# Counter Narrative of President Buhari's Narrative on Nigerian Youths with Visual Images and Texts on Facebook

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## Abstract

This paper interrogates the visual images and texts Nigerians posted on social media – Facebook as a counter-narrative to President Buhari's narrative that 'we have a very young population, a lot of them have not been to school, and they are claiming they should sit and do nothing but get housing, health care, and education free'. The narrative of Muhammadu Buhari was interpreted by Nigerians as suggesting that the youths are lazy. This attracted a swift reaction from Nigerians, who used social media platforms as the medium through which to present their counter-narrative not merely to the President but global consumers that Nigerian youths are not lazy. In doing this, eight visual images that show young Nigerians engaged in different socio-economic activities were analysed and some interactive texts that convey counter-narrative were interpreted. The analysis reveals that despite government failure in providing a developmental plan for the youths in Nigeria, they are either acquiring skills in furniture making or fashion designs. Some others engage in hawking of different products as a means of livelihood. Besides, a group of young men waiting under the sun on motorcycles in another visual image reflects commercial motorcycle transporters. We concluded that the visual images demonstrate that young Nigerians are not lazy but hardworking and energetic.

**Introduction**

Generally, in international diplomacy, the narratives of Presidents on issues that concern their citizens are important, weighty, respected, and accepted as the true reflection of their lifestyles. So when at the commonwealth meeting held in London, on 19 April 2018, Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari stated that 'we have a very young population, a lot of them have not been to school, and they are claiming they should sit and do nothing but get housing, health care, and education free'. Although this narrative may be accepted in the international community as a true reflection of Nigerian youths, it was perceived differently among Nigerians as implying that 'Nigerian youths are lazy' and so, did not go down well with them. As a result, many youths and critics of the President, after listening to his narrative which represent identity on mass media and social media platforms, responded swiftly with media chats and circulation of visual images of Nigerian youths on social media, to challenge the socio-political discourse by creating counter narrative. These gestures suggest on the one hand, 'the realization that social media are very effective at spreading information rapidly to a broad audience' (Nyst 2018, 17). In this regard, it was seen as suitable medium for providing counter narratives, as the individuals or group do not agree with the master narrative. On the other hand, it demonstrates that Nigerian youths are perceived as people who are energetic and hardworking. Thus, this counter narrative draws attention to the role of young Nigerians as significant stakeholders in shaping socio-political discourse in the nation.

The term *narrative* is defined by Jenny Rankin as a 'story – factual, fictitious, or somewhere between the two – that is usually told verbally or in writing, but may be expressed in other symbolic systems, such as those of art, of sign language or of gesture' (Rankin 2002, 2). The fact that Rankin's definition is not limited to utterance and text, suggests the acknowledgement and recognition of many symbolic forms of communications as narratives that are primordial processes in human affairs. Towards this end, a narrative is conceptualised as Rankin further points out, as 'any form of telling, where a telling involves a teller or narrator, an audience and a subject'. This argument suggests that whoever the narrator may be – an individual, a group of people or a political personality, the ultimate function and intention of a narrative is the communication of ideas, possibilities and meanings on a subject to a targeted audience. In other words, narrative is employed in the attempt to make sense and signal this sense to others. Thus, it might be argued that a narrative from a political authority

– the president of a nation, on any subject is not just dominant but communicates political statements that have far reaching audience than his/her immediate listeners. In this regard, the cultural context of the listeners is important to the understanding of narratives. So narratives may sometimes be reshaped in certain cultural contexts to aid perception.

In this article, therefore, we focus on interrogating the visual images and interactive comments Nigerians circulated on Facebook to establish a counter narrative to President Buhari's narrative on the youths. This is significant given that Nigerians did not adopt the traditional strategy of occupying the streets to oppose the President, but innovatively chose to circulate visual images and textual contents using social media or digital technologies in political engagements, which have not been discussed in a mainstream academic journal. Thus, this article aims to fill that gap in literature within the context of socio-political discourse of social media counter narrative. Such counter narrative could present facts about reality, by speaking to a particular political context through non-violent approach (Sommer 1990). To this end, the circulated visual images do not merely indicate political responses from the citizens to their leader and a broader audience, but hints on finding suitable social media platform to challenge the narrative. This demonstrates as Mora (2014, 1) argues that 'a counter narrative goes beyond the notion that those in relative positions of power can just tell the stories of those in the margins. Instead, these must come from the margins, from the perspectives and voices of those individuals'. It is against this background, the article focuses on the counter narratives that came from the perspective of those in the margin, the Nigerian youths. This reveals not merely the impact of a dominant narrative on people or citizens, but their responses or reactions.

Therefore, the visual images are interrogated to bring meanings out of their contexts and contents and the interactivity that followed after they were posted on Facebook, to state the voices of Nigerians in response to President Muhammadu Buhari's narrative. To begin the discourse, we focus on contextualizing scholarly analysis of political discourses of online and off-line narratives and counter narratives, the research methodology adopted in this qualitative article, visual images and texts, Nigeria and the role of young people in Nigerian politics, the direction of their votes, the digital consumption habits of Nigeria's youth, the presentations and analysis of the visual images and textual contents and finally discussion and conclusion. The following questions guided this discussion, what visual images did Nigerians circulate on Facebook as counter narrative to President Buhari's narrative? What

ideas and meanings do the interrogation of the visual images and the textual contents reveal about Nigerian youth? Therefore, the contexts and contents of the visual images are interrogated to state the counter narrative of young Nigerians to President Muhammadu Buhari's narrative on the youths.

**Political Discourses of Narratives and Counter Narratives**

Counter narrative is a method of opposing narratives by offering a counter argument. Most times counter narrative arise out of groups, citizens or individuals whose experiences do not fit the dominant or master narratives. According to Stanley, 'counter narratives act to deconstruct the master narratives, and they offer alternatives to the dominant discourse' (2007, 14). Thus, counter narrative which often challenges dominant ideas, may be done directly or indirectly through a range of offline or online means. This is done by providing multiple realistic and conflicting evidences to understand lived experiences. In this regard, counter narrative is perceived as being more powerful, because it resists another narrative.

