
Can we show the spirit of Ubuntu on social media?

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1. Introduction

Caring, affection, sympathy, commonality, and togetherness are some of the good qualities and attributes of Africans for centuries. Africans use words and sympathy to heal wounds and broken hearts. These attributes are elements of Ubuntu that are socially inbuilt in Africans. African forefathers use the above qualities and attribute to build their families and communities, also, to fight and win wars. The spirit of Ubuntu promotes care, concern, and engagement for one another (Mungai, 2009; Chaplin, 2006). Africans are known for the practice of Ubuntu, which is the interconnection and concern from person to person. Ubuntu is an African philosophy on the practice of humanity and social affection for one another. Digitalization continues to make waves across Africa. Globally, we live in the digital world, global village, connected world, and even social media world (social media age), and so on; humans, specifically Africans, are digitally connected. The human world today is more connected than before because of social media platforms and other digital tools. Social media has become critical interconnectivity, communication tool, and communication highway for Africans within and outside Africa.

Social media on its part promotes interconnection and connectivity of person to person, to foster social and human concern, as well as, the connection among Africans. However, some have used (are using) social media to harm and negatively disrupt the spirit of Ubuntu. The researcher argues that social media exhibits some attributes of Ubuntu because of its interconnectivity. However, the consciousness and spirit of Ubuntu on social media continue to raise doubts, and questions keep rising about the good interconnectivity of social media in African society. Now, can we say that social media promotes or advances the spirit of Ubuntu among Africans? This question remains a critical point of concern as Africans engage in social media activities in this social media age. The researcher, through this study, deeply evaluates whether social media promotes the spirit of Ubuntu among Africans on its platforms.

2. The spirit of Ubuntu

According to Chukwuere (2020), van Breda (2019) and Msengana (2009), Ubuntu is an African philosophy stressing the importance of humanity. To this study, Ubuntu is a philosophy of one people, and one commonality. The word Ubuntu was coined from a Nguni Buntu word meaning 'humanity', stressing that everyone is connected, and one can only grow with the efforts of others (Williams, 2018). According to Robb (2017), Ubuntu means that one is something because of another and no one is isolated or an island. This implies that one is what he/she is, because, of others. It shows that a person or community is built because of collective efforts and the support of others. The philosophy of Ubuntu has guided the founding fathers of Africa to work and support each other, as seen during the colonial era. For example, great African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Nyerere, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nelson Mandela, and many others believed in one Africa for all. Their speech, actions, words on conventional media (radio, TV, printed newspapers, magazines, and many more), and support for each other shows the true spirit of Ubuntu enshrined in Africanism. The current question is, do we see Ubuntu on social media among Africans? Do we see the spirit of Ubuntu on comments, videos, and audios made by Africans on social media platforms, concerning those facing different social, economic, and political (SEP) challenges? These challenges have forced many to leave their homes and countries, to become displaced and refugees within their countries, continents, and beyond. Can Africans show Ubuntu on social media?

3. The anti-Ubuntu on social media

As we read and watch social media events, what do you see and read? Many challenges confronting Africans are shown on social media. The challenges confronting Africans should be used to provoke the spirit of Ubuntu when the news and discussions are found on social media, but the opposite is the case. One can ask, do we see Ubuntu on social media these days? Rather, we see criticism, blame, shaming, deformation, abuse, hate speeches, negative comments, sexism, xenophobia, Afrophobia and so many others. For example, during the xenophobic incidents in South Africa, and, other social and political challenges, social media hashtags such as #PutSouthAfricaFirst were used, which have trended more than other hashtags between August 2020 and February 2022 (Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change, 2022). Many conversations and hashtags are used to fuel the challenging incidents and promote national divides between locals and foreigners. Also, the anti-Africanism in Ghana against Nigerians living in Ghana led to the closing of Nigerian shops in support of the Ghana Law, which, aims to stop foreigners from owning small retail shops but investing in big firms worth at least \$1m (Dollars) (bbc.com, 2020).

