INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RELIGION, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY
IJRCS

# Exposure to Voodoo Merchants on Facebook and its Influence on Youth's Engagement in Ritualism

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## Abstract

The contemporary Nigerian society is challenged by vices that undermine the peace and security of her citizens. Some of these acts are believed to be perpetrated by the youths. Among these vices are drug and other substance abuse, internet fraud, otherwise known as Yahoo Yahoo, sexual immorality, ritualism and others. Engagement in these practices lead to the loss of lives and the destruction of human capital. No nation can attain reasonable development with the endless list of social vices eating up the better part of the workforce, the youth. There have been cases when the Nigeria Police Force has paraded youths ranging from 17 to 40 years of age for alleged ritual killings. Some of the suspects have confessed to getting information on the process online. This is given the availability of voodoo merchants, who freely market charms and enchantments. Consequently, this study seeks to find out the influence of African voodoo merchants on youth's engagement in ritualism. Social media has created a platform for African voodoo practitioners to interact and promote their trade with the use of platforms such as Facebook Live, Reels, TikTok stories etc. This study is anchored on Cultivation theory. The qualitative research design was adopted to gather data. The study found that youths are exposed to voodoo merchants on Facebook, the merchants enjoy huge followership, few of the respondents have patronized the merchants and got positive results. The study recommends among others that security agencies must prosecute voodoo merchants who prompt youths to engage in ritualism.

**Keywords**: Voodoo merchants, black magic, herbalist, youths, influence, ritualism, social media

## Introduction

Nigeria has been on a fast lane of technological advancement deeply facilitated by her young people who are piloting affairs in the digital space. Communication keeps individuals connected and serves as a means of maintaining friendships and relationships. Modern technology in communication has no doubt helped to serve as a means of connecting people and as a medium of interaction in the social world (Adebola & Yahya, 2019). Consequently, various sectors and spheres of life have been exploring the opportunities that technology has brought to human activities. Also, there has been rapid growth in the adoption of online platforms as preferred means of communication. Technology has changed the way people interact and has brought about the emergence of an open social platform in the form of social media and this offers people the ability to easily connect, thereby making the world a global village.

Social media has influenced and redefined human communication (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016; Adebola & Yahya, 2019). As a result, McLoughlin & Lee (2007**)** argue that the use of social media platforms has impacted positively on individuals by creating diversification between different categories of people. Its use has become global. Some of the popular social media platforms include Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, MySpace, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok, among others. However, this study will emphasize the use of Facebook, which is owned by Mark Zuckerberg as an offshoot of Meta.

Advancements in technology have to a great extent played a key role in young people's adoption of social media (Greenhow, 2011). Social media is usually used interchangeably with *Web 2.0*, to refer to online applications which promote users, their interconnections, and user-generated content (Barnes, 2006; Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; Greenhow, 2011). Similarly, Greenhow & Robelia, (2009) view social networking sites as web-based.

It is also a service through which individuals can maintain existing ties and develop new social ties with people outside their network (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Conceptually, social media seem to embody social constructivist views of knowledge as decentralized, accessible, and co-constructed by and among a broad base of users (Greenhow, Robelia & Hughes, 2009).

Social media, especially Facebook, appeals to people of broad interests across age groups. Among these users are practitioners and promoters of traditional African religion. They use Facebook to display their supposed fortified products to prospective users who might be attracted to patronize them.

There are multitudinous manifestations of West African spiritual beliefs and religion. Recently, the practice of these religious beliefs is portrayed on Facebook. If we were to consider the disposition of the religions and their practices across the world in percentage terms, one can see that Christianity accounts for 33% of the world's share in terms of the practicing religion, which is followed by Islam, which is practiced by 21% of the world population. 6% of the world population practices or believes in traditional African faiths, which is equal to the number of people following Buddhism or Chinese traditional beliefs and is quite larger than the people following Judaism (0.22) or Sikhism (0.36) across the world (Zivkovic, 2017).