In interrogating the counter narratives to Buhari's narrative it is important to explore some cases of counter narratives in political discourses in different parts of the world. Although there are different modes of counter narrative in political engagements in the digital era, Africa has a long history of mass street protests. This may be traced to period when 'colonial powers faced opposition from national liberation movements, as well as strikes by labour unions and street demonstrations by disenfranchised urban populations' (Arnould et al 2016, 1). Even after independence of African countries from colonial administrators, other forms of street protests resurfaced. Suffice it to say that, many of those political engagements were staged because of 'discontent over the dominance of one-part rule and dictatorships, as well as worsening economic conditions and draconian austerity measures' (Arnould et al 2016, 1). Aside from those political challenges that unfolded in different parts of Africa, since the 1960s, almost every decade young men and women have responded to political issues with public protests aimed at countering different forms of dominance and narratives. Interestingly, those political engagements brought about democratic shifts across the African continent.[1]

The digital era has witnessed a new mode of political discourses of narratives and counter narratives. While some of these political engagements are done on social media, others take place physically in form of occupying parks, streets, or other public spaces. An example of a

political countering project that adopted off-line and online strategies is the Occupy Wall Street event that was held in the fall of 2011. When this movement began their political representations on September 17, 2011, although they gathered daily at Zuccotti Park to protest income inequalities, their additional modes of political representation through media technologies and other attendant communication strategies 'allowed the political project to persist beyond the dispersion of the original protest in Zuccotti Park' (Creech 2014, 465). As part of their strategies during the gathering at the park, individuals documented the event using cell phone cameras and catalogued them through blog posts and social media messages, thereby reaching a wide audience.[2] Consequently, many spectators who viewed the movement through digital platforms expressed support, because they understood the objects of the critique (Creech 2014, 262).

Similarly, from the late 2000s, there were unprecedented protests in the Middle East and North Africa, where social activists adopted off-line and new media strategies of political engagements in countering their governments. When 'protesters in Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria poured into the streets to express dissatisfaction with their governments', their activities reached the international community because bloggers and citizen journalists used mobile phones to record and circulate video clips on social media platforms (Gheytachi and Moghadam 2014). As a result of the strategic deployment of digital technologies in the 'Arab Spring' counter narratives to political powers, in the Middle East and North Africa, access to the web increased among young women and men.[3] Likewise, in other parts of Africa, different forms of counter narratives to political powers continued in the digital era. While some adopted street protests combined with the deployment of social media platforms, others took to occupation of public spaces to counter narrate dominant narratives. In Ethiopia, countering political powers took the form of mass street protests, and these were witnessed 'across Oromia and Amhara regions over grievances about political exclusion, which gained global prominence when an Ethiopian athlete at the Olympic Games in Brazil made a gesture (wrists crossed above his head) which has come to symbolize the demonstrations' (Arnould et al 2016, 1).

Furthermore, in a different context, when the Nigerian government, on January 1, 2012, announced the removal of subsidy on petrol, it did not predict the dimension of counter narrative from the youth to the narrative. To this end, on January 2, 2012, young Nigerians occupied streets in protest, under the banner 'Occupy Nigeria Movement' (Akor 2017, 109).

Before this day, attempts by youth groups to have staged a protest on November 11, 2011, 'were met with stiff resistance from the security agencies who cordoned off the roads leading to the National Unity Fountain (the venue of the protest) with armoured tanks, police dogs and snipers' (Akor 2017, 113). As a result, young Nigerians went into hiding but relied on social media to communicate and mobilize for the next street protest to counter narrate the dominant narrative in January 2012. Thus the turn-out to counter narrate the subsidy narrative was massive, when 'the protests started in Abuja on 2 January, in Lagos on 3 January, in Kano on 4 January, and consequently spread to other locations in the country' (Akor 2017, 114).

Aside from the aforementioned forms of counter narratives to political powers that had taken place on the African continent, another form of counter narrative was from students of higher institutions in South Africa. This is known as the *Fees must fall protest*, which gained momentum in 2015/2016 and spread across the country. Although the student-led movement began heated debates to counter the high fees in universities, they soon expanded their scope to demand the 'decolonization of the educational system, [the] transformation of universities to address racial and gender inequalities in terms of staff composition, as well as insourcing of general workers' (Langa 2017, 6). To this end, visual images of the students' protests were circulated online as part of their counter narrative strategies, and there were more media reporting of the violent dimensions of the protests. The violent nature of the counter narratives was because the students did not adopt social media platforms to challenge the authorities (Arnould et al 2016; Langa 2017). From the analysis of the different kinds of counter narratives that were witnessed in America, the 'Arab Spring' and other African countries, it is evident that, while some of the counter narratives were done with digital technologies and street protests that were reported on social media, others used social media to challenge dominant narratives.

**Research Methodology**

Hypothesis: the visual images and interactive comments circulated by Nigerians on Facebook counter narrate President Muhammadu Buhari's narrative on Nigerian youths being lazy. Although the responses of Nigerians to the president's narrative in April 2018, was nationwide on different social media platforms, this article focuses on interrogating few visual images and the interactive comments made by Nigerians on Facebook. The rationale for selecting the visual images and interactive comments from Facebook is not merely

because it is the social media platform through which the researchers knew of the counter narrative but through it, images that reflect the daily experiences of young struggling Nigerians were circulated. In addition, the rationale for selecting the timelines of the two Nigerians is because of access through their tagged posts and the high number of interactive comments on the first image, and the high number of images reflecting young active Nigerians in the second timeline. To this end, whereas the first timeline has 1 image with introductory textual content and 931 interactive comments, the second timeline has 15 images with 84 interactive comments. While avoiding being biased in the sampling of comments, the study adopts purposive sampling in selecting few comments that convey the counter narrative argument and selected 8 visual images in all. They were found suitable after excluding some for repetition, despite focus on constructing counter narratives that reflect the realities of lived experiences by young Nigerians.

