

Bizarre social media craze: Accident victims groan as sympathisers record agony on smart phones

By - March 19, 2016

Eric Dumo

Romoke Adedotun's heart was almost ripped apart with joy as the three men walked towards her. The arrival of two other women at the scene almost immediately equally raised her hopes and for a moment, calmed her fraying nerves. Covered in blood with deep cuts to her left hand and face, there was only little she could do to save her dying husband, Deji, who laid motionless by her side, few metres away from the scene of the tragic incident. Help in any and every form was all the young mother of two needed at that time. But sadly, the excitement and momentary relief the arrival of the five people had brought initially evaporated as quickly as it had come – their emergence in fact left Adedotun in a bigger shock.

The couple was returning to Lagos from Ife, Osun State, after attending a relative's wedding ceremony earlier that Saturday. The allure of returning to the warm embrace of their two children, Joke and Olamide, who were left with a neighbour that morning, was too strong for them to wait till the next day before hitting the road. By 4:00pm, in the thick of the wedding ceremony, the couple, found their way to the park ahead of the trip to Lagos. But midway through their journey, at the Ajebo end of the Lagos/Ibadan Expressway, tragedy struck. A speeding heavy duty truck that had lost control rammed into the bus they had boarded and two others, spilling blood and sending bones flying in different directions. It was a few minutes before 6:00pm and all around the scene laid men and women in critical conditions – a few dead and dozens others desperately clinging on to life. For the 33-year-old woman and the dozens writhing in pains, a timely intervention was all they needed to change their situation.

"Immediately I saw the men and women walking towards us after the accident happened, I thought they were coming to help and rush us to the hospital. I felt so relieved," Adedotun who survived the fatal accident but lost her husband in the tragedy recalled. "But how wrong I was," she continued. "The people who rushed to the scene of the

accident were not interested in our plight. Rather than flag down a vehicle and rush those of us who were still alive to the nearest hospital, they just brought out their phones one after the other and started taking our pictures and recording the incident.

"My left hand was seriously injured while my husband sustained deep cuts on his head and was writhing in pains. I was crying for help but instead, the people just stood there and watched life gradually go out of him and others. Even though I was also in pains, watching my husband die with all those people around recording every bit of it when they could have helped save his life hurts more than anything else. Instead of saving lives, they were eager to post pictures and videos of the accident online. It took a while before officials of the Federal Road Safety Corps arrived the scene but by then, it was too late. I still cry every day because I know that my husband could have survived the accident if they had rendered the needed help," she said, grief, anger and heartbreak still clearly audible in her voice. It will take a long time for the wound to fully heal.

Like Adedotun, Ruth Ejiofor is yet to recover from the loss of her husband two years after a fatal road accident in the Ikorodu area of Lagos. It was a Sunday morning and the couple and their three children were heading to church in Ojota, a densely populated suburb in the metropolis. As their Mazda saloon car approached one of the many bends on the axis between Majidun and Itowolo bus stop, her husband, Francis, lost control of the vehicle. The only thing Ejiofor, a frozen foods seller, remembers is scores of sympathisers surrounding their car after it had somersaulted three times.

"We were trapped in the car after it somersaulted three times," she recalled. "My husband who was driving and was in front with me was mangled in between the dashboard and the roof while I could hear my children screaming for help at the back. I regained consciousness after a few minutes but noticed that I could not move any part of my body. Soon I heard voices around our vehicle and within me I was happy that help had come at last. But even from my dying state, all I saw was just people taking our photos on their phones and murmuring to themselves. None of them made any attempt to rescue us. By the time some policemen arrived at the scene about 20 minutes later, my husband had died while my daughter had slipped into coma. If the officers had not arrived when they did, she also could have died," she tearfully revealed.



It took more than two weeks of intensive care at a hospital in Ikorodu for Ejiofor and her three children to regain full consciousness. But losing her husband and best friend of 15 years in such a manner still hurts, the middle-aged woman revealed while speaking with our

correspondent a few days ago.

"I never knew the world had become this wicked," she cuts in. "The people just stood around our car, I could hear their voices even though faintly while my children shouted for help. In fact it was the shutter of their phones' cameras that brought me back to life. I have never seen such a heartless bunch of individuals like that in my life. They were more satisfied by posting the accident on the social media and I don't know what they stand to gain when they should have made efforts to rescue accident victims," she said.

Mr. Sodipe Bakare, an established cab operator within the metropolis, recalls how a group of young people watched his Toyota Camry car burn to ashes in November 2015 in the Palmgrove area of Lagos.

Bakare, a veteran in the taxi vocation, had successfully achieved a host of things through proceeds from the vocation – he has built a house and trained five children through primary and secondary school and was looking forward to bigger things when one Tuesday afternoon, fire ripped through the car's bonnet and consumed his major source of income. On Monday when our correspondent met him at a taxi park in the Maryland area of the city, Bakare said his vehicle could still have been around had the people around the scene of the fire been sensitive enough.