There are many terms used to identify Facebook users who promote African traditional religion. Most of them identify as ‘eze nwanyi’, ‘ogbanje’, ‘nwanyi mmiri’ etc. while some of them simply go with their birth names. Among these Facebook witch doctors are; Akwa Okuku, Angela Nwosu, Ada Mmiri, Mmili Enweilo Okalakwu etc. In the Igbo traditional parlance, ogbanje and dibia are used to refer to people who possess spiritual powers. Witch doctors are referred to as African voodoo merchants in this study given their adoption of technology and social media to project themselves. These voodoo merchants claim to have juju which solves problems. For several years, juju has occupied an integral role in Nigerian culture. Juju is derived from the French word *joujou* which means a toy or a plaything (Zivkovic, 2017). Uzoma (2004) asserts that religion, despite its concern with the spiritual, affects us socially, and religious rights thus remain an important topic in contemporary society.

Juju according to Ellis & Ter Haar, (2004), Adams & Dzokoto, (2005) cited in Aborisade & Adedayo (2020) is a spiritual belief system that utilizes various items like amulets, animal horns, and spells that are incorporated into religious practices, usually connected with witchcraft in Africa. Although it used to be prominent among West Africans and regarded as a traditional West African religion, it has, however, grown in leaps and bounds across the African continent. The objects or idols that are believed to possess the spirits of juju are often made by sorcerers that are

also referred to as witch doctors or juju priests (Abioje, 2013). The potency of juju that dates back to pre-colonial Nigeria has been acknowledged by scholars (Igbo, 2001; Nwalozie, 2011; Abioje, 2013; Aborisade & Adedayo, 2020), however, recently juju practices are beginning to surface on social media. The belief and use of juju in various forms transcend social and economic classes as people of different demographics patronise juju priests (Bisikay, 2011; Abioje, 2013).

The notions regarding native practices are not unidirectional as some believe that voodoo is effectuated to help people whereas juju is carried out to harm the people. Voodoo practitioners are thought to be mostly herbalists and wise men that use herbs and the bark of trees to cure diseases. Juju performers, on the other hand, are believed by some to use objects like the skulls of dead animals, and human skulls to perform juju rituals. Consequently, there are a growing number of African traditional religion practitioners who have adopted social media, predominantly Facebook, to promote and market their mystical products to teeming users who are searching for answers to their problems. As a result, this study set out to determine if there is any correlation between exposure to Facebook with doctors and youth's engagement in ritualism in Nigeria. Not many studies have been done in this area despite the surge of ritual killings across Nigeria. Hence, the need for this study to beam a searchlight on the discourse, thereby contribute to the available literature on the topic through an empirical study.

**Objectives of the study**

- To ascertain the level of youth exposure to voodoo merchants on Facebook.
- To determine the level of followership voodoo merchants enjoy on Facebook.
- To find out the tendency of youths to engage in rituals due to exposure to voodoo merchants on Facebook.
- To ascertain if the charms sold by voodoo merchants on Facebook are as effective as claimed.

**Research questions**

- What is the level of youth exposure to voodoo merchants on Facebook?
- What is level of followership voodoo merchants enjoy on Facebook?

- What is the tendency of youths to engage in rituals due to exposure to voodoo merchants on Facebook?
- Are the charms sold by voodoo merchants on Facebook as effective as claimed?

## Literature Review

### Social media influence

As the dependence on social media increases, it has become a choice destination for different demographics of people to interact, communicate, persuade, and champion a cause, or market products and services. Among them are witch doctors, who market religious items believed to possess supernatural powers to solve problems. As a highly religious society, Nigerians have over time believed in the power of God or gods to address and solve problems that have eluded their human grasp. Social media according to Asibong et al., (2021) refers to any Internet-based platform or service (s) (such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter), with which individuals can interact with each other verbally and/or nonverbally. Social media usage (SMU) comprises posting of created content (contributing), distribution of content from others (sharing) and learning/acquiring knowledge from content posted by others (consuming). Many young people in current technology-driven humanity are highly dependent on social media platforms to define their identities. This dependency transcends different areas and need of individuals (Asibong et al., 2021)

An individual's consistent connection to the content and functionalities in this platform is, therefore, the key to the fulfillment of their perceived needs and wants. Although the use of social media by the youths in Nigeria appears to be rapidly increasing due to widespread availability of low-cost smartphones, however, there remain scarce studies on the relationship between SMU and youth involvement in ritual practices across Nigeria. Most local studies had focused on the pattern of SMU/addiction without relating it with how it affects the behavior decisions of the users. Asibong et al., (2021) cites a cross-sectional survey of 907 undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, where the investigators found a high level of social media addiction (SMA) among the respondents. Furthermore, they reported that Facebook (90.2%) and Twitter (77.6%) were the SNS most frequently visited platforms and in 2018, Nigeria had 92.3 million

Internet users, representing 47.1% of the population, and the Internet penetration is set to reach 84.5% in 2023 (Umar, Armiya'u & Ali, 2021). Nearly 72% of the users of the Internet in the country visit social networking sites. The field of social media presents a new area of challenge crime and prevention of illicit acts.

