy potentials which makes them a distinctive age cohort for scientific study (Pew Research Centre, 2013). Without doubt, access to the Internet and mobile phones are transforming the development landscape in
Africa, injecting new innovative opportunities and information in key sectors (Saghir, 2013). More so, the creation of new actors and change makers of transformative and innovative developments from Africa has consistently brought about internet-related developments empowering millennials in Africa to drive entrepreneurship, innovation and income growth in Africa (Yonazi et al., 2013). Despite the gains of internet use by millennials, the State of the Internet Report in 2000 by the US Internet Council, notes that “Internet diffusion in Africa has been hampered by factors such as poverty, low computer penetration, illiteracy, lack of trained personnel, disinterest, corruption, identity theft, and a failure to understand the benefits of Internet access” (Dholakia et al., 2003: 43) which altogether challenges access to sophisticated services for the most marginalized populations (Dalberg, 2013).

The United Nations Economic and Social Council, (2015:11) supports the above, stating that there is significant evidence of inequality in Internet usage access, especially in terms of “proprietary production models and intellectual property rights that are restricted or locked out for some African countries”. As a result, millennials within these regions miss out on a great deal of online resources and opportunities on these platforms. From the above, it would suffice one to argue that despite the significant inequalities in internet usage, recent engagement and appropriation of the internet resources by millennials in Imo State and Nigeria at large have been characterized as a necessity to change. The attempt to measure this change becomes an intellectual niche in observing the lived experience of the millennials and the outcomes of their usage of internet resources for socioeconomic change. In the light of the severe socio-economic conditions of life steaming from poor governance, and institutional backdrops such as corruption, the young ones are constrained to seek for alternatives to livelihood sustenance. These scenarios have been the motivation for the appropriation of digital resourcefulness by the millennial for community development in Nigeria.

From the above one would surmise that the influence and economic power of millennial generations is central to understanding how their interactions with technology has shaped their power on local concerns in the communities. Schwab (2016) observed that the millennials are crucial tools of the Fourth Industrial Revolution which has the potential to empower individuals and communities, as it creates new opportunities for economic, social, and personal development. Furthermore, he argued that it could lead to the marginalization of some groups, exacerbate inequality, create new security risks, and undermine human relationships between people, culture, and values and humanity’s traditional sources of meaning – work, community, family, and identity – or it can lift humanity into a new collective and moral consciousness based on a sense of shared destiny. To this end, one leverages on the study by Pew Research Forum (2010) which found that, millennials, a demographic cohort following Generation X (Horovitz 2012), were summarized as being confident, connected, and open to change; they have expressed deep impression as a social generation whose emergent identities are constantly shaped by technological imprints that stay with them as they move through their life cycle (Howe and Strauss 1991, 1997).

Drawing from the foregoing, this study examines how perceived barriers have affected millennial generations’ in taking part in off-line community development programmes in Imo State, Nigeria. Based on the above this study leverages on the work of Counted and Arawole (2016) who were concerned with geo-restrictions on internet-related services as a major challenge hindering millennials and Internet-fueled developments in Africa. It therefore examines what effect millennial use of their digital resources has on communities’ in Imo state? And to what extent millennials contribute to community development in Imo state?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted amongst 303 purposively selected respondents in which 288 focus group discussants and 15 interviewees were all drawn from three clustered communities each from the Senatorial clusters of Okigwe, Orlu and Owerri comprising of 12 communities namely; Amawom, Umuoyima, Emekuku, Umuoguma, Ugwuaku, Umuololo, Arondizogu, Isinweke, Asa-Obile, Awara, Obosima, Umuapu and representative of the senatorial zones in Imo State.
Table 1: Distribution of Sample for the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Government Area</th>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Sampled number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ohaji/Egbema</td>
<td>Asa-Obile</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umuapu</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obosima</td>
<td>24+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awara</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okigwe</td>
<td>Ugwuaku</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isiala Mbano</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umuololo</td>
<td>24+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Onuimo</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owerri</td>
<td>Emekuku</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umuguma</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amawom</td>
<td>24+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Umuoyima</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>288+15=303</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collection involved the application of Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for the qualitative study and the administration of unstructured interview guide to help elicit first-hand information on the millennials’ lived experiences. Data analysis involved the application of content and thematic analysis using the grounded theory approach.