In stating how this counter narrative is produced in this qualitative paper, we focus on interrogating the visual images and their textual contents by combining the still image method and visual hermeneutics theory as tools for the analysis. As we focus on using these tools for analysis, we acknowledge in Rose's (2001, 16) words that the 'interpretations of visual images broadly concur that there are three sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image (refers to where an image was made), the site of the image itself (refers to the visual content), and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences' (refers to where the image encounters its users or spectators). This suggests that the visual image relays multiple meanings. Thus, the still image method is adopted because it constitutes historical documentation of 'realities that would [not] be the same if nobody took pictures of them' (Derek 2009, 52). And also because the still images that are chosen play strong roles in the visual communication of counter-narrative. In doing this, we seek to interrogate the realities of the lived experiences of young Nigerians that are informed through the perception of the photographic images. Lastly, given that the visual images attracted audience participation in counter-narrative to the president's narrative, we focus on interpreting the ideas that were conveyed. To this end, the visual hermeneutics theory is adopted to interpret and analyse the experiences in the images and contextualise them in the cultural histories recalled.

**Visual Images and Texts**

Although in visual communication of narratives or counter narrative, an individual may use images without texts and still relay meanings, the combination of images and texts is aimed at relaying strong social and political commentaries of resistance. Such combinations do not subordinate visual images to text or imply that images do not have the autonomy in conveying meanings. Instead, the combination of visual images and texts show the interdependence of visual culture and literary art in helping 'the viewer to understand a message faster' (Russmann and Svenson 2017, 1). Besides, it also demonstrates that 'visual images very often work in conjunction with other kinds of representations' (Rose 2001, 10) in the construction of meanings.

As the producers of the counter narrative combines visual images and texts, this section examines what visual images and texts means. Visual images such as photographs, according to Drew and Guillemin (2014, 56), are concrete representations that contain 'information useful for intersecting social and cultural phenomenon'. The social and cultural phenomenon that often intersects in visual images is particular classes of people, places, actions, roles, situations and things as though they are real. In a related view, Rose (2001, 6) observes that 'images offer views of the world; they render the world in visual terms. But this rendering even by photographs is never innocent. These images are never transparent windows on to the world'. In contrast, Drew and Guillemin (2014, 56) note that photographs 'are sometimes attributed as faithful depictions of truth or a window on the world'. Their arguments suggest that photographs do not merely act as medium for interpreting the world, but as faithful cultural products that provide knowledge about the world, by presenting visible evidences.

To this end, it might be argued that the images of Nigerian youths embedded in a social media counter narrative do not merely interpret their world, but are faithful representations of the world of those youths. Nonetheless, we know that the producers of images have the capacity as Drew and Guillemin (2014, 56) argue, to sometime 'artfully choose and/or manipulate what they include. This is part of a legitimate process for them to deliberately influence the story they want the image to tell'. If producers of images manipulate them, then this argument supports Rose's stance that some photographs are not innocent. Despite this argument, it is difficult to establish that the photographs used in this article were manipulated. But what appears important is how they may be analysed as powerful tools in driving

perspective, and influencing public opinions (Domke et al 2002) to counter narrate a dominant narrative.

What is a text? A text is a mode of representation that may be described as literary art. As Fairclough (2003, 10) notes a 'text is a transcript of what is said and to a degree one can see meaning-making going on by looking at how participants respond to each other'. Although a text may be seen as product of interactions among participants in social event, it might also be argued that text may be generated by an individual. But since an individual act by speaking or writing, he/she may initiate an interaction consciously or unconsciously. In so doing, texts can be seen as enacting social relations between participants in social events and representing aspects of the world (Fairclough 2003). Most times, what is said in a text always rests upon unsaid assumptions, which places a responsibility on an interpreter not merely to analyse what is said but also what is assumed.

**Nigeria and the Role of Young People in Political System**

The British government in 1901 formed the Nigeria colony out of many disparate populations and vast territory (Visona 2016). But it only became an independent nation in October 1, 1960, with the amalgamations of over three hundred ethnic groups, speaking hundreds of languages. Although the nation is made up of hundreds of ethnic groups spread across six geopolitical regions, there are three major ethnic groups namely Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo (James 2021). These ethnic divides are evidently manifest with Yoruba being the dominant culture in the southwest, Hausa in the northern region and Igbo in southeast. As a result of the many disparate populations spread across vast territory, Nigeria is endowed with human and natural resources that should have made her a developed nation. Unfortunately, despite being governed by leaders from the different regions of the country, her divisions along the lines of ethnicities intertwined with religions have hampered significant development. This is an agonising reality of Nigerian independence betrayed by its own, as citizens live with expectations unfulfilled by despotic regimes.

Besides, while we seek to discuss the role of young people in Nigerian political system, we also focus on narrating who may be considered a youth, and their population in Nigeria. Expectedly, in Nigeria, young people constitute a large population of active participants in the political system. Nigeria is acclaimed the most populous Black Country in the world, with a conservative population of about 180 million people. What percentage of this population may be considered as young people? The definition of who may be considered a youth vary

from country to country. However, 'the United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines "youth", as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by the Member States'[4]. Despite the United Nations' definition of youth, the age group is increased in the African Youth Charter definition of the term youth. In doing this, it defined who a youth is within the African context based on Africa's developmental realities. Therefore, a youth is 'any individual between 15-35 years of age'[5]. But the Nigeria President, Muhammadu Buhari categorized the youth as persons below the age of 30 years. To this end, young people in Nigeria accounts for over 60 percent of the estimated 180 million populations. This contextualizes the category of people the Nigerian President constructs his narrative around. They are energetic and hardworking, resilient in the face of challenges.

What roles do young Nigerians play in the political system of the nation? The history of Nigerian political landscape reveals that 'in the immediate post-independence era, the youth played significant roles in national development' (Amzat and Abdullahi 2016, 126). Most of the founding fathers of Nigeria were young people. Even after gaining independence, the nation was ruled by young military officers until it was returned to democracy in 1979. But the decline in youth participation in Nigerian politics began between 1979 and 1984 (Amzat and Abdullahi 2016, 126). Since then, while elected officials derive their just powers from the people, most of whom are young, they never consider young people worthy of active participation in politics. The situation in the twenty-first century seems to be worse, as Bello (2019, 26) points out, 'in Nigeria, it is difficult to allow youths to fill [the] position that has been allotted to them. For instance, in June 2014, during the election of APC that produced John Oyegun as the party chairman, the party-appointed a 52-year-old man (Ibrahim Jalo) as its National youth's leader'. This appears to be a mockery of the term youth. The painful reality is that, although young people are not given the opportunity to actively participate in politics, politicians always seek their votes before and during elections. And in some cases, the bourgeois use them to buy votes, rig elections through physical snatching of ballot boxes (Bello 2019).