**Types of Black Magic**

Black magic can be used for defensive purposes, some for enhancing economic activities like hunting, business and agriculture, and others for healing and health; some are used to increase attractiveness and love life, to acquire influence, and yet others for spiritual cleansing. Kenyatta cited in Vanithamani, (2019) lists 11 types of magic are as follows:

- Charms or protective magic
- Hate or despising magic
- Love magic
- Defensive magic
- Destructive magic or witchcraft
- Healing magic
- Enticing and attracting magic
- Silencing and surprising magic
- Wealth and agricultural magic
- Purifying magic
- Fertilizing magic (Nyabwari, 2014)

Nyabwari & Kagema (2014**)** in their article entitled 'The Impact of Magic and Witchcraft in the Social, Economic, Political and Spiritual Life of -African Communities' revealed that Africans believe that witchcraft cause unusual phenomenon like accidents, conflicts, death, domestic and public aggression, loss of poverty, sickness and failure. The mystical powers are controlled by witches who possess powers which stop or influence the aforementioned phenomena. Belief and practice of witchcraft as this study analyses has enormously impacted the social, economic, political and spiritual development in African. Baglari (2015) in a research titled 'The Magic Art of Witchcraft and Black Magic' explained that the belief in and the practice of magic has been

present since the earliest human cultures and continues to have an important religious and medicinal role in many cultures today.

**Reasons Behind Practice of Black Magic**

Vanithamani (2019) identified the following as the reason why an individual may get involved with black magic:

**Table 1: LEVELS OF MOTIVATION FOR ENGAGING IN BLACK MAGIC PRACTICES**

| **Purpose** | **Frequency** | **%** |
|---|---|---|
| Property | 12 | 26.7 |
| Kill the person | 4 | 8.9 |
| Love | 5 | 11.1 |
| Affaire | 4 | 8.9 |
| Sexual Abuse | 2 | 4.4 |
| Superior Complex | 3 | 6.7 |
| Higher Posting | 4 | 8.9 |
| Business Down (revenge) | 8 | 17.7 |
| Work Control | 3 | 6.7 |
| **Total** | **45** | **100.0** |

Zivkovic (2017) asserts that juju is a form of black magic practiced majorly in West Africa which is performed and prepared by the native doctors, witch doctors and herbalists. Juju is high on popularity in areas like Nigeria and the people out there consider it as the power of their forefathers and the ancient African gods and goddesses. Juju comes from the traditional African religion known as voodoo and it is a part of African culture. There are two aspects of Juju: the good juju and the bad juju. The definition and differences between good juju and bad juju depend on the individual or the community or the culture. Usually, in Nigerian culture, good juju means good luck and bad juju means bad luck. In other terms, good juju is the juju spell used for healing, giving

etc. and bad juju is the magic used to harm or hurt a person or a group of persons for any reason whatsoever (Zivkovic, 2017).

Juju has continuously manifested itself as highly significant and effective practice among the African tradition and culture. It has been observed in almost all the regions of Nigeria that whenever there is some big event or ceremony, a "rain chaser" is always called and paid accordingly to chase or move out the rain from the area where the ceremony or occasion is being held. Traditional rain control in this context is considered as a process involving the making and preventing of rain to modify atmospheric condition of a place using Indigenous Knowledge and Technology (IKT). Rain control ritual is an age-long indigenous knowledge and technology aimed at influencing weather conditions (Tella, 2022) These rain makers or rain chasers use juju to perform these tasks. During the rainy season, these rain chasers in Nigeria make a lot of money by using juju to control or chase the direction and magnitude of the rain in a particular area. The help of rain doctors is sought by people who want to carry out any of these activities during rainy seasons to avoid disruption. (Tella, 2022) The juju belief and system might seem primitive but highly effective in most of the cases if not all. Some people bury charms or spells in other people's farms and compounds in order to manipulate or influence in negative or positive way depending on the intentions of the juju carrier or preparer.