**Results**

The results from the interviews and focus group discussions analysis is presented with the following thematic considerations.

**Access to Mobile Technology and Internet Services:**

Questions regarding the access, communication and feedback of millennial generations’ engagement with smart phone and computer technologies helped elicit the views which were examined against their use for community development.

“Like I rightly said earlier “ the inability of most millennials to afford money to feed on, help provide food and basic needs for the family, acquire good education that is inaccessibly expensive and has contributed to discountenance of their engagement in community development” (male discussant, 29years, Ohaji).

Similarly participants in the FGD revealed that;

“To purchase or use a good smart phone today requires up to 50k-200k for I-phone handlers which are basically the ladies or female millennials who seems favoured by their gender to appropriate access to good smart phones unlike their male counterparts especially as evident amongst the students in the university campuses and urban centres of Okigwe, Owerri and Orlu (FGD Female 34years Owerri)”.

In support of the above, another respondent submitted that:

“It is not enough reason to say that men don’t have access to good smart phones just that the millennials have introduced a culture of illicit transactions within the circle of their engagements with gambling, cyber-crime (yahoo guys) and show-off students. Most times the male millennial generation is more prudent in their choices and use of smart phones than their female counterparts” (Female 35years Owerri).

From the above data, one would argue that most of the indulgent of these social crimes in the societies today are young ones who are inadvertently the millennial. They have taken to soft criminality via the social media usage to change the narrative of their socioeconomic challenges and positions.
Experience in internet usage on community development
Findings from some millennials’ lived experience on their use of smart phones for community development revealed the following:

From my experience, to optimally utilize internet, one has to be financially capable or have residual income to support the recent spate at which the telecom services bill for data airtime especially with visiting some sites that consumes data (FGD, Ohaji 32years)

I still get worried that until now that there is no stable network service in my community hence the ability of one to even communicate effectively or make impact on any key community concerns becomes a huge challenge (KII, 34years Female).

The idea of utilizing a good smart phone in my community is a risk for most owners especially the female folks who are times attacked and victimized by miscreants in the community. This situation really aggravated crime and insecurity to the point that some persons reportedly loss their lives to these millennials who are miscreants that ones to owe smart phones at all cost.

Values and Social Control
The online engagement of millennials in community development is largely challenged by the conflicting cultural values of most families especially the believing Christian groups who see online community development as access to satanic influences and immorality

Most parents are challenged to guide and supervise the activities of their children on online utility owing to fear of the exposure to immorality
In some cases the millennials are largely affected by the peer values that contradicts the family values in the utilization of online community development……. This reminds me of how my father would cease my phone and password his phones in order to deter me from visiting sites where I download musics and movies.

The findings from the discussants revealed that most millennial generation have not realize the benefit of their key attributes and such are yet to fully tap or exploit the benefits of smart technological use for real community development.

“Like earlier stated, they are seen distracted with social media where they engage in relationships that have not been useful to the community” (FGD male 22years Owerri)

Another respondent supported the above when he stated that:

“If given the opportunity to say, most millennials are yet to build good relationship that can translate into gainful development in their communities because of their inexperience in time management, poorly focus-driven behavior, social life style of “ngowrism” amongst youths of this era in Owerri making it impossible for them to humble themselves down. They all feel they have it all and disregard humility for arrogance especially on the traditional instituted authorities. Despite the facts that we are exposed to ICT use, our experiences with the use have not been productive to qualify or quantify key developments expected” (FGD Male, 36years, Okigwe).