**Digital consumption/production habits and practices of Young People**

In Nigeria, the estimated population of internet users in January 2021 is 104 million. While the statistics of social media users released same time reveals that there are 33 million active social media users,[6] it is difficult to establish that most of these users are young people. However, an estimated seventy percent of young people own mobile phones in Nigeria, and

most of them are smartphones. The preference of young people for smartphones is because of access to internet, which the mobile telecommunication service providers made easy through cheap internet data bundles. As a result, some of these young people access the social data, whereas others pay for monthly access to social media platform. In so doing, they regularly buy data packages for daily and weekly access. This enables young people in Nigeria to be constantly abreast with happenings around the world through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp among others. Apart from using these platforms for interacting and socialising in their everyday life, young people utilise social media in information search and political discourse (Shadrach and Apuke 2020). Some others access these social media platforms not merely for information but entertainment and education purposes (Chinedu-Okeke and Obi 2016).

Before the advent of social media which are now within the reach of most young people in Nigeria, the mass media were the major platforms for political awareness and debates. Those platforms were used and controlled by government and the elites as medium of top down communication, intimidation and harassment of citizens. This made it difficult for common Nigerians to ask them questions or respond to political happenings (Shadrach and Apuke 2020). But 'the emergence of social media is believed to have reduced the one way (top-down) political communication system orchestrated by traditional mass media in Africa and Nigeria' (Shadrach and Apuke 2020, 2). This is because social media platforms afford young people with inquisitive and critical minds, the opportunity not merely to receive or consume information on national or political matters but where possible, engage the elites in creative arguments.

A major production habit and practice of young people on social media in Nigeria takes place on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter. This is because, in this age of technology, these mainstream sites are employed by young people in circulating information, sharing of visual images and texts and socializing. On the other hand, as Shadrach and Apuke (2020, 4) point out, 'it is believed that social media such as Facebook and Twitter serve as platforms of Public spheres where Nigerians can debate political issues among themselves, form opinions and link up with their political leaders'. To this end, while many use social media platforms for positive political discourse, some others end up using them negatively. This is even revealed from research findings that cases of violence and tensions witnessed before, during, and after the 2011 elections in Nigeria were caused by inciting messages, hate, and false rumours spread by young Nigerians on social media (Shadrach and Apuke 2020). In view of

the digital consumption and production habits of youths in Nigeria, we argue that they are active participants on social media.

**Presentations of the Visual Images and Textual Contents**

This section presents the analysis and interpretations of selected visual images and texts shared on the Facebook timelines of two Nigerians, who along with their friends engaged in interactive comments to counter narrate President's narrative. This practice is supported by Fairclough (2003, 10) who argues that 'one can see meaning-making going on by looking at how participants respond to each other's conversational turns'. Although the researchers first saw the circulated visual images on the timeline of Moses Jedidiah, he was tagged by Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi who generated the images. Hence, to establish the number of interactive comments and the main sources of the postings, we traced them to the timelines of "Correct Bro" and Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi. While the background information of their Facebook profiles reveals that they are men, "Correct Bro" simply states that those who manage the page are in Nigeria, whereas Oguchi lives in Abuja, Nigeria. Besides, since information about their age is not accessible from their Facebook profiles we could not establish if they are youth. Despite this challenge, we the researchers conclude that the participants are young Nigerians; this is because their profile pictures and those of the interactive participants suggest that they are young. This is however not to deny the likelihood that older persons participated in the interaction. Furthermore, while the counter narrative of these interactive participants may be perceived as being done out of context, it can be argued on the one hand that their opposition is based on their perception, meaning, and interpretation of the assumed dominant narrative. And on the other hand, it is because they attempted to construct the identities of some youths that may take exception from those referred to in the dominant narrative.

Figure 1 was generated by "Correct Bro" on April 20, 2018. It presents an image with textual content but the photographer and when the image was taken is unknown. The textual content embedded beside the image, reads: 'After all these suffer[ings], somebody will now go and tell the world that we are lazy people waiting for freebies ... E dey pain me'. Although this textual content seems to express the displeasure of the youth in the image to the President's narrative, it can be argued that the image presents a self-inflicted suffering, as the youth is not under compulsion to carry more than one or two bags of cement at a time. Such display of power highlights the activity of a youth who is high on drug. Besides, the high number (931)

of textual responses to this image and the introductory text reveals not just the high number of young Nigerians who countered the President's narrative but their pains. In this regard, the high interactive responses support Peruta and Shields's (2018, 178) stance, that 'Facebook users may feel more attracted to straightforward and common messages that contain photos and text'. This is because texts and 'visual images can be powerful and seductive in their own right' (Rose 2001, 10).

Analysis of some texts reveal the response of an interactive participant, Otega Agbalagba who invites the President, saying '#Dear #Pa #Buhari, why not come to Oshodi and see young people struggling to catch buses to the[ir] places of work as early as 4:30 am. You can stroll down to Computer Village too. Ariaria (Aba Market) and the main market (Onitsha) should also be part of your itinerary. You would have a good sight of works done by very industrious intelligent young persons'. This verbal invitation to the President is not merely to different sites where young Nigerians engage in their daily socio-economic activities for livelihood, but to establish that they are not part of those waiting for the government to meet their needs. Such invitation to evidence based sites also portends the presentation of 'contradictory position in some of the human realities of world domination' (Brennan 1990, 48). In a related view, another interactive participant Igwe Nnamdi says, 'Imagine calling Nigerian youths lazy. No Jobs: we became entrepreneurs. No light: we still generate our electricity. No Government support: yet we still fend for ourselves'. In presenting this counter narrative, Nnamdi's argument highlights some of the key challenges confronting Nigerian youths, and despite Buhari's government failure to create jobs, provide stable electricity or support for the youth, they overcame. This stance does not just reveal the determination of youths in Nigeria to succeed, but how they are constantly addressing their socio-economic challenges. Beyond these interactive engagements on social media, Nnamdi called on Nigerians to get their permanent voters' card (PVC) and vote in a new President rather than Buhari, during the 2019 presidential election.
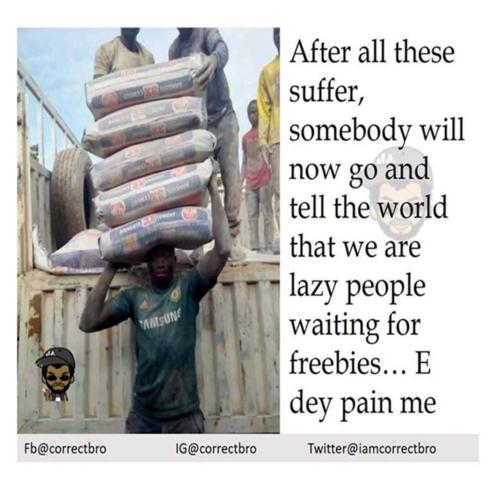
**Figure 1:** Correct Bro, *Young man carrying bags of cement*