The new trend which this study looks at involves witch doctors marketing their charms and product on social media with a view to reach a more diversified audience across the country. The findings indicate that witchcraft transforms when applied on social media and requires aesthetic and creative competences when practicing a ritual transfer, in alignment with the affordances and visibility of Instagram. (Deniz, 2022) These lots believe that the powerful effect of social media to reach a widely heterogenous audience can be harnessed to grow their trade. Given the shift from the traditional media to new media, most Nigerians are beginning to embrace and prefer social media platforms to other alternatives. Hence, the migration of witch doctors to these platforms to seek more patronage and more converts. In Berit Renser and Katrin Tiidenberg's (2020) article "Witches on Facebook: Mediatization of Neo-Paganism" the authors explore a community of Estonian witches in a group on Facebook. The study aims to answer how the online sphere and social media shapes the online practices of neopaganism (Deniz, 2017). My study is very much inspired by this article, with a few exceptions.

Incidence of Juju has also been seen in the political hierarchy of Africa. Zivkovic (2017) notes that in March, 2014, images of a hex (juju) were allegedly retrieved from the residence of the Special Executive Assistant to the President of Sierra Leone, Sylvia Olayinka Blyden. SEA in its defense argument said that desperate competitors were trying to take her off the State House. The presence of "juju arsenal" in Blyden's residence is the proof that even educated and religious people with significant social and political role to play. African societies are still under the influence of occult forces, regardless of the educational background of the people in concern, the social class they come from or the religion they follow. In Sub-Saharan Africa, mastering occult forces and rituals is a socio-cultural phenomenon of great importance. Particularly in regions of Nigeria i.e. Western Africa, magic and witchcraft have deep penetrated incidence since generations, regardless of the social strata and the rural urban settings (Kohnert, 1996) Juju plays a significant role in African politics. It is used for various reasons: to secure positions in government, to get rid of others, to be favored, to destroy others, to be more powerful and for protection. There have also been cases of juju use in African football and in business as well (Zivkovic, 2017). Scholars argue that Indigenous African societies rarely tolerated religious pluralism, but the advent of Islam and Christianity brought religious pluralism and social upheaval to Nigeria by introducing different cultures and ideas (Uzoma, 2004). Today, Christianity, Islam, and indigenous African beliefs are the three main religions practiced in Nigeria, with Christianity and Islam being the dominant religions in the country.

**Juju and youth engagement in crime**

Existing literature posits that the use of charms or juju for deviance and criminality dates back to precolonial Nigeria (Igbo, 2001; Nwalozie, 2011; Abioje, 2013; Aborisade & Adedayo, 2020), however, there had been resurgence and rapid development in the use of juju for violent crimes since the post-colonial era (Ojo, 1981; Smith, 2004; Harnischfeger, 2006; Aborisade & Adedayo, 2020). Notably, the proliferation of arms and ammunitions that were introduced during the colonial period is identified as one of the factors that made violent crimes to thrive in post-colonial Nigeria. Meanwhile, the existence of juju practice and rituals for criminalities which existed since the traditional period combined with accessibility to modern weapons that were brought into the country during the advent of colonialism are parts of explanations given for the emergence of juju

usage for violent crimes in the country (Harnischfeger, 2006). For instance, armed robbery kingpins of 1960s and 1970s were reported to have taken advantage of accessibility of modern weapons and juju power to subdue their victims and escape arrest from the police within these periods (Ojo, 1981).

The first celebrated armed robber in Nigeria, Dr. Ishola Oyenusi, who terrorized south-western parts of the country in the 1970s, was attributed to have combined the use of sophisticated weapons with juju power (Smith, 2004). In his days, he often bragged that "bullet has no power" whenever he had cause to confront the police officers in a gun battle or shootout (Nwalozie, 2011; Aborisade & Adedayo 2020). The confidence he exhibited at the time was attributed to the perceived potency of his juju-enhanced "bullet proof" which he wore until he was eventually apprehended and executed. Reports also had it that, robbery czars, such as Lawrence Anini, who exploited the city of Benin in the 1980s, Shina Rambo, who was feared for his exploits within the south-western parts of Nigeria in the 1990s, and Abiodun Ogunjobi, also known as Godogodo, another robbery kingpin of south-west Nigeria in the 2000s, all made extensive use of juju in their criminal careers before they were caught (Vanguard, 2013).