"As I screamed for water, the only thing the people around me did was to simply bring out their mobile phones to take pictures of the burning vehicle, my only source of income," the 48-year-old said as he battled to contain his emotions. "I ran into a street to look for water but only found less than half bag of 'pure water.' It couldn't do anything to save my taxi. What hurt me the most was seeing all the people who could have helped just stand there taking photographs with their phones. I don't know if I can ever forgive them," he said.

Bakare has since acquired another vehicle to continue his business of ferrying passengers

from one part of the city to the other, but the loss of his 'trusted partner' to such painful circumstance will continue to leave hurtful feelings on his mind for a long time to come.

Interestingly, cases like Adedotun, Ejiofor and Bakare's are just a snippet of such incidences that now happen across Nigeria on a daily. Unlike in the past where people rushed to scenes of accidents with the sole aim of helping the distressed victims, these days, capturing and filming their agonies on smartphones before uploading them on the Internet, appears to be the norm. From Lagos to Ibadan, Port Harcourt to Asaba, Ilorin to Abuja and even Onitsha to Aba, the story is the same – smartphones are beginning to make individuals act strangely and insensitive to the plight of others.

While recordings of accident scenes and victims of such fatalities on smartphones have helped alert authorities to such tragedies in real time after they had been uploaded on Facebook, twitter and other social media platforms, it has sadly, according to latest findings by *Saturday PUNCH*, contributed to more losses than it had saved situations. Many in this bizarre habit arrive at scenes of tragedies within minutes of their occurrences but do little or nothing to assist the dying victims. By the time emergency workers arrive such scenes, it would have become almost too late to reduce fatality.

"Three months ago, while I was driving to Yaba one morning, I saw people gathered on the other side of the expressway at Obanikoro bus stop and were using their phones to snap and record a guy who was rolling on the ground. Two hours later when I was coming back, I saw the guy lying there and covered in blood, he was dead. I later learnt that he was knocked down by a bus while trying to cross the road. I bet you if all those who gathered around him that morning had rushed that guy to a hospital, he could have survived. But many of them just stood there, filming him and watching him die. It is the height of insensitivity as far as I am concerned," Francis Iyanma, a software analyst, told *Saturday PUNCH* of his experience recently.

Apart from the insensitivity smartphones appear to have entrenched in recent times, it has also resulted in some bizarre addictions and behaviours never previously seen. For example, a 19-year-old girl in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, Grace Emenike, lost her life in October 2015 while taking a picture of herself widely called 'selfie' under a high tension electric cable. The teenager, in the middle of her now infamous 'selfie' got electrocuted after one of the sagging cables snapped and fell on her. A relative of the

deceased who was with her when the incident happened in Borokiri, a suburb in the oil-rich city, told *Saturday PUNCH* in a telephone conversation earlier in the week that the family is yet to get over her loss.

Strange and disturbing as it sounds, deaths arising from 'selfies' are not peculiar to Nigeria – it is a bug that has in fact spread from other parts of the globe famous with smartphone addiction.

In March 2014 for example, a 21-year-old man lost his life in Spain from electrocution after climbing on top of a train to take a 'selfie' with friends.

The following month, a 17-year-old photographer from Russia fell to her death after losing balance atop a railway bridge in Saint Petersburg where she had climbed to take a photo of herself.

In May of that year, more than 20 people lost their lives in the United States after the pilot of the small jet they were flying in lost control of the plane while attempting a 'selfie'.

Weeks later, a 15-year-old boy in India was instantly killed by a speeding train while posing for a shot on the track.

In January 2015, a 21-year-old South African woman died after falling from Northcliff Hill, Johannesburg, while preparing to take a 'selfie' with a friend. That same month, two young men died in Russia while trying to take a shot of themselves with a hand grenade while in July of that year, a man from San Diego, United States, was hospitalised for five days following an attempt to take a vintage shot with a rattlesnake.

Few weeks later in August 2015, Mauricio Vagas, a Brazilian, lost his life while trying to take a 'selfie' with a crocodile. Unaware that the reptile had no barrier holding it back in the river, Vagas turned his back to it before reaching for his 'selfie stick', a special pole attached to smartphones to achieve vintage shots. But the hungry animal had other ideas. Vagas was a free meal on a platter of gold. By the time the dust settled, only a shuttle bag and a few other handy items held by the victim remained to remind the world of another self-inflicted death.

The Telegraph, a British tabloid, wrote that in 2015 alone, more people were killed around the world taking 'selfies' than by shark attacks.

In Nigeria, the rise of smartphones and mobile connectivity even though has improved inter-personal communications, news dissemination, research and also swelled business transactions, it has equally introduced a series of new and bizarre trends capable of hurting the society in more than a few ways, experts say.

For instance, cases of blackmail done through smartphones have been on the increase in Nigeria in recent times. Nude and suggestive pictures of men and women captured on these devices have been used by criminal elements to milk victims of huge sums. Those who fail to meet the demands of such blackmailers must live with a tarnished reputation following the posting of such photographs on the Internet.