Close analysis of the visual image shows a young black man dressed in a t-shirt, indeed English attire that indicates the consumption of foreign dress element in Nigeria. The head loading of five bags of cement, each weighing 50kg, signal attempt to transport 250kg to a store. Although the representation appears manipulated or photo shopped, it can be argued that the photograph is a faithful depiction of the youth world. It shows a youth who is in a hurry to offload the bags of cement within a limited time. The background reveals four able-bodied youths inside a trailer loading the cement on the head of the standing youth. This image narrates the experience not just of these youths but recalls the cultural history of many others across Nigeria, whose daily means of livelihood is the offloading of cement bags and other bagged items from trailers. Although the image constructs a socio-economic activity performed by young men, it is difficult to establish their educational level; as such menial jobs are sometimes executed by illiterates, unemployed school leavers, undergraduates and even graduates. This argument is supported with a related claim by Joshua Ose Oboh (2018), one of the interactive participants who observe that, 'I have my masters [degree] with my first

degree and I still go to the farm with old fashion tools. Success comes when opportunity meets preparation; Nigerian youths are prepared, we are just waiting for an opportunity. # I am hardworking'. This view seems to suggest that the President's narrative should not merely centre on youths who never went to school, but how to create employment opportunities for those who are educated. Since many are academically qualified waiting for the right opportunities.

To this end, the counter narrative establishes the fact that most youths are hard-working and many others are hopeful and optimistic of a better future. Besides, in the light of the depicted activity, the image highlights the human powered transportation, which on the one hand is cheaper for the owners of the products, and on the other hand provides livelihood for the youths.

To create a counter narrative with visual images and texts, Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi shared (15) visual images on his Facebook timeline on April 19, 2018, and the interactive comments made by participants were (84) in all. It is however important to note that the photographers of the visual images and when the images were taken are unknown. But for the purpose of this research seven (7) visual images were selected from Oguchi's timeline, whereas the remaining (8) were excluded, as they are similar to the ones selected. However, some of the selected images reveal similar activities, but convey different ideas and meanings about young people when contextualised in their cultural histories in Nigeria. Besides, the similarities in activities also indicate that Oguchi did not engage in well-researched socio-economic engagements of the youths. Rather they suggest quick collections of visual images from perhaps his neighbourhood used to swiftly counter the president's narrative. This signals as Rose cited by Russmann and Svensson (2017, 2) argue, an understanding of 'when, why and how people create and use visual images' on social media platform. Although the selected images do not sufficiently represent the socioeconomic activities of young Nigerians, their inclusion were based on the available data collected from the Facebook timelines of the two young men that initiated the counter narrative.

To initiate counter narrative, Oguchi made the following comment along with the visual images he shared:

Here are some of the millions of lazy Nigerian youths hawking from morning to night under the hot African sun! I am a Nigerian, and I am not lazy! This same man that called you lazy has never done anything to support our education system since he left office [as military Head of State] and till now he's our president again. This same man hired 13 SANs to defend

his WAEC certificate, this same man's children are millionaires on oil money, [and] this same man is currently ... living on oil money and cannot boast of a single personal investment that has gainfully employed Nigerian youths!

In response to this textual content, an interactive participant Sunny Pee observes that 'I feel so heartbroken by that statement from someone who is supposed to be the one protecting the integrity of the country. Shame on him!!!!' Aside from being disappointed with the narrative, even though Sunny Pee is not in a position to determine a better narrative from President Buhari, he would have expected a construction of youth and national identity that highlights the strengths of Nigerian youths. Similarly, Oguchi took a conversational turn noting that 'It's painful. That is not what the president should be telling the world, who doesn't know internationally the youths and people who are lazy, refuse education, and depend only on the government'. In Oguchi's argument, he constructs the identity of Nigerian youth referred to in the narrative. Why did he counter the narrative? Is his pain because the President made the narrative at an international forum? Or did he assume the narrative applied to all youth? It appears the counter narrative is not just because of a phrase taken out of context, but for collective image of Nigerian youth.

However, to establish the identity of the youth, Akinola (2018, 1) points out that 'the specter of young men and women roaming the streets, begging for food and money, sadly, portrays a picture of laziness on the part of our youths. If one must be brutally honest, this ugly specter is more visible in the North where President Muhammadu Buhari hails from'. It is however contestable to conclude that it is only in Northern Nigeria one would find youth who refuse education and depend on the government. Perhaps the President was referring to youth in the Niger Delta region or elsewhere in Nigeria. Besides, another interactive participant, Mary Oduma observes that it 'Saddens to wake up every morning to face another hustle even in the scorching sun. Then an old illiterate who worsened our economy ... [would] make our hustle more difficult [by] call[ing] us lazy'. Oduma's argument reflects on a major aspect of the Buhari's government that have impacted the country negatively and accounts for lack of jobs. This is the negative economic impacts across Nigeria. This has caused great discontent among most people despite new innovation, search for work and extra hard work to make ends meet.