The rate at which criminals make use of juju to perpetrate evil in the entire Nigerian state has continued to grow since the turn of the current millennium (Odeh & Nanji, 2015; Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2016). The growth of existing crimes like armed robbery, and emergence of new crimes like kidnapping for ransom, drug and human trafficking, widened the scope of insecurity in the country (Harnischfeger, 2003). Among the vices on the increase is engagement in ritual killings by youths. Writing on the alarming involvement of youths in ritual killings, Guardian (2022) assert:

> "But not a few youths have decided to jettison hard work and embraced the get-rich-quick syndrome by getting involved in ritual killing…Some years back, matters of ritual killings and the quest to get rich quick by whatever means were restricted to the older generation. Cases of youth involvement in ritual killings in the country have been on the rise since last year, no thanks to the new fad among the younger generation to acquire wealth with less hard work, including via the Internet. Just the second month into the year,

> Nigerians have been inundated with stories of ritual killings carried out by the youth. Desperate for money, these killer-youths go to any length to achieve their aim, while their targets include their parents and siblings, friends and acquaintances. It is sickening that while some youths are embracing science and technology, others, perhaps out of laziness, are turning to ritual killings to get rich quick. A few examples will suffice…"

Alluding to media influence which might shape lifestyle and behavior, Udomisor & Sonuga (2012) note that Nigeria home videos tell us what our actual lifestyle is. There is too much emphasis on themes such as sex, violence, prostitution, and sibling rivalry, evils of polygamy, devilish spiritualism and rituals. Media have effect on vulnerable members of the society. Movies have the ability to reflect goings on in the society and this determines the influence they have.

**Theoretical Framework: Cultivation theory**

The cultivation theory otherwise known as cultivation analysis has been chosen as a theoretical framework to backup this empirical study. The theory as propounded by George Gerbner in 1969 explains how exposure to social media witch doctors can influence youth's engagement in ritualism. Despite being revised and updated many times by varied scholars, the crux of cultivation theory include: a broad theory of the overall cumulative influence of the media on audiences (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2012; Russell, Russell, Boland, & Grube, 2014; Omoera, Aiwuyo, Edemode, & Anyanwu, 2018).

Consequently, this study is anchored on the theory given its claim that social media usage has continued to influence and determine the habits and mannerisms of its users over time. Part of this influence is evident in how people adopt shorthand form of writing, against the conventional means. Within the broader concerns of media effects, the emphasis has always, for obvious reasons, been on mainstream print and broadcast media (Omoera et al 2018). This theory focuses on effect of consistent viewer exposure to violent television content with a corresponding behavior in real life. A consistent claim is that heavy cumulative exposure to media messages shapes viewers' concept of reality, attitudes, and behavior. In the same vein, Gerbner (1973); Signorelli

and Morgan (1990); Morgan & Shanahan (2010); Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli (2012) cited in Omoera et al., (2018) have put forward the media cultivation hypothesis whose kernel is that audience exposure over time to specific media perspective or point of view (POV) has the potential of making such audience appropriate the media perspective or POV or tendency in everyday living or activities. Oftentimes, the viewers or users are unaware of the extent to which they absorb media message(s), many times viewing themselves as moderate viewers or users when, in fact, they are heavy viewers or users who are likely to adopt whatever they are exposed to in the media.

Cultivation theory tackles the long-term effects of the media on viewers. The theory proposes that the danger of television (although this has been expanded to involve other media) lies in its ability to shape not a particular view point about one specific issue but in its ability to shape people's moral values and general beliefs about the world (Mosharafa, 2015). There seems to be a risk in having the masses dependent on media means, in constructing the image of the surrounding environment. The theory argues that the media presents homogeneous messages about issues like crime and violence and those viewers especially regular viewers eventually come to adopt a shared understanding of social reality due to the messages they absorb through television (Vinney, 2022). Cultivation theory holds that the consistency of these messages influences the public's shared understanding of the real world.

It is in this connection that this study is anchored on the media cultivation theory, to explain why Nigeria youths may decide to engage in ritual due to constant exposure to witch doctors who market and showcase the efficacious powers of their products to better their lives. When a user is heavily exposed to such messages over time, he/she may begin to buy into the idea of obtaining them for the purpose of having improved standard of living. The theory is also suitable given that it talks about perpetration of crime and violence which ritual killings falls under. Marketers and advertisers had previously fraternized with the traditional media of communication (Television, radio and print) to reach their audiences, and to engage in advertising ‘war’ in competition against themselves (O,Toole, 2010). Nevertheless, this situation is rapidly changing. Current studies show that traditional mass media audiences are speedily tilting towards the new media for information and gratification of specific communication needs (Rudloff & Fray, 2010; O’Toole, 2010). This has shown a conscious shift from the more conventional mainstream media particularly among the younger generation to the new (social) media which they view as a better alternative.