Furthermore, the agitations in southeast Nigeria by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and his arrest continue to trend with many hashtags on social media, and the southwestern agitation of Sunday Adeyemo alias Igboho. The terrorism in Nigeria by Boko Haram, Bandits, and across the Sahel region in West Africa keeps trending; as well as the 2020 End SARS protest in Nigeria, the agitation by Ambazonia in Cameroon, the terrorism in Somalia, and famine in the horn of Africa, the agitation and conflict in Ethiopia, terrorism in Mozambique, civil protest in Eswatini, political unrest in North Africa, and many other social, economic, and political challenges across Africa. Table 1 presents some hashtags used on social media (Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change, 2022). Some of the hashtags were used to support (pro) and some against (anti) the challenge.

Table 1: Some hashtags used on social media

	Hashtags	Type of incidents	Region	Anti/Pro-Ubuntu
1	#PutSouthAfricaFirst, #PutSouthAfricansFirst, #WeWantOurCountryBack, #PutSAFirst, #ForeignersMustGo, #NoToZimWorkpermits, #SAMediaMustFall, #ForeignersMustleaveSA and #Xenophobia	Xenophobia	South Africa	Pro & Anti
2	#FreeMaziNnamdiKanu, #FreeBiafra, #BiafraReferendum, #FreeNnamdiKanu, #BiafraExit, #EndNigeriaNowToSaveLives	Agitation	Nigeria	Pro & Anti
3	#YorubaNation, #OduduwaRepublicm, #Yoruba	Agitation	Nigeria	Pro & Anti
4	#BringBackOurGirls, #Banditry	Terrorism	Nigeria	Pro & Anti
5	#EndSars	Protest	Nigeria	Pro & Anti
6	#Ambazonia	Agitation	Cameroon	Pro & Anti
7	#Mozambique #Terrorism	Terrorism	Mozambique	Pro & Anti
8	#Somalia, #AlShabab	Terrorism	Somalia	Pro & Anti
9	#TigrayGenocide, #EndTigraySiege, #AllowAccessToTigray, #EndTigrayFamine, #Tigray, #StopTigrayFamine, #StopTigrayGenocide	Agitation	Ethiopia	Pro & Anti
10	#EswatiniProtests #Eswatini, #Manzini, #swaziprotest	Protest	eSwatini	Pro & Anti

The above challenges are supposed to trigger some form of humanity, concerns, sympathy, and affection on social media. However, what do you see? For instance, some use the opportunity to promote racism, Afrophobia, and other negative reactions and hashtags. The anti-Ubuntu on social media is not African and does not promote the common connectivity to be gained through social media presence.

4. Ubuntu on social media, and how can we have Ubuntu on social media?

Africans need to learn from the Ubuntu philosophy and show such on social media platforms. According to Williams (2018) and Mungai (2009), Ubuntu promotes togetherness and care for one another (oneness or humanity). Based on togetherness and humanity:

- a. Africans should be sympathetic to others in crisis.
- b. Africans should always show affection and concern/care for others facing challenges on social media in promoting comments that display oneness in crisis.
- c. Africans should be as humane as possible to other Africans who are facing any form of crisis and challenge.

- d. Africans should return to the mindset of the founding fathers of Africa as shown above.
- e. Africans should use and promote hashtags with elements of hope and solidarity.

5. Recommendations

There is a possibility that Africans can show Ubuntu on social media to victims of the crisis. A true consciousness within the spirit of Ubuntu on social media must be awakened, to achieve sympathy and care for other Africans. However, government or other agencies must play a significant role in promoting good moral social media use through digital citizenship, and, pulling down negative hashtags, comments, videos, and others by filtering social media platforms.

Promoting Ubuntu on social media should be process-driven and intentionally driven. The educational process should be used to create awareness among social media users by making them sympathize with those who are victims of the issues listed above, and others. Ubuntu philosophy and concept should be enshrined into the education syllabus and curriculum and preached in religious organisations.

6. Conclusion

The time for criticism and shaming on social media platforms is over; it is time to show love and care. Ubuntu on social media should be a continuous exercise. Africans should accept imbalance and inequalities (social, political, and educational divide) on the continent and show oneness. The political class should show concern and care for the citizens and do the right thing to ensure continuous development and service delivery in the country and communities.

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