Aside from the analysis of the interactive textual contents, Figure 2 presents a visual image that reveals two youths depicted carrying trays loaded with tomatoes, peppers and vegetables neatly arranged, as they hawk and walk towards the viewers. Through this activity, they bring

the farm produce closer to people that need them, saving them the time of going to market. The site of production suggests that it was depicted in an urban neighbourhood rather than a market. Although there are other people in the photograph, the images of the two youth are the focal point, as they are relevant in establishing a counter narrative on the youth. This socioeconomic activity of hawking presents one of the many experiences of child labour in Nigeria, especially during recession in low income and less privileged families. In some cases, youths between the ages of 13 and 17 who engage in hawking do so because they are out of school, some others do it after school hours, while many others do so perennially because they do not go to school. Most times, this also describes the many experiences of forced child labour across Nigeria, either by biological parents or any other adult.



**Figure 2:** Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi, *Youths hawking tomatoes, pepper and vegetables.* Posted on April 19, 2018

Besides, this image establishes the fact that hawking is not limited only to the female gender. On the other hand, while it may narrate the experiences of hardworking male children in supporting their family income and makes a commentary that most youth do not wait for the government to provide their needs, it reflects child abuse. It echoes child abuse not merely because it constitutes 'flagrant abuse of children's God-given and constitution-guaranteed freedom, comfort and peace, by adult in society' (Akpan and Oluwabamide 2010, 189), but because it exposes them to many risks like kidnap, being lured into sexual abuse or knocked down by vehicles. In addition, street hawking develops in young male children poor social interaction among their peers in school (Nwajiuba and Oni 2017).

Although a related scene of hawking is presented in Figure 3, a major difference with the first one is that it represents young men who are old enough to be independent or start a family. The visual image shows a group of young Nigerians hawking different products in the centre of a busy road. Some displayed their products inside cartons, while others are holding the products in their hands for people to see and request. The site of production of this image suggests that it was during busy hours around a market in southwest Nigeria. The movement of the young men in the space between the vehicles signal a procession. Indeed, a procession of street vendors attempting to sell their products to motorists in traffic. This site draws a viewer's attention to an experience of socio-economic empowerment of young Nigerians in the southern part of the country. Study has shown that 'there are more than five million vendors in Nigeria' (Nwajiuba and Oni 2017, 2). And the major cause of this rising number is poverty. Despite this stance, it can be argued that not all young men affected by poverty in Nigeria resort to hawking. Given that the visual image makes a socio-economic commentary on the engagements of young Nigerians, it presents reality of lived experiences of people who may take exception from the narrative of people waiting for the government to meet their needs. The idea echoes means of daily livelihood.



**Figure 3**: Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi, *Youths Hawking on the Road.*
Posted on April 19, 2018

Aside from visual images revealing young men hawking, Figure 4 introduces the viewer to four young Nigerian women carrying different items arranged in wide trays as they hawk. The site of production of this photograph suggests that it was taken around a residential area in an urban area. However, the exact location of is not known but the focal point is the identity of the young Nigerian women walking towards the viewers. Although the visual image highlights hawking, it presents to the viewers some other kinds of products that may be sold on the street. In this context, the hawked products are roasted groundnuts and pawpaw. This experience recalls the cultural history of some young women who are either married or unmarried, but often with low educational status. Research shows that 'itinerant trading is the second major economic activity of women in West Africa' (Fawole et al 2003, 80). They are either professional hawker who own their trades or young women who are learning how to trade under the supervision of an instructor. To this end, as they attempt to support their family, some hawkers sell from dawn to dusk. As they move from place to place, they pause only eat. While this reflects on the trading activities of young women, it also creates a counter narrative they do not sit and wait for their husbands to provide all their needs, neither the government. It also echoes the lived experience of young women who shape the socio-economic landscape in Nigeria. The next visual image in Figure 5 draws a viewer's attention to a different form of socio-economic engagement of Nigerian youths.

**Figure 4:** Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi, *Young Ladies Hawking in the Sun.*
Posted on April 19, 2018

It shows two young Nigerian women, sitting behind sewing machines in a posture that suggests active engagement in sewing clothes in a tailor's shop. In this context, the site of production of this visual image is the tailor's shop. The sociocultural context of this visual image, presents a different experience of young Nigerian women in the fashion industry. This reflects the practice of artisans or skilled dress-makers and fashion designers of women African apparel (Akinwumi 1998). Such African apparels are often cultural norms of design that are aesthetic response of the participants of the culture. Aside from the ready-made English wears Nigerian women buy from the market; most clothes worn by Nigerian women are products of aesthetic responses of designers from different cultures. Some of those cultural clothes are designed, styled and sewn by seamstresses in Nigeria. Given the creativity of these young women, the argument is that Nigerians who engage in the production of African apparel in tailor shops are not lazy. Additionally, they do not only engage in dress-making as means of livelihood but employ and train other young female artisans as well. Such functional programme is a skill acquisition training that affords youths

a means to be relevant in fashion designing (Fajobi et al 2017). It reflects on gender role female seamstresses in contemporary Nigerian society.



**Figure 5:** Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi, *Women sewing clothes.*
Posted on April 19, 2018

The next visual image in figure 6 introduces the viewer to another socio-economic activity of young Nigerians. It reveals a depiction of a youth casually dressed in a worn-out t-shirt focused on a shaped out piece of wood in a carpenter's workshop. The site of production of this photograph signals a carpenter's workshop. The large shaped wood that this young Nigerian holds is one end of a wooden bed. In front of the youth are other frames of furniture painted brown, which demonstrate creative upholstery industry. Although the youth is busy, he appears to be an apprentice. Such apprenticeship is a veritable vehicle, a functional prerequisite for employment generation and poverty eradication (Fajobi et al 2017, 1). This narrates the experience of young Nigerians whose parents enrol them in learning carpentry after returning from school or as a career path for the future, especially in low income families. To this end, carpentry is a profession or craft that provides livelihood for the teaming populations of Nigerian youths who are unemployed. This industry is focused on the production of locally made furniture for household and office use, instead of over dependence on foreign made furniture. As an image aimed at establishing a counter narrative, a Nigerian youth engaged in carpentry cannot be said to be lazy or sitting and waiting for government to

provide his basic needs. Besides, this youth might as well be the son of the carpenter, which suggests that he is working or learning under his father.