**Methodology**

This study was conducted between February and April 2024 in Awka, with youths of diverse backgrounds who made themselves available for a focus group discussion. The time gap was a result of the interval it took us to get consent from our participants to attend with the assurance to keep them anonymous while piloting the focus group discussion. We received direct permission from all who took part in the focus group discussion.

The majority of those who took part in the study showed interest in the study the moment the scope of the study was explained to them. An oral response of yes means a willingness to proceed with the focus group discussion while no means unwillingness to participate. We informed participants that we would keep them anonymous and we would refer to them using numbers. We selected study participants using the referral/ snowballing technique as this was to ensure that certain types of individual attributes were included in the study (Lune & Berg, 2018). 10 individuals, six females and four males participated in the FGD. These participants willingly indicated interest to participate in the study.

**Table 2: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS**

| Age | | Religion | Occupation | Ethnicity | Gender | Marital status | Educational qualification | participant |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26 | | Christain | Minder | Igbo | F | S | SSCE | 1 |
| 24 | | Christain | Security | Hausa | M | S | Primary | 2 |
| 20 | | Christain | Student | Yoruba | M | S | SSCE | 3 |
| 21 | | Christain | Student | Igbo | F | S | SSCE | 4 |
| 28 | | Christain | Trader | Igbo | M | S | SSCE | 5 |
| 30 | | Christain | Artist | Igbo | M | S | B.Sc. | 6 |
| 24 | | Christain | Cashier | Igbo | F | S | OND | 7 |
| 30 | | Christain | Student | Igbo | F | S | BSc | 8 |
| 36 | | Christain | Civil servant | Igbo | M | S | HND | 9 |
| 28 | | Christain | Nurse | Efik | F | M | Diploma | 10 |
| 34 | | Christain | Lecturer | Yoruba | F | M | MPharm | 11 |
| 26 | | Moslem | Civil servant | Yoruba | M | M | B.Sc. | 12 |

We threw open a range of open-ended questions to address the research questions, first we started with research question one.

**What is the level of youth exposure to voodoo merchants on Facebook?**

***Participant 1:*** Neutral, indifferent I have no use for them
***Participant 2:*** I feel Indifferent though I have never seen an actual page, I have never contacted anyone, one sent me a friend request, I accepted then he sent me a flier of their kind of picture then I blocked him.
***Participant 3:*** it's the trend now, a lot of youths are going traditional now, only difference is its online.
***Participant 4:*** Yes I looked for them, some upon popup I follow them, some who do money ritual also send me friend request but I don't follow them. There are some whose account have been closed I look for them and follow their new pages. I like some of them who teal Igbo traditional ways. How people should act, how to treat your neighbor, I learnt a lot, I follow a lot of them but i don't like the ones of money ritual.
***Participant 5:*** I see a lot of these things and people see them too.
***Participant 6:*** I don't like what they are about, they make me uncomfortable. I see pop ups because most of my friends actually visit their pages
***Participant 7:*** the devil and his cohorts are gaining grounds everywhere; I have always insisted that that social media is of the devil, to ruin lives
***Participant 8:*** That's normal, I scroll and pass them
They make me uncomfortable because of the images, the things they write, sometimes I wish they are here with me so I can slap them, I don't follow them, I can't do that, I see their popups because I'm mandated to see them.
***Participant 9:*** these people enforce themselves and their craft on us, like it's in our faces. You look right, it's there, and you turn left its right there.
***Participant 10:*** The bamboozle is too much, we are exposed even without consent. I don't like what they are about, but I like that, some people have benefitted positively from them.
***Participant 11:*** I know them, I dey visit their page, but I never contact them, because I dey fear wetin if fit do me.
***Participant 12:*** I have heard of okeite from Facebook and TikTok, some of them advertise the okeite on line

**What is the level of followership voodoo merchants enjoy on Facebook?**

***Participant 1:*** a lot of them have lots of followers
***Participant 2:*** It makes me uncomfortable, I'm not willing to try to find them, I see these things because they are in my face.
***Participant 3:*** A lot, though I personally do not follow anyone, but I hear side talks from people. There's a whole lot going on now.