An alleged human trafficker, Esther Nicole Otubo, was recently busted by the police for moving young girls to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from Nigeria for prostitution.

According to reports, Otubo, among other suppressive tactics, records videos of the girls naked on her phone before making them sign to a criminal agreement that perpetually enslaves and dehumanises them. Failure by the girls to keep to their own part of such bargains would lead to the release of such recordings on the Internet, thus destroying their reputation.

Last year, a woman had her marriage broken in Anambra State after her lover posted videos of where he was making love to her. He posted the video after she refused to yield to his financial demands. The woman identified as Onyeka Ubah, according to findings, has lived with the shame ever since.

In recent times also, the Internet has been flooded with photographs of young men posing with fully-erect and protruding private organs. Referred to as 'eggplant', the shots are mostly taken to tantalise viewers, especially ladies and remind them of the endowment hidden between the thighs of their owners.

Young women across Nigeria have not also been left out of this bizarre Internet craze sparked largely by the emergence of smartphones, too. From posting raunchy shots of

boobs, curves, buttocks and sometimes complete nakedness, many in this category have abandoned morality in favour of the new craze in town.

Sociologist, Mr. Boma Harry, told *Saturday PUNCH* that if not urgently checked, the trend could apart from corrupting the minds of young people, also lead to sexual abuses and unwanted pregnancies.

He said watching victims of tragedies die when we could have helped save their lives could pass a wrong and dangerous signal to little children who could think that is the normal way to behave.

"It is disturbing that the society is not doing anything to curb the spread of pornography and strange activities on the social media through mobile phones. If you see what people post online these days, then if we care about the future of our young ones, we must do something urgent to stop it.

"If we fail to address this issue and behave as if it is not a problem, then we should be prepared to face the consequences. Many of these posts are precursor to crimes like rape and other forms of sexual harassment. It shows how much we have digressed from the values that used to guide our everyday lives as a people.

"Also, the practice where people just stand and record the agonising ordeals of victims of tragedies rather than help save their lives if not quickly checked could pass a wrong message to children who witness such scenarios. They, in all their innocence, could believe that is the proper way to behave and so when they are confronted with such situations could act in a similar way. We must address this 'madness'," he said.

The disturbing trend has also found its way into many homes today with smartphone users now taking photographs of their meals even in public places before posting them on social networking sites like Facebook, twitter and instagram. Many also now take 'selfies' while in the bathroom and toilet respectively.

A psychologist, Dr. Stephen Bolade, described the practice as the function of the loss of the human mind.

He said since individuals, especially smartphone users, tried to equate real happiness with the acquisition of modern technology, they have sadly developed strange behaviours in the process. He said the need to 'flow with the trend' is partly responsible for some of these insensitive behaviours now witnessed across the country.

"For most people, smartphones are more of an obsession than an addiction. There's an expectation of instantaneous communication, many people feel they have to text back immediately, or post, or comment, or like, or whatever. The smartphone has created an atmosphere of shallowness and weakened the human capacity for empathy.

"Many suffer from anxiety if they lose their phone, even if only for a few minutes. We rely on it to do everything from saying "I love you" to breaking up, from checking bank balances to investing and even sharing photos of our loved ones. But gradually, as a result of this strong but strange obligation to post items, we forget the human side of us. We become less sensitive to the needs of others around us and which is very dangerous," he said.

According to Information and Communications Technology expert, Ahmed Olayinka, as good as smartphones have proved to be, they can be equally damaging if not carefully managed.

"The advent of this new digital age has contributed positively to the Nigerian economy and the Nigerian populace. It has opened up the economy and resulted in the emergence of new businesses within the technology sector, which has improved the unemployment situation, thereby pulling many Nigerians out of the quick sand of poverty.

"Sadly, this new technology has also exposed a previously unnoticed aspect of the Nigerian society. There was a time when the concept of 'dignity in death' was adhered to in Nigeria, but with technology, the dead are no longer given their respect. One of the most sickening displays of this insensitivity occurred in the aftermath of the June 2012 Dana Airline crash. Shortly after the plane crashed in Iju, Lagos, thousands of people residing in the area rushed to the scene, however, instead of rescuing the people in the plane, people began using their phones to take images of the dying plane crash victims and recording the scenes. For me, it is a sad commentary of the harm this technology has and will continue to cause us except we put our humanity first," he said.

According to a July 2014 study, Nigeria was ranked the 17th highest smartphone using country in the world with over 23 million people owning one of the devices whose usage in the country is projected to soar further by the end of 2016. An Internet Goes Mobile Country report in Nigeria conducted by Ericsson in 2015 revealed that around 84 per cent of smartphones in the country are connected to the Internet. But while the technology has proven to improve the economy, enrich ties and help save lives in times of danger in other climes, in Nigeria, it is turning to be the other way round.

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