**Figure 6:** Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi, *A Youth at Carpenter's Workshop.*
Posted on April 19, 2018

In figure 7, a different scene unfolds depicting young Nigerian men seated on their motorcycles under the hot sun. The site of production shows a photograph shot at a busy junction or park, where the cyclists often wait for prospective customers. This activity narrates the experience of commercial motorcycle transport in Nigeria, which in some cases provides self-employment (Arosanyin 2010), and at other times they operate and pay daily agreed amount to the owners of the motorcycles. Although different names are used to identify the operators of this mode of transportation in Nigeria, the popular one is okada. Okada riders are most times the available means of transportation of goods and passengers to remote areas not merely in urban areas but also in the rural areas. As Arosanyin (2010, 53) points out, 'the use of this mode is entrenched in their ability to provide door-to-door services and ability to navigate alleyways, footpaths and poor roads, which are inaccessible by other motorized modes as well as speed advantage in the face of congestions through jumping traffic'. To this end, it became a source of employment and income for many young Nigerians – educated and uneducated. Thus, its inclusion in a counter narrative argument is to

establish that youths engaged in commercial motorcycle transport are not lazy neither are they waiting for government to provide their needs.



**Figure 7:** Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi, *Youths Waiting to Transport Passengers with Motorcycles.* Posted on April 19, 2018

Lastly, Figure 8 is a visual image that shows young women seated beside the road with different vegetables arranged in front of them. The visual image which was shot from the back view does not merely present a realistic experience of young unemployed women vending but draw attention to their inability to afford a shop. As a result, they sit on the side of a road to engage in their petty socio-economic activity. Besides, the traffic orchestrated by vehicular movement on the opposite street, the architectural designs at the background and activities around this road suggests that, this photograph was taken around a market in southern Nigeria. While this visual image may be narrated as providing another, arguably richer, source of information, it demonstrates that young Nigerian women who sits beside the road vending vegetables are not lazy but hard working in providing for their personal needs and in some cases supporting their immediate family.

**Figure 8:** Joshua Ifeanyichukwu Oguchi, *Young Nigerian Women Selling beside the Road.*
Posted on April 19, 2018

While these visual images reveal the problem of underdevelopment in Nigeria, they echo the experiences of the youth in terms of socio-economic engagement and means of livelihood. On the other hand, this reveals the neglect in the development of youth in Nigeria (Fajobi et al 2017).

**Discussion**

The objective of this paper was to interrogate the visual images two Nigerians shared on Facebook and the interactive comments made as they took turns to counter-narrate President Buhari's narrative. The result of the interrogation reveals that, although it is argued that 'visuals provide another, arguably richer, source of information than written text' (Russmann and Svensson 2017, 3), in this political interactive engagement both visual images and textual contents were found useful in communicating counter-narrative meanings. In this regard, it can be argued that the combination of visual images and texts complemented each other not just to communicate opposing views but to help the viewer to understand their message faster. Besides, this demonstrates as Mora (2014, 1) argues that 'by choosing their own words and telling their own stories, members of marginalized communities provide alternative points of view'. Thus the visual images and the interactive textual contents posted on Facebook by Nigerians creates a counter-narrative as they reveal some of the daily

'entrepreneurial drive of young people in the country'.[7] Although the visual images were posted to challenge, reject and oppose the President's narrative, they rather seems to establish his stance that these particular youths engaged in one socio-economic activity or the other, are not part of those waiting for the government. Their interactivity further demonstrates that even though his statement or narrative was taken out of context, the visual images and interactive texts take on new significance as they become elements in another telling or narrative. In this regard, it highlights how a narrative may be reshaped in different cultural contexts to aid understanding and perception.

These repertoire of images do not merely reflect young Nigerians, but may in D'Alleva's (2005:160) words 'suggest to the viewer that the truth, no matter how it is told, is ... powerful' for the global audience to consume. Rather, it can be argued that the collection of visual images and texts present the experiences of young Nigerians in different settings to demonstrate that 'some narratives are potential stories waiting to be fleshed out' (Rankin 2002, 2). In this regard, though the images were used to counter narrate, they fleshed out the president's narrative by opening up pictorial and textual narratives with a young men hawking, another carrying a heavy load on the head, others selling different items by the roadside in a market, another one at the carpenter's workshop, a group of others waiting on motorcycles to transport people and some others sewing at the tailor's shop. Such use of pictorial representations record knowledge and model thought processes, a practice that dates 'back to the earliest humans who left a history of their life through their drawings on cave walls' (Renfro 2017, 95). But in this context, the aim is to visualize the youths and to project their images both locally and internationally (Vokes and Newbury 2018, 1), not as lazy but energetic and industrious people.

From the close analysis of the visual images, while it might be difficult to categorically state the educational levels of these young Nigerians hawking, providing services, in carpentry workshop and selling by the side of the road, yet their activities signify socioeconomic engagements of both educated and uneducated youths. The visual images demonstrate that 'hawking has been a source of employment for thousands of peoples both the educated and uneducated due to expanding levels of unemployment in the country'(Bamigboye 2015, 9). So many educated young Nigerians who do not have employment engage in different kinds of legitimate economic activities to make ends meet. For instance, in Lagos, hawkers

comprise about 20 percent of the total national labour force (Bamibgoye 2015). While this figure may be high and worrisome, hawking for them appears to be the sure way of providing income for their household needs. It is against this background, Nigerians refuted the President's narrative to take exception, by providing some of these visual images of young Nigerians, that youth hawking or transporting people with motorcycles to earn a living are not waiting for the government. Even though hawking is an economic activity in Nigeria, the worth of the items that some of these young Nigerians trade may be barely $10, yet they are committed to doing that daily. Depending on the patronage, some may have the opportunity to sell items worth $30 from dawn to dusk. This reveals that young Nigerians 'engage in street hawking due to the poverty level of their parents in order to finance their education and to boost the household income' (Salisu 2012, vii).

While hawking and some of the activities young Nigerians engage in for daily living have a long history, such activities increased under the present government led by President Buhari, whose style of leadership and anti-corruption crusade contributed immense hardship to Nigerians. The President had acknowledged in several public gatherings that he is aware that Nigerians are suffering; however, his claims has not impacted Nigerians positively, neither is there an end in sight anytime soon. This is not to deny that 'in Nigeria, there are significant attempts to address the challenges of women, which could be peculiar relatively to regions, states, and localities' (Aliyu 2013, 448). But, where and when such happens only a few young women may benefit from such sustainable development programs. Notwithstanding, it can be argued that over the years, in most Nigerian societies many women have faced daunting challenges of widowhood, single parenthood, joblessness, and no source of livelihood (Aliyu (2013). Yet some young women do not allow the challenges of joblessness and widowhood to confine them, as they make a living from selling beside the road or hawk goods on the street.

In their counter-narratives, Nigerians used different expressions in textual contents such as '#I am hardworking', 'I am not lazy', '#wearenotlazy', 'don't mind Buhari, you are not lazy', 'No Jobs: we became entrepreneurs'. But while ironically referring to young Nigerians and calling for the next action, many concluded that #LazyNigerianYouths should all get PVCs' to exercise their civic responsibilities by voting the president out of office during the 2019 general elections. This was followed with the hashtag '#VoteOut2019', but the concern of Nigerians is that their votes do not count, so they may not succeed in voting him out. But that

concern was countered by another participant Oguchi (2018), who argues that 'Nigerians must vote until it will count'. Through their interactive political discourse, Nigerians helped to create complex opposition by truly presenting the realities of life lived by the marginalized (Mora 2014), as they established through the visual images and textual contents that they are not sitting down and waiting for the government to provide their needs of housing and health care free of charges. This is because young Nigerians know that it is their responsibilities to identify areas of need within their immediate environment and to fill such gaps by providing services to earn a living.

Furthermore, although the responses of Nigerians with visual images and texts on social media produced a counter narrative, it also suggests conflict with the tendency of state power in reading the Nation somewhat restrictively, as its ideological apparatus[8]. To situate the President's narrative and those of Nigerians, it can be argued that 'to study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself' (Bhabha 1990, 3). Therefore, while the visual images of the young Nigerians shared on Facebook aim to counter narrate, they also 'become a contemporary, practical means of creating a people' (Brennan 1990, 50). This is because the visual images represent the reality about image content, aesthetics, and display, which reproduces the class of those represented (Russmann and Svensson 2017; Van House 2011). Thus, the visual images make these youths purposely visible and project them by recording their visible social world (Vokes and Newbury 2018).

The counter-narrative indicates the disappointment of Nigerians with a restrictive description of young hardworking Nigerians, by their leader. In contrast are the words of the former President Goodluck Jonathan (2016), who argued that 'despite incredible challenges, Nigerian youths are achieving great things and placing Nigeria positively in the world map. Nigerian youths are an inspiration to their leaders'. This comparison suggests that Jonathan portrayed the youths in terms of their achievements and promotion of national image, rather than Buhari's problematic representation of the youths. The meanings conveyed through the counter narrative indicate that although Nigerians were disappointed, still they have high expectations from his government.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we provided analysis and interpretations of visual images and textual contents generated by some Nigerians on Facebook, through interactive engagement as they counter-narrate President Buhari's narrative. Their action demonstrates that social media platforms not street protest, is the twenty first century medium of constructing counter narrative against political office holders. In so doing, through Facebook they were able to counter what may be described as their interpretation of the perceived and assumed dominant narrative; by affirming that Nigerian youth are not lazy people, but hardworking, industrious and energetic people who are not waiting for the government to meet their needs. They argued that despite government failure in creating jobs and enabling environment for businesses to thrive, young Nigerians irrespective of gender engage in socio-economic activities across the country. In their counter narrative, they established that indeed, those refusing education, seated and waiting for the government to provide their needs of housing, education, and free health care are from the northern part of Nigeria where President Buhari hails from. In so doing, they constructed the identities of people who may be implicated in the narrative and established that those in images take exception from the narrative. Thus, it can be argued that their different visual images are photographic realistic representations of the social worlds of Nigeria youths as the process of visual statements (Harper 2002, 17). Their interactive engagement on social media platform also demonstrates that youth do not merely use Facebook for socialising and searching for information, but in engaging government through constructive arguments.

Although some of the images show similar socio-economic activities, they communicate different narratives and meanings about particular classes of people. This include young boys, young men and young women who engage in hawking as the means of livelihood. Women who engage in petty trading by roadside in the market because of inability or capital to own shops, women who enage in tailoring, appretenice carpenter and use of motocycle for commercial transportation. Through this social media platform they communicated not just the social realities and voices of young people across Nigeria but beyond on some daily socio-economic activities for global consumers. This is because the social media as a cultural public sphere is a window to the outside world, through which Nigerians represents unified and purposeful images of young Nigerians. This mode of engagements helps to provide a counter-narrative in a peaceful environment, and demonstrate as Mora (2014, 1) notes that

the marginalized 'need to embrace the potential of counter-narratives as the means to improve our collective understanding and even as a precursor to conflict resolution'. Thus, the readings of these images provided interpretation to the counter-narrative Nigerians communicated to the global consumers. They also demonstrated that digital photographs are artefacts that carry visual narratives portrayed through activities across space and time (Van House 2011; Graham et al 2011). As a result, Nigerians have 'great expectations regarding the effects of visual social media campaigns on citizen engagement in community life' (Thelander and Cassinger 2017, 6).

**Note**

[1] This view was expressed by Arnould et al, in their article Africa uprising? The protest, the drivers, the outcomes.

[2] See Brian Creech 2014, Digital representations and occupy Wall Street's challenge to political subjectivity.

[3] See Gheytanchi, E. and Moghadam, V.N. 2014. In their article titled women, social protests and the new media activism in the Middle East and North Africa.

[4] Definition of youths by the United Nations [O]. Available: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf

[5] What Is Wrong With Nigeria's Definition of Youth? JUNE 30, 2015 ~ MZ_AGAMS

[6] Simon Kemp, digital 2021: Nigeria. Datareportal. [O] Available: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-Nigeria

[7] See Munachim Amah and Bukola Adebayo, article titled 'We are not lazy,' Nigerian youth lash out a President Buhari on social media. CNN April 21, 2018.

[8] Homi Bhabha 1990. Introduction: narrating the nation.

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