***Participant 4:*** Yes I have seen a lot of them, they have a very huge following, Like ezenwanyi sabbali onye igbariam, they are so many I can't remember
***Participant 5:*** it's massive even though I do not follow anyone at the moment.
***Participant 6:*** the recruit is massive; gen z is obviously in line with what they preach.
***Participant 7:*** Just there, I don't like it, it's against my belief, and they make me terribly uncomfortable. I don't follow them and I sometimes go through the pop ups the likes of Angela nwosu, I'm not willing to try, but I know a lot of people who are willing to, for wealth and protection.
***Participant 8:*** they have a lot of followers, and most of them are youths. I have lots of friends who follow these people and their buzz to live shows and even try to practice what they say.
***Participant 9:*** youths and teenagers are their new recruits.
***Participant 10:*** I worked as a social media handler for one of them, the energy is so much. Sometimes it feels as if there would be a stampede if it was physical. They have a lot of following.
***Participant 11:*** Yes but not on Facebook, I went for power, odeshi for gunshot not to enter and also for slap and fall. Yes I have friends, I have one who made money via ritual, and he still has the money, and I still get plenty when want to try their luck with the ritual.
***Participant 12:*** I'm comfortable with everything they are about, I like their teachings and I know a lot of people who follow them too. I think they drive a lot of traffic, because they have a lot of followers.

**What is the tendency of youths to engage in ritual due to exposure to dibias on Facebook?**

***Participant 1:*** The world is evolving so it comes with it, I think it's normal, and the fact that it's very accessible makes it very easy for a lot of youths to be a part of ritualism, either by listening or practicing.
***Participant 2:*** I have never considered patronizing them, I feel Indifferent though I have never seen an actual page. My general perception of ritualism and the publicity on Facebook I feel people should know what is good and what is bad. I can't be pressurized to do such things
***Participant 3:*** with the current trend amongst youths, wanting to get rich quick syndrome, almost everyone I think would be guilty of this.
***Participant 4:*** I do these traditional things even before I joined Facebook and started following them. Like use of egg for cleansing, use of alligator pepper for protection. I'm sure it's not strange or new to a lot of people. Because there would be testimonials of how this one worked for this person and someone that is at the brink of everything would be so desperate and want to try to see if it would work for them as well.
***Participant 5:*** everything is online now, people are doing things differently online, and a lot of youths find it easier to connect with ritualism and ritualists.
***Participant 6:*** I see pop ups because most of my friends actually visit their pages
I'm not willing to try to see what they are about, but these people puts this up in our faces; you basically are forced to accept these things.

***Participant 7:*** I have seen a few ritual tricks my perception is not like its bad but then religion and Christianity has taken over.

***Participant 8:*** these things are manipulative, the quest for riches and power drives their traffic, testimonials from people also increases their commercial and advert tendency.
***Participant 9:*** I think it's wrong because there is no regulatory body monitoring them. Because of poverty this would encourage the young people to try it every time.
***Participant 10:*** this is our sad reality, youths and even teenagers have access to this information free, with almost no guidance, a lot of them cheerfully walk into these time bombs.
***Participant 11:*** I'm an example; I tried after I read testimony.
***Participant 12:*** I'm not intimidated to want to try ritualism though there must be restrictions a lot of kids use smart phones without parental guidance. Regulations are inevitable.

**Are the charms sold by voodoo merchants on Facebook as effective as claimed?**

***Participant 1:*** I don't know, never used and I don't know anyone using it either.
***Participant 2:*** I'm aware that there's a do it yourself okite instruction online, I have seen a lot of stories online about it both negative and positive. I have also seen a lot of stories about the blue eyes.
***Participant 3:*** of course, if they weren't, there wouldn't be testimonials.
***Participant 4:*** Of course I have friends who have done this ritual, last year my friends I came back with from Dubai, 3 of them engaged in okeite, I don't hear from them any longer. Nothing can make me try it, all of these things have repercussions and none of it is worth the stress, they are also short lived. My general perception of this online ritualism some are good, yes it is effective, what I can't guarantee is the repercussions that comes with it. Whatever you see, you take.
***Participant 5:*** I don't know, I don't want to get involved with all of that.
***Participant 6:*** My general perception of ritualism on social media I don't see any moral value
I have lots of friends who follow them, but mostly because of the giveaways these people do
I don't feel intimidated, the way out is regularization.
***Participant 7:*** I have seen a few ritual tricks, my perception is not like its bad but then religion and Christianity has taken over. I have heard of okeite
***Participant 8:*** I think they should find a way of executing them out of social media
***Participant 9:*** My perception is neutral because most of them are money driven, so we don't even know who is real and who is not real
***Participant 10:*** Most of these people are unreal, fake and just sell their stuffs to gullible people, who would want to hear and see anything.
***Participant 11:*** I blame girls because nobody wants to date a poor man, they all want rich men, but they don't know the source of the wealth.
I'm angry at the girls and I'm happy for what happens to them
Yes I have friends; I have one who made money via online ritualism, okeite precisely.
***Participant 12:*** I have Facebook friends who patronize them, one called me that she wanted to buy Angela blue eye because of the testimonials she got from people.