Findings from the data revealed that millennial generations’ perceived barriers and willingness to take part in offline community development projects is constantly challenged by several social, cultural and economic factors such as the cost of owning a good cell phone, access and the affordability of data to be globally connected. However, results showed that female millennial generations are likely to own good smart phones but do not utilize the values for tangible community development due to their obsession with social media which makes them profoundly engaged with online social behaviours that ant to the normative lifestyles and values that have not been significantly influenced community needs. Data also revealed that the unequal rural-urban access to internet resources or
network deters the optimal use of millennial generations’ capabilities for self-development which literally translate to community underdevelopment. Consequently, millennial generations experiences on perceived barriers and willingness to take part in community development is a reflection of the institutional inequality amongst community stakeholders of development projects such as the public and private policy networks undermines the growth and development of youths capacities, leadership and social mobilities. It was gathered that inequality measured in terms of their fear of been victimized by the security apparatuses, use of force by government to trample any perceived group that challenges their ill dealings or that tries to interrogate the prevalent norms of corruption and “sacred cows” that short-changes community development plans for personal gains as it is the norm of local and federal governance in virtually all the communities in Nigeria.

Findings from Owerri indicate that social lifestyles of most millennial generations is still immersed in restiveness, substance abuse without social control, amongst other social odds engraving from the presence of numerous hotels and clubs in Owerri the capital city of Imo state. Finally and drawing from the theoretical stance of the generational theory and the social capital theory, the Generational Social Capital Model (GSCM) was developed to guide the study. It argued that the millennial generations are constantly challenged by prevailing socio, cultural, and political norms of corruption affecting their individual and collective level access, conducts, relations, and decisions on the use of their potentials or what the research termed as “generational resource”, which refers to digital capital for enhancing the well-being and capabilities of their cohorts through mutual trust system for instituting positive self-development and by extension encourage sustainable community development and changes in their community physical and relationship structures.

In view of the above, the study submits that to exceed on community development from the negative appropriation of shared identities of millennial generations, otherwise tagged “Generational Social Capital Deficit”, the deficits within the cultural context must be corrected. It also revealed that the strengthening of cultural institutions like the family system, the age grade and peer groups alongside the social work and non-governmental agencies in Imo state have failed to promote honest norms for physical and online relationships. These have altogether impacted on the inherent inequality in access, use and control of online behaviors of millennial generations and community development challenges in Imo State.

CONCLUSION

Without doubt, Millennials find their integration into community development plans to be a challenging proposition between them and the generation before them. This amongst other challenges can produce anxiety, self-doubt, frustration, impatience, and despair that may drive the fourth industrial revolution in Africa. The established a grounded theory tagged “the generational social capital theory” in which the level of social capital bonding of the millennials is at variance to actualize the needed development in their communities hence a deficit. Against these backdrops, the study concludes that to build a generational capital for community development in Imo State, there is need to break away from the appropriation of negative shared identities of millennial generations, otherwise tagged “Generation Social Capital Deficit”. This can only be achieved when millennials begin to utilize the digital resources of its generations to politically, socio-culturally and economically appropriate their local capital network for a change in the local institutions and distributive justice in the key community development projects. This implies that all millennial generations in the study area must put concerted efforts to become technologically relevant to the changing development needs and to strengthen their relationships with the basic social institutions in order to address the inequity and support good digital local governance within the community level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

a. Millennial generations must put concerted efforts to become technologically relevant to the changing development concerns in their communities.

b. The deficits within the cultural context otherwise seen as the perceived barriers on millennial generations’ off-line engagement with community development should be strengthened to strongly influence their discreet norms and motives for offline and online engagements in
relevant for sustainable development.

c. For millennial generations to break away from the appropriation of negative shared identities, otherwise tagged “Generation Social Capital Deficit” local institutions and the government must create enabling social and economic laws to intervene on their challenges through active regulations and subsidies in the provision of the digital resources for them to explore their chances and utilize their wits for community good.

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