**Discussion of Findings**

According to the study results, the researchers discovered that most of the youth are of the opinion that voodoo merchants are enforced on them on social media platforms. This finding corroborates with the findings of Lenhart et al., (2010), Kumar (2012) & Idubor (2015). These studies found Facebook as the most used social media application. The pop-ups are outrageously everywhere and every time, thereby expanding their viewing exposure to voodoo merchants and ritualism and followership from unsuspecting youths. According to Dolan et al., (2019), results reveal distinct effects of rational and emotional appeals on social media engagement behavior. Rational appeals in social media have a superior effect in terms of facilitating active and passive engagement among social media users, whereas emotional appeals facilitate passive rather than highly active engagement behavior, despite the social and interactive nature of the digital media landscape.

With regard to our second research question, data from respondents indicate that most voodoo merchants have great followership. Fapetu, Agbi & Ologun (2021) agrees with this finding as their study pointed out that most Nigerian youths who are on the Facebook platform are exposed to all sorts of information on money rituals and some of the criminals caught engaging in rituals have confessed to getting ritual information on Facebook pages that offer these ritual services thus the upsurge in money rituals in recent times. A list of reasons were stated why youths follow them, some of which included - free gifts, money, power, business success and even teachings about traditional ways of life. From those who followed, they expressed satisfaction with the gains of the exposure.

All respondents were in agreement that the tendency to engage in ritualism was so high in support of this notion; Ninalowo (2014) argued that these youths unfortunately live in a society where values and ethics are changing very fast. In a society such as Nigeria with gross structural

inequalities, high rate of indiscipline, weak sanctioning system and wide gap between the rich and the poor, there is a tendency for the deprived to reject and embrace illegal means of achieving prescribed goals such as been wealthy in young age Though most of them said they felt indifferent about the rituals, but they know lots of people who have either done or tried to do ritual as a result of testimonies they have seen online (Tade, 2013).

Regarding the fourth research question, a few of our respondents admitted to have tried a few of these rituals and its results were positive and potent. This supports Adeniran (2008) assertion that peer pressure compels young people in most part of the country, especially in the South East and some parts of the South-South region of the country, where making money as a proof of manhood encourage unscrupulous youths to engage in this fraudulent internet crime and ritualism.

**Conclusion**

The practice of ritualism has taken a major upward soar. The exposure to voodoo merchants on Facebook creates an easy access to information that should either be censored or regulated. Nigeria and its youths are on a constant battle to forestall innocent killings and murder for ritual purposes. Needless to say, social media is highly sought after by several minority groups or people to seek advocacy, learn, convert or teach. What better way to spread ritual information than through the Facebook platform, which is home to our youths of today. Furthermore, our audience analysis showed that most youths are scared to try out the okeite ritual as they believe its repercussions are dire but they are more willing to try out others. Despite the overwhelming potential for the promotion of voodoo or black magic on social media, most youths are reluctant to engage in ritual killings and other extreme measures in their quest for riches and wealth.

**Recommendations**

- Nigerian youths and society need a reorientation through talks, seminars, in order to be better informed on the consequences of their choices despite the regular pop-ups on Facebook.
- The Nigerian government must regulate social media platforms, Facebook in context, to help limit access to certain information that can encourage youths to practice ritualism.
- Facebook should device ways for people to indicate types of information they would rather not have access to, and such information should be completely invisible including pop-ups and adverts.
- The Nigerian police and other security agents must work together to bring to book, all voodoo merchants who disclose information on ritual practices that can cause harm to fellow human beings. Penalties must be served by both supplier of information and purchaser of